

Highlights of the 2024 UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF): A Call for Inclusion of Sub-Saharan Africa's Libraries in National Development Plans

By: Namutenya Hamwaalwa & Kepi Madumo

Introduction

The Sub-Saharan Africa Library Sector, with support from the International Federation of Libraries and Associations (IFLA), was represented by Mr. Kepi Madumo, National Librarian & CEO of the National Library of South Africa, and Ms. Namutenya Hamwaalwa, Deputy Director at the Ministry of Education, Arts, and Culture, Directorate of Namibia Library and Archives Service. They had the opportunity to be part of the 2024 UN High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from July 8-17, 2024. The forum, themed "*Reinforcing the 2030 Agenda and Eradicating Poverty in Times of Multiple Crises: the Effective Delivery of Sustainable, Resilient, and Innovative Solutions*," provided a platform for critical discussions and networking.

Mr. Kepi Madumo and Ms. Namutenya Hamwaalwa, joined a team of delegates, representing library sector from Oman, Mr. Saif Al Jabri; Georgia, Ms. Maia Simonishvili; United States, Ms. Loida Garcia Febo and Argentina, Mr. Alejandro Santa.

The 2024 UN HLPF Program

The 2024 UN HLPF program included thematic reviews of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Goal 1 on no poverty, Goal 2 on zero hunger, Goal 13 on climate action, Goal 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions, and Goal 17 on partnerships for the Goals. The forum supported the implementation of the Political Declaration and other outcomes of the 2023 SDG Summit, advancing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Four African countries expressed interest and submitted their 2024 Voluntary National Review (VNR) reports: Kenya, Namibia, South Africa, and Uganda. However, only Kenya, Namibia, and Uganda presented their reports, as South Africa withdrew its report from the program.

Purpose of Participation

The primary objective of the delegates was to engage their countries' representatives who were presenting their VNRs and raise awareness regarding the contribution of libraries to national development and the achievement of the UN SDGs.

The delegates participated in various plenary and site event sessions, VNR presentations, and most importantly, they interacted with their national delegations and government officials to advocate for the inclusion of libraries in national development plans. The IFLA delegation effectively used the HLPF to build meaningful connections with policymakers, NGOs, and other stakeholders through engaging discussions and presentations.

Lessons Learned

- A notable achievement of the 2024 UN HLPF was participating in the preparatory meeting for the creation of a Group of Friends of Libraries, hosted by the Permanent Mission of Argentina with contributions from the Permanent Mission of Ireland. This

initiative aims to ensure that the potential of libraries is fully understood and utilized across the work of the United Nations.

- Discussions with high-ranking officials highlighted the pressing need to establish an advocacy agenda to position African libraries strategically in addressing the SDGs. It is imperative to foster awareness regarding the multifaceted roles of libraries in upholding information integrity, facilitating knowledge management, informing evidence-based policy-making, fostering research, and ensuring digital inclusion.
- Presenters at the forum also highlighted the ongoing challenge of managing data gaps in the implementation of the SDGs.

Way Forward

Mr. Madumo and Ms. Hamwaalwa are anticipated to spearhead advocacy endeavors within their respective countries and in Sub-Saharan Africa, motivating fellow professionals to harmonize library services with governmental priorities, and prompting all other information professionals to engage with government officials. This concerted effort will underscore the substantial contribution of libraries to the development agenda, particularly in relation to the SDGs.

Conclusion

Special thanks are due to the Stichting IFLA Global Libraries grant for their generous sponsorship, which enabled active participation by delegates in the 2024 UN HLPF. This opportunity proved transformative, offering a platform for valuable networking and enriching experiences through profound insights from colleagues and high-level advocacy.



Mr Kepi Madumo with the South African delegation attending the plenary session



Mr Kepi Madumo with ambassador Mathu Joyisi, the permanent representative of SA to the UN at the Nelson Mandela Day celebration



L to R: Minister of Education, Arts and Culture, Republic of Namibia, Ester Anna Nghipondoka and Ms Namutenya Hamwaalwa attending a site event



Delegates during the preparatory meeting for the creation of a group of friends of libraries hosted by the permanent mission of Argentina to the UN



(L to R): Ms Namutenya Hamwaalwa, Ms Loida Garcia Febo (US) and Mr Kepi Madumo at the Nelson Mandela Day celebration in New York.