

National knowledge initiatives: the role of the National Library of South Africa

Mr John Tsebe

National Librarian, National Library of South Africa, South Africa

Abstract

Libraries and information services are significant in the provision of information for socio-economic development and sustainability. It is through these institutions that information is organised, preserved and disseminated to society. This starts from basic life skills information to entrepreneurial information. Through knowledge derived from these institutions, the world is capable of improving human lives and as a result strengthens economies of the world. The growth in the global production of knowledge has necessitated new inventions to facilitate universal availability and access.

This paper discusses broadly the role of the National Library of South Africa as a key custodian of published documentary heritage. The focus is however, on the NLSA's national initiatives contributing towards a knowledge-based economy. The NLSA's role is expressed in terms of the value the library has in contributing to the development of a knowledge-based economy. As a national heritage institution, the NLSA is a central point facilitating access to the world's information resources and contributes immensely to human development which ultimately drives the knowledge economy. The enabling political environment lays a solid foundation for the active participation within the knowledge economy.



Mr John K. Tsebe was appointed National Librarian of South Africa in March 2004. Before this appointment he was University Librarian at the then University of the North (now University of Limpopo) for 19 years. He has been working in the library and information services (LIS) profession since 1975.

Tsebe holds a Masters degree in Library Science (MLS) from Syracuse University as well as a Masters degree in Public Administration (MPA) from Harvard University, both in the United States. He also studied at the University of Wales, College of Librarianship, Wales in the UK.

At the University of the North he served on Senate and several Senate Committees. He was the first Secretary of the University Broad Transformation Committee addressing critical issues in the transformation of higher education in South Africa. He was also extensively involved in different aspects of the University's Strategic Planning Processes.

Tsebe played a significant role in the development of the South African LIS sector. He is a founder member of the Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA), and was chairperson of the LIASA Higher Education Libraries Interest Group (HELIG). He coordinated the difficult but exciting and challenging process of the drafting and the presentation and facilitation of the LIASA constitution. As National Librarian he is always readily available to assist and support LIASA activities.

He currently serves on the Boards of the South African Library and Information Consortia (SANLiC) and the South African Book Development Council (SABDC). He chaired the Forum of University Librarians of South Africa (FULSA) and contributed towards the formation of the new Committee for Higher Education Librarians in South Africa (CHELSA) in tandem with the current South African higher education transformation landscape. He was a member of the South African National Heritage Council (NHC) Transformation Charter Task Team which drafted the transformation charter for the heritage sector in the country.

He has been mandated by the National Council for Library and Information Services (NCLIS) to coordinate the process and the roadmap of drafting the LIS Transformation Charter for South Africa.

On the African continent he chaired the Executive Committee of the Standing Conference of African National and University Libraries in East, Central and Southern Africa (SCANUL-ECS) for two terms: 1998-2000 and 2000-2002. As chair of SCANUL-ECS he represented the sub-region in West Africa at the SCAULWA (Standing Conference of African University Libraries - West African Region) meetings in Ghana. He has been elected as a Standing Committee member of the IFLA National Libraries Section. He is the Second Vice Chairperson of the Conference of Directors of National Libraries (CDNL). He served in the OCLC Members Council as an alternate member until May 2009.