



## GLOBAL VISION DISCUSSION

# Report of the IFLA Africa Section Meeting *How a united library field can tackle the challenges of the future*

15<sup>th</sup> May 2017





# Contributors

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## Introduction

On 15<sup>th</sup> May 2017, in Yaounde, Cameroon, 12 librarians participated in a conversation about how a united library field can tackle the challenges of the future. Together we represent Standing committee members and observers during the meeting from the library profession and with over 18 years of professional and library experience.

## A vision for libraries

Libraries enable literate, informed and participative societies. When we look at the future, according to the debates in Yaounde, this means that:

*E.g. Libraries are an accessible source of factual information, where people come to find the truth. Libraries are inclusive community centres where all voices are represented. To make this vision reality, librarians feel part of a global community where they exchange ideas and help each other overcome challenges.*

### The core values of libraries (Q4):

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1. Information services for society and access to that information that is available to everyone. Everyone is welcome.
2. Freedom of information. Freedom of access to information. Encourage freedom of expression and publication.
3. A record of human progress collected and stored providing preservation and dissemination of knowledge.
4. Centre of community and resource sharing valuing the diversity of thoughts, resources, services, and the community we serve. Resource of credible and reliable information. Knowledge management and informatics.
5. Lifelong learning. Educating the community. Information training, literacy and awareness. Support teaching and learning, research, community engagement. Providing for physical space. Advocating for information privacy. Keeping confidentiality of information.

#### Comments:

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### Libraries are exceptionally good at (Q5):

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1. Providing and making information discoverable and accessible to general public. Organization and management of information. Information access, management and dissemination. Deconstruct and construct information. Giving value to online information. Being the source of reliable information.

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2. Embracing emerging and cutting edge technologies and technology innovation.
  3. Functioning as community hubs and information centres, both online and offline. Breaking down all cultural boundaries. Building communities and creating community sense. Collaboration.
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**Comments:**

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**Libraries should do more of (Q6):**

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1. Cooperate with local authorities, national and international standards bodies in order to increase interoperability of their information systems. Cooperation with developing countries providing more information to low-information population via online & off line services. Work as a group to ensure equity in access to information.
  2. Helping people use information more effectively by instructing how to use information and teach literacy and information retrieval skills. Expanding opportunities for information sharing, with e-learning and social networking tools. Fight against the limits to access to the scientific production. Inspiring users to find and use information responsibly and correctly. User education especially public libraries. Work for open access and open licensing.
  3. Information technology awareness. Collaborative projects that leverage the power of technology. Use their ICT infrastructure to ensure that important library information is well indexed by major search engines. Develop ITC common tools. Improve skills in technology. Helping with innovation. Experimentation and permission to fail. Technological innovations & initiatives (e.g. eBooks).
  4. Creative fundraising, grant writing and donor relationships. Promoting library use by highlight success stories where the library had an impact, marketing and branding. Cultivating communities with arts. Being more visible, attractive and open. Creating inclusive spaces for open, frank, and thoughtful conversation. Be an open space where people can meet. Online sharing of our cultural heritage.
  5. Be the source of reliable, non-tampered-with, information. Bridging the communication gap. Communication about resources, dissemination of information internally/externally. Specialisation: units dealing with IL training, RDM, OA publishing (more librarians for specialisation needed) Teaching on how to do advocacy. Advocacy with ministry of education. Advocacy – Internal and/or external. Advocate and facilitate for data literacy.
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**Comments:**

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**Libraries should do less of (Q7):**

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1. Closing on weekends & public holidays. More society activities.
  2. Having strict book circulation regulations, rules and procedures.
  3. Believe that they have an information monopoly. Replacing other governmental services.
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4. Taking on too many projects at the same time, not unless there is enough manpower to carry out activities over and above the normal duties. Trying to do more with less – we have a “yes AND” problem. Increasing workloads to keep up with trends.
  5. Being afraid of our mistakes – it’s okay to try and fail. It’s also okay, to try it again after you fail.
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**Comments:**

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## Challenges and solutions

### The main challenges to society (Q8):

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1. Perception of reduced library functions in the Internet age. Wrong perception about library – e.g. library is all about books. Impact of social media and competing with modern Medias to attract different society members. National policy makers less informed of the role of libraries.
  2. Demographic shift. Population growth. Serving people with different cultural and language background. Providing literacy & education to diverse communities with different interests and needs. Digital natives.
  3. Information technology developers. Unclear progression path and weak mentoring for new professionals.
  4. Working in a rapidly changing environment. Shifting expectations of library from the community. Librarians tend to be less empowered.
  5. Economic criteria. Financial inequity. Growing inequality in access to wealth/information. High unemployment rates. Regime change. War/conflict. War, social inequity and oppressive government causing dislocation and migration. Infrastructure. Bandwidth, connectivity.
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**Comments**

