

Deborah Jacobs Keynote Speech
at AfLIA's Public Libraries Summit – April 30, 2016 – Swaziland
21st Century Public Libraries – Innovation Develops