

ICML 9 / CRICS 7
9th World Congress on Health Information and Libraries
Salvador - Bahia, Brazil
20-23 September 2005

**Multi-stakeholder partnerships: a strategy for the
construction of a society of shared knowledge
accessible to all**

Intervention of
H.E. Mr. Adama SAMASSEKOU
President of the Academy of Languages
President of PrepCom of the Geneva phase of WSIS
Former Minister of Education of Mali

Salvador de Bahia, 21 septembre 2005

**Mesdames, Messieurs,
Honorables invités,
Chers amis,**

Bom dia aos meus irmãos e as minhas irmãs! Buenos días mis amigos y mis amigas! Bonjour mes frères et sœurs ! Good morning my brothers and sisters!

For me, as an African, Brazil and particularly Bahia, its cradle, are a special place, a bridge between Africa and the Americas. This is the reason why it is an honor and a great pleasure for me to be with you today. I wish to warmly thank the initiators and organizers for their invitation to participate in the important conference. My sincere thanks also to the high authorities of Brazil and Bahia for their fraternal Brazilian welcoming and hospitality, which was reserved to me.

**Mesdames, Messieurs,
Honorables invités,
Chers amis,**

Here I am again in the great family of information and training professionals, thinkers and researchers to talk about access for all. Along the process of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), the second phase of which will finish in two months in Tunisia, we talked a lot about this problematic, to the extent where one of the main achievements of the Declaration of Principles of Geneva which put the access to information and knowledge in position three of eleven key principles which constitute what I call today the Information of Shared Knowledge.

I remember from Berlin, in August 2003, when IFLA made me the honor to invite me to the deliberations of the 69th World Congress, I will say the following:

« We all know that the librarians, they also, have always wanted to adapt to the technological revolution. In some kind of a refrigeration of the Internet – which is characterized by the integration between distance transport and treatment on site -, the copyists of the library of Alexandria reproduced systematically all manuscripts which transited through the port. Today, printing, audiovisual and digital are available on a unique support, accessible at all times, all around the world.

The former dream of a unique instrument of access to universality of knowledge is in the process of being realized. The online catalogue, the digital “revues”, electronic books and search engines have thrown over traditional methodology of access to information. The danger is no longer lack of information, but rather overabundance. The difficulty is no longer the find information, but to select information that is of relevance and of quality. You were the specialist of knowledge and you have become the mediators of knowledge.

The Internet has profoundly transformed a large number of jobs, especially those, including yours, which are linked to the production, transmission and communication of general knowledge, including traditional knowledge, scientific knowledge, cultural and artistic production. I am deeply convinced that the role of librarians and information services in the process of creation and dissemination of knowledge and in formal and informal education not only is indispensable, but will take more and more importance.”

I am happy that in Geneva the third principle I just mentioned has given importance to this question. It appears to be useful here to mention these essential paragraphs of the third principle:

24. The ability for all to access and contribute information, ideas and knowledge is essential in an inclusive Information Society.
25. The sharing and strengthening of global knowledge for development can be enhanced by removing barriers to equitable access to information for economic, social, political, health, cultural, educational, and scientific activities and by facilitating access to public domain information, including by universal design and the use of assistive technologies.
26. A rich public domain is an essential element for the growth of the Information Society, creating multiple benefits such as an educated public, new jobs, innovation, business opportunities, and the advancement of sciences. Information in the public domain should be easily accessible to support the Information Society, and protected from misappropriation. Public institutions such as libraries and archives, museums, cultural collections and other community-based access points should be strengthened so as to promote the preservation of documentary records and free and equitable access to information.
27. Access to information and knowledge can be promoted by increasing awareness among all stakeholders of the possibilities offered by different software models, including proprietary, open-source and free software, in order to increase

competition, access by users, diversity of choice, and to enable all users to develop solutions which best meet their requirements. Affordable access to software should be considered as an important component of a truly inclusive Information Society.

28. We strive to promote universal access with equal opportunities for all to scientific knowledge and the creation and dissemination of scientific and technical information, including open access initiatives for scientific publishing.

En of quote.

In such a context, you can easily understand, dear friends, that the challenge is today how to transform this « information society », where abundance of information, which is sometimes not well organized, often not well managed and most of the time in a language not accessible for the largest number, an impediment of good communications, and an efficient construction of knowledge into a society of shared knowledge for all and accessible to those who most need it. This is why, in Geneva, the international community has show its determination through the adoption of the last paragraph of the Declaration of Principles “Towards a society of information for all based on knowledge sharing.”

The main question, today, remains therefore the one of the concretization of this determination. And here, there is no doubt that:

- There is no information society for all, as long as all populations have access to an infrastructure adapted to their realities, to at an affordable price and manageable in their functioning;
- There will not be any sharing of information, as long as all languages of the concerned populations are not taken into consideration and present on the Internet. It is here that the notion of equity takes all its sense: only a multilingual cyberspace can allow the larger number to not only have access to knowledge, but also and foremost to produce knowledge, by developing language creativity and innovation!

You know more than anyone else how useful ancestral knowledge and know-how is if preserved throughout the centuries by the various populations, often through a living oral tradition!

- And knowledge will only be accessible to all if we put in place new educational methods which can “capacitate”, in their language, actors from the field through adapted training for this new digital culture which is under construction.

Is it necessary to recall that information is important for all fields of activity, because it serves to communicate and to construct knowledge. However, there are not many fields for which the good management of information is as essential as for the one of health, where, thanks to a mastered use of the new tools of information and communication technologies, we can today save millions of lives.