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### The main challenges to libraries (Q9):

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1. Perception of no need for libraries in the electronic database age and changing the narrative around “everything is available online”. Commercial competition for information access and delivery services (e.g. Google, Amazon, etc...). Changes in modes of access to information that sideline libraries.
  2. The disappearance of library’s values and its benefit to the community. Public perceptions about value of libraries and librarians. Recover its image as the centre of a community and culture events. Being more visible to the university community – remains confusion about the role of the academic library.
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3. Changing legal environments (Net Neutrality in U.S. for example). Change legal environment to digital and scientific collections. Increasing use of DRM and licensing to undermine fair use and preservation of the record.
4. Budget cuts. Lack of investments and projects. Meeting clients' requests for content while facing financial constraints. Lack of funding.
5. Changing political environment. Regime change. Impact of information technology. Changes in technology. (Upskilling of staff).

**Comments:**

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### The main Challenges to the profession (Q10)?

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1. Articulating and advocating for the relevancy of libraries (and understanding how to perform advocacy). Political interference and regulation of library schools.
2. Understanding that our profession is more about project management and relationships than about books and periodicals. Believe in our role in society. Ever changing job role with the idea that we can do more with less.
3. Transition to digital content with the attempt of preserving data. Keeping up with technology and follow up to date ICT related to libraries. Balancing technology innovation with providing basic services. Greater information technology awareness in the profession.
4. Re-aligning services to changing expectations and users. Be more visible and useful to society demands. Keep in touch with young users.
5. Lack of recognition for the LIS profession. Redefining the core set of principles that represent the library professional.

**Comments:**

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## How a united library field can make a difference

### How should a united library field help meet the challenges identified (Q11)?

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1. Collaboration between libraries and all stakeholders towards creating an inclusive information society. Supporting and forming consortiums. Collaborating. Networking. Collaborating across boundaries. Sharing ideas and knowledge. Mutual support. Sharing experience and knowledge.

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2. Promote professional education programs for existing staff to sustain proficiency in a rapidly changing environment. Introduce programs to facilitate the reconfiguration of staff to integrate the skills of librarians with the needed skills from related professions. Professional development – eg through sector-based programmes for best practice in their field.

3. Work on creating a network for sharing and preserving cultural heritage both physical and digital that transcends national borders. Support group for learning and getting the library community up to speed.

4. Standardized services or at least minimum standards. Provide a strong aggregate view to maintain access to information in a context where publishers and owners of information are increasing pressure in every way to limit access to information based on ability to pay. Setting up access to content for easier use. Linked data.

5. Build stronger library associations – management support for librarians to be more active participants in library associations.

**Comments:**

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**The characteristics of a united library field (Q12):**

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1. Use of information communication technology to find ways of sharing our stories with a larger community – whether through social media, or more concerted efforts with traditional media like press releases, etc. Use the same tools as our users.

2. Collaboration among libraries both within and beyond the different library types. Visible collaborative efforts in state, national or wider level. Strong synergy between and within all types of libraries. Stronger voice in a context of reducing strength of libraries individually.

3. Agreeing on a set of core values, well set and defined library standards, while being respectful of cultural issues whether collections based or community based.

4. Stronger and relevant library association. Build stronger library associations – management support for librarians to be more active participants in library associations.

5. Has no fear in changing the traditional library roles.

**Comments:**

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**The focus of a united library field (Q13):**

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1. Making visible efforts to join forces, collaborate, network and cooperate together to share experiences, knowledge and metadata.

2. Return the benefit to society. Community needs. Serving as a catalysts for addressing social problems. Contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

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3. Open access and openly sharing information and knowledge giving easy access to information for everyone.

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4. Archiving and preserving historic artefacts and digital history projects.

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5. International voice and recognition. Advocacy, especially for information access and information equity.

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**Comments:**

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## A global conversation

This report is created in an interactive process, Yaounde, Cameroon on 15<sup>th</sup> May 2017 It is part of a global conversation initiated by IFLA on how a united library field can tackle the challenges of the future.

Over the course of two years (2017-2018), IFLA will involve as many librarians and others as possible in this global conversation. Participants are encouraged to continue the conversation in their own networks and organization and share the results with IFLA. At the end of 2017, the first results of all the workshops and online discussions will be turned into a *Global Vision Report*, which in turn will be adapted into concrete strategies, processes and work programmes in 2018.

To learn more about the global conversation, and download supporting materials to support your own activities, visit [globalvision.ifla.org](http://globalvision.ifla.org).

Stay tuned for news about the IFLA Global Vision discussion following [#iflaGlobalVision](https://twitter.com/iflaGlobalVision) and make sure to cast your vote in August when the online voting platform is available on <https://globalvision.ifla.org>.