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PREFACE

Starting the ball rolling: putting knowledge and digitization on the African development agenda

The world is in the midst of a digital revolution. Throughout Africa projects are under way to create virtual libraries and archives and to build a digital heritage continuum in Africa. The year 2009 was therefore of great importance in terms of progress regarding the future of digitization projects on the continent. Given this context, it seems astonishing that, until the First International Conference on African Digital Libraries and Archives (ICADLA-1) which was held in the United Nations Conference Centre, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 1st–3rd July 2009, there had never been a continent-wide discussion on policy frameworks and notions of partnerships in relation to the digitization of African heritage and resources or dialogue on a way forward for the development of a digitization agenda.

As coordinators of ICADLA-1, we are pleased to present to you the publication of the proceedings in the form of papers and electronic presentations delivered at the conference. The papers form a record of many different digitization activities of libraries and archives in Africa, and give insight into national policy scenarios, networks of national and international cooperation and examples of digitization initiatives.

This historic conference was the brainchild of the University of Witwatersrand Library, Johannesburg, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) Library and the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) Africa Region. The conference sought to concentrate on policy rather than on narrow technical issues. ICADLA-1 also engaged in the larger questions which frame digitization projects, such as national policies and processes around heritage, political identities, contested archives, the commodification of the archive and the archive as shaper of national histories.

There were 200 participants from all over Africa, including librarians, archivists, curators, information management specialists, documentalists, academics and professionals from universities, non-governmental organizations, the United Nations, and other international and national organizations. Participants came from Ethiopia, South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, Senegal, Kenya, Lesotho, Sudan, Uganda, Cameroon, Tanzania, Nigeria, The Netherlands, India and the United States of America.

In line with the IFLA Presidential theme, *Building on Knowledge: IFLA Roundtable with Intergovernmental Organisations on Putting Libraries on the African Development Agenda,* the first day of the conference took the form of a Strategic Roundtable with key African regional and sub-regional organizations, to advocate for the inclusion of significant library services and

other knowledge input elements in African development strategies and programmes. The main ICADLA-1 conference theme was "Connecting Africans to their own resources: developing policies and strategies for Africa's digital future".

In the first session the issue of the urgent need to put knowledge production, governance and management on the African development agenda was discussed and debated. The second session focused on the need to develop policies, strategies and capacity building efforts to enhance the digital future of Africa, at the same time recognizing the inherent technological and intellectual challenges. Existing African digitization initiatives were also presented.

Discussions at the conference revealed that policy-makers in Africa face enormous challenges emanating from the demand for access to their resources via digitization. This has become especially pressing because there has to date been virtually no attention to policy or the development of policy. The lack of policy frameworks and guidelines at national and at institutional levels has particular significance for any planned collaborative initiatives. It is clear that policy-makers in Africa need to shift their attention from discussions about technology as such to a new model which incorporates the purpose of digital projects, what is being digitized and why, how the digital information will be used, by whom it will be used, and how it will be made accessible. Policy-makers need to devise dynamic strategies which build local capacity; provide guidelines and mechanisms for extra-regional relationships; facilitate strategic alliances; ensure that digitization projects contribute to the preservation and protection of our physical materials; and develop common positions. They need to prioritize regional discussions, interactions and perspectives on these issues in order to ensure coordination, develop stronger regional knowledge sharing and understanding, build on existing linkages and share lessons learned.

The key themes discussed at the ICADLA-1 conference were:

- Knowledge as the basis of development effectiveness;
- Knowledge audit of New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and other African development strategies;
- How best to put knowledge on Africa's development agenda;
- Reorienting development policy in Africa for the information and knowledge age;
- Regional, national and local policies and strategies for developing digital libraries and archives in Africa to improve access to knowledge for development;
- National perspectives, cases and best practice projects and programmes involving the digitization of African heritage & scholarship;
- Access to knowledge in Africa: challenges and innovation;
- Institutional Repositories: policies, strategies, and practices.

In addition, the ICADLA-1 conference also provided a valuable platform for lively debate about important issues such as advocacy; Open Access and Open Source; production vs. skills development; long-term sustainability of the end resource and the digitized components; how to build and support infrastructure for digitization projects; intellectual property and mass digitization vs. “cherry picking”.

The outcome of the conference was a “Declaration and Recommendations on knowledge for development in Africa and the digitization of African knowledge and heritage”. One of the key recommendations was that an African Digital Library and Archives Programme should be established and that this programme should spearhead the formulation of comprehensive policies, a strategic framework and a road map for digital libraries and archives on the African continent.

This conference would never have taken place and would not have been such a resounding success without the tremendous contribution and active involvement of all the participants, the national and organizational representatives and project partners, and generous support from IFLA-ALP (the Action for Development through Libraries Programme), Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida).

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