



Sustaining African Democracies: the Library As A Key Partner

by

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at the LIASA Conference held at ,
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2004

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Summary

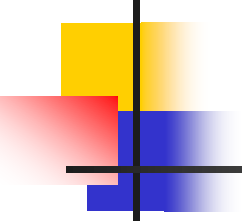
- Introduction
- Democracy in Africa
- Challenges faced by Libraries
- Role of Libraries
- Conclusion



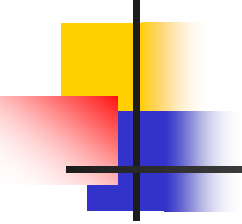
Introduction

- Information has become very important in the development world today than ever. It is currently believed to be the 4th factor of production after land, labour and capital.

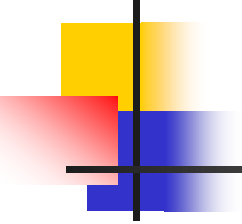
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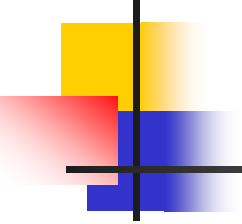
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- It is the catalyst, which will shoot Africa towards prosperity. Library and information workers in Africa therefore have a key role in making this happen.

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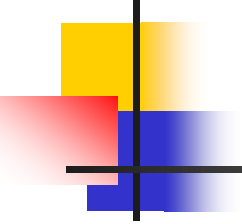
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- IFLA emphasizes that libraries and information services promote sustainable development by ensuring freedom of access to information.
 - Libraries and information services help people to improve educational and social skills indispensable in sustained participation in democracy

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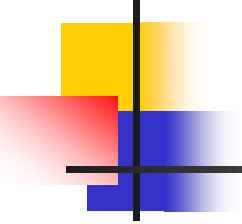
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- Access to and use of information assist greatly in good decision-making and subsequently increased development, flourishing democracy and economy.

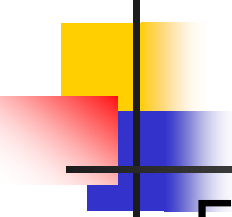
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- Governments in Africa produce a great amount of public information, which will improve the public's understanding of their activities if they are well disseminated.
 - Official information is about and for people.
 - People need to be informed in order to make informed decisions and critical choices.

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- Lack of information can be disastrous as it breeds ignorance, oppression, poverty, disease, poor economic development and misgovernment
 - Education is crucial to man as it provides meaningful participation in all aspects of society and where he stands and what he does in it.
 - The library's role in these activities cannot be ignored.

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- Information brings about knowledge and knowledge is power. Lack of it brings about knowledge deficiency, which leads to powerlessness.
 - Powerlessness of a people is a time bomb, which can be expressed in various ways, which are detrimental to a nation's progress.

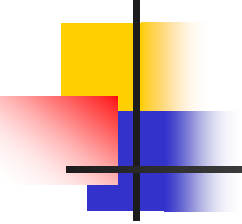
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- Free and universal access to information is often upheld as a major tenet of a democratic society. Riley and Relyea (1983) say ... it includes the right to access of information
 - Governments must be useful to the governed in order to have their unflinching support. Usefulness is also measured by free flow of information to the governed who have made sacrifices towards democracy.



Steps towards Democracy

- Most African governments were installed after its people had fought for liberation from colonialism in the last century. Loss of lives were involved.
- These governments later got into problems including wars, military rule, and several forms of natural and human calamities.

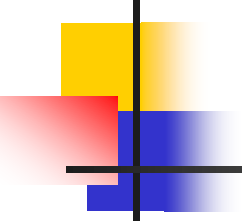
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- In the 1990s, Africa started breathing some clean air of democracy. Some countries like Niger, Benin, Mali, Zambia elected their first Presidents. South Africa, a real success story also came on board. Ghana and Nigeria, which had had several years of military rule also elected Presidents.

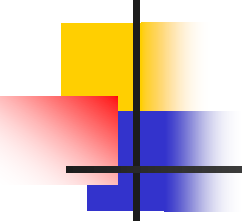
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- Men and women formed democratic movements in several countries like, Nigeria, Rwanda, Mozambique, Morocco, Benin, and South Africa to bring about the second liberation which is related to change and development.

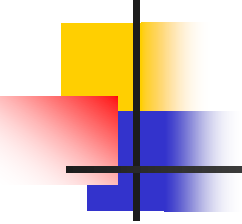
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- The dawn of the 21st century brought in hope of economic and political stability, technological advancement, hope for the provision of the basic necessities of life – potable water, food, shelter, health care, and education.
 - These can be better achieved if good planning is involved which need input of generation, management and use of information.