But we will never be able to guarantee to a larger majority this mastered use if we do not develop, at all levels, the multi-actor partnership approach. It is only by creating a true network of solidarity, by putting into synergy their complementarity that governments, civil society, the private sector and international organizations can build a society of information and shared knowledge for all. This is today even more possible that the basis have been established in Geneva. As a matter of fact, if we had to speak about mutual respect, opening towards the Other, active listening, understanding, cooperation and a constant search for consensus and of dynamic compromise, which has opened today a channel for **Multi-Actor Partnerships**.

This is also what has enabled us to characterize the spirit and process of Geneva through three notions: **inclusion, partnership, solidarity**. However, Multi- Actor Partnerships cannot be constructed and reinforced without the respect of three fundamental principles:

- Confidence
- Transparency
- Commitment

And when I speak about solidarity, it is well what is at stake here. To speak about solidarity in our African culture, is to refer to, before anything else: to express,

through a sincere dialogue, a real attention to the preoccupation of the Other and a constant availability for common action, reflecting a high consciousness for a shared destiny!

In our vision, the **concept of solidarity refers more to the human relations than the material relation**. We people from Mandé say in the mandigue language: mogotigiya ka fisa fêntigiya ye « the richness in human relations is preferable to the richness in material goods. » As a matter of fact, the real human relation, based on esteem and mutual respect, the open to the Other and in particular the **mutual trust** is much more solid, trustworthy, and durable than the “fugacité” of material relations, based on circumstantial relationships of interest.

This is why, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends, Africa had, through my modest person, the honor and privilege to conduct the preparatory of the World Summit on the Information Society in Geneva. As foreseen in the Resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations which called for the Summit, it was a question of not only calling for the inclusion into the preparatory process of all actors concerned, but a real partnership and solidarity among the main stakeholders. It is this spirit of Geneva, base on **constructive partnership dialogue**, which in the end allowed to agree about the creation of the Digital Solidarity Fund, proposed by Abdulaye WADE in the name of Africa. The Fund was designed to combat digital exclusion all over the world. It is this same spirit that prevails in the thinking about the fundamental question of Internet Governance...

And this concept of solidarity, based on human relations and a constructive dialogue is particularly valuable in your sector: Health! But also for the never tiring workers that are so solicited like librarians!

**Estimados convidados,
Queridos amigos,**

If I spoke Portuguese, I would have wanted to say a few words in the national language of Brazil. Instead, I will say them in English, to pay tribute to cultural and linguistic diversity.

I see three main principles for the construction of this society of shared knowledge, be it for the health sector or for many of the other sectors:

- first, the **principle of multilingual open source applications**, meaning tools which are accessible to all and which can be adapted to specific needs. Here, the answer lies in online communities developing applications and open source software, in order to bridge the linguistic digital divide;
- second, the **principle of open contents**, written and oral information that can be shared and appropriated through information and communication technologies;
- third, the **principle of sharing best practices**. This is particularly important for health-related information, where it does not make sense to reinvent the wheel, but rather to share with others what has worked and what has not. An application of this are online universities and distance learning programs, as well as online libraries and so on. Interesting projects are carried out in this sense with telemedicine initiatives, for example between Geneva and Bamako: what initially was a North-South exchange, has turned into a South-North and South-South one, for tropical medicine and best practices experienced in the South. A good example is also what I found here, coming to your Congress: the excellent initiative of Information and Knowledge Management Centers, as well as the Global Health Library and HINARI project...

**Estimados convidados,
Queridos amigos,**

Time has come to conclude... but how to do it without mention of actuality which is very much linked to this congress?

Just a week ago, was held in New York the Summit of the Millennium +5. Among the eight Millennium Development Objectives (MDGs), there is, among others, those of health and partnership. For the vast majority of humanity, the prognostics are rather dark: the UNDP Development Report of last year stipulates that, if Africa continued at the same speed, it will reach the MDGs in 2147 instead of 2015!

For my part, I am deeply convinced that, if it takes the historic opportunity which constitutes the extraordinary potential of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), the international community can defeat this somber prognostics, taking up the challenges related to the three main issues at stake, according to me, the WSIS, which is not merely a summit of technologies but rather a global societal project:

1. transform the digital divide, which is in fact a knowledge gap, into an opportunity, and most importantly a digital perspective for all, in particular for the vast majority of our humanity living in the South, facilitating in this way the reduction of the digital and economic divide ;
2. speed up the attainments of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), making sure that optimal and mastered use of the new information and communication technologies can be made in all fields ;
3. promote cultural and linguistic diversity – wealth of people and public goods of the world by Excellency, to guarantee to the « without a voice » of the world a multilingual Cyberspace.

Today more than ever this is possible thanks to a multi-stakeholder approach! In fact, the promotion and development of Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships constitutes THE way forward for a society of information and shared knowledge accessible to all, that means in priority in the language they master best, and conducting to the eradication of poverty, to guarantee a more solitary human development.

This is **THE** voice of realization of our Commitment as for Equity!

This is, at least, my dream and vision which I wanted to share with you...

And being, out of luck, in the land of Don Elder CAMARA, let me cite his thought which I like:

When one dreams alone, it is only a dream, but if there is more than one sharing this dream, it is already the beginning of reality!

Your deliberations may show that dreaming together is possible and that God can help you in this noble enterprise!

Thank you for your kind attention ! Merci beaucoup! Muchas gracias! Muito obrigado !