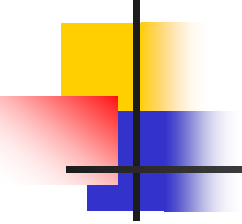
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- One bad reoccurring scene in African democracy is the fact that most of the leaders do not know or listen to their people. They also do not know when it is time to leave the podium.
 - Genuine protests are seen as handiworks of the opposition rather than ingredients for the soup of civil unrests.

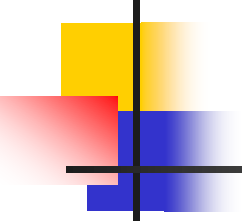
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- Bad governments, military rule, wars and natural disasters have affected the economies of various African countries.
 - New democracies often face problems because the citizenry is now politically awake and so do not have patience with any government which does not honour its promises.
 - Communication of new facts affecting promises can change peoples outlook. Informed men and women can protect liberties.

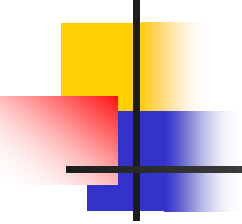
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- Western media often portray Africa as having bad governments, poverty, hunger, ethnic clashes, un-ending wars, diseases, ignorance, poor communication and a host of negatives.

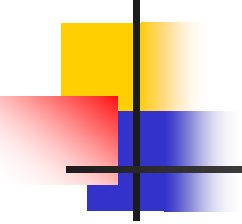
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- This may be so as they are faced with limited funds to provide good infrastructure, including water and electricity; reduce poverty; make available good health and education facilities; stimulate economic activity; service and reduce foreign debts; develop a strong agricultural base; etc.

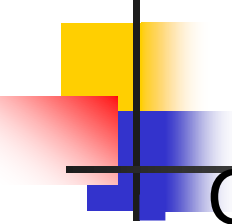
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- In the face of these challenges, one is tempted to be a pessimist and to wonder, whether African democracy will live and thrive in our times.
 - African democracies will live on one condition, that is

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- When the governing and the governed decide to forge ahead together to develop an efficient and effective system of governance to meet these challenges of development, which are inevitable.

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Governance, stands for the practical exercise of power and authority by governments in the management of their affairs in general and of economic development in particular.

- This means there are stakeholders in governance who make inputs and demand accountability.
- Therefore, governance is effective when there is good information flow between the governed and the governing as it gives birth to development.

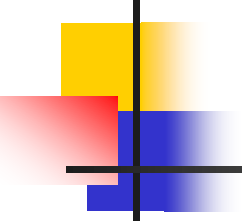
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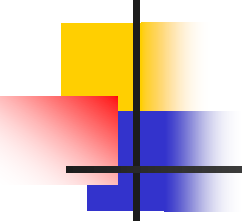
Challenges faced by libraries

- For about three decades now, libraries in Africa have not been in good shape. From school through public to special, academic and national libraries, the same challenges present themselves, crippling their efforts.
- School libraries are where the firm foundation for a reading culture, independent and resourceful learning are laid in the citizenry.

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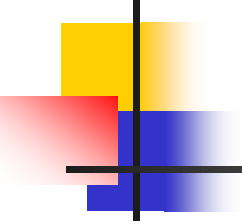
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- Public libraries are the haven for students, regular and part time, where they have access to textbooks; and also provide general informational and educational materials to the public, from children to the aged.
 - Academic libraries provide current information to support teaching, learning and research.

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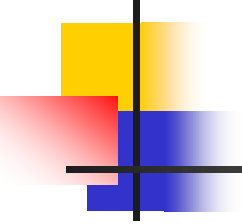
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- National libraries are the librarians library

 - All these types of libraries are not functioning to expectation because of low priority given to their development.

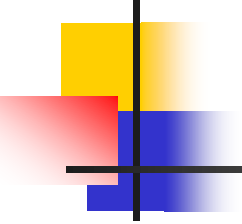
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- Inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, including telephone and electricity, limited qualified personnel, inadequate ICT facilities, lack of technical support for ICT, are some of the major factors that limit the support African libraries can give to the sustenance of democracies.

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- It should be noted that libraries by nature and functions, provide a service without direct financial gains.
 - There is therefore the need for governments to exhibit the genuine desire to have information disseminated, by putting the necessary structures, including ICT facilities and adequate funding in place.

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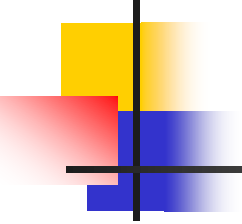
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- Governments need to be educated that libraries are very useful in organisation and dissemination and librarians by training create, manage, package, preserve and disseminate all types of information.
 - Governments need to do their own part to enable libraries to also do their part to sustain democracies.



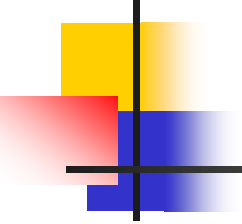
Role of Libraries

- Libraries exist to serve everybody.
- Libraries the world over are engines for development.
- Librarians need to recognise and put in efforts to make their users information literate.

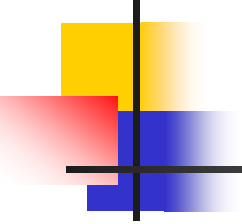
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- Librarians must be proactive and not wait to be invited before making constructive contributions.
 - Harnessing and documenting indigenous knowledge is also very important.

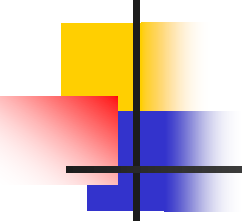
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- Librarians need to carry out user needs assessment in order to use the results to plan.
 - Library professionals must gear up in their responsibilities to create, organise and give access to information to support government efforts.

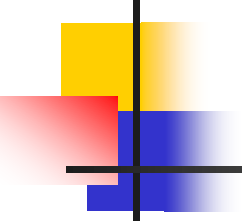
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- The use of ICT will further enhance service delivery since there will be easy access and great amount of information.
 - Public debates can also be encouraged on hot government issues. This can be taken up by libraries as another extension service rather than concentrate only on story telling hours, quiz competitions and arts and crafts activities.

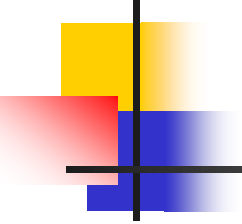
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- There is the need for librarians to make an inward search, a real soul search, to find out if we are really living our vision, providing services, which are relevant to the survival of the people.

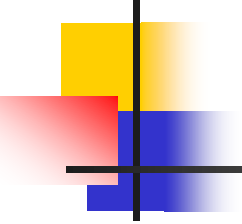
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- African librarians need to link up researchers and scholars within the continent and with their counterparts in the developed world through ICT.
 - Library schools have to revise their curricula to accommodate the use of modern technology and methods.

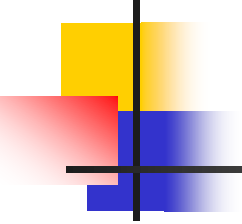
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- Information networks should be developed among libraries in Africa to access each other's resources, learn from each other to enable them to introduce new techniques into service provision for the citizenry.
 - National and Regional Library Associations need to be revived and strengthened.

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- Librarians need to be visible. Era of staying within shelves and “no noise” are gone.
 - Librarians need to be strong advocates to make libraries to live and grow so that they can support democracies by gaining access to limited funds.

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- LIASA has treaded where other national associations have feared. Its five point policy issue at inaugural conference – any success?
 - Surely if librarians must be relevant as partners in the success of democracies in Africa then much more advocacy is needed to make us visible and change our visions into realities.

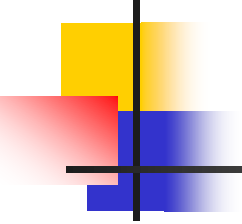
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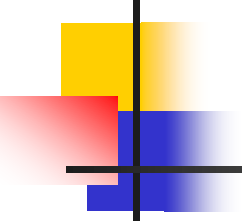


Conclusion

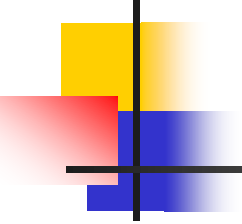
- The importance of information is not disputable. Every nation needs information, be it global or indigenous.
- Governments need to access and use information for development.

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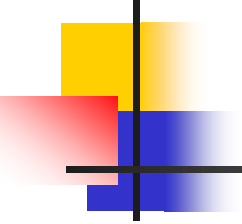
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- For any democratic government to be taken seriously in the world it has to make its mark on the world political map.
 - Information availability to assist in decision – making is an aspect of the process towards making the mark.

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- The need therefore for governments to strengthen libraries and their infrastructure to enable them provide relevant information to support democratic governance is very paramount and non-negotiable.

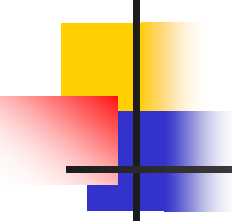
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- Libraries are very relevant to the success of democracies as they are the main means for the provision of free, easily accessible information to all ages and levels of the people.
 - Public libraries need special attention, as they play a far important role than other libraries but they are the worst on funds.

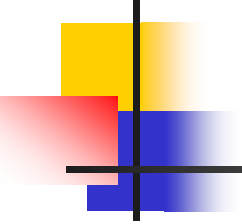
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- Public libraries are closer to the people than any other libraries so governments should fund them appropriately and work closely with them to send their policies across to the people.

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- The challenge to libraries to be effective partners in sustaining democracies can be surmounted when governments accept the fact that they need libraries to among other roles, organize and disseminate information including those generated by them, and so should give them the attention they deserve.

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- I believe that with strong advocacy we shall overcome, and in the near future libraries will become the hub on which government decision-making and planning machinery revolve for good governance and sustained democracies.

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- Thank you for listening!!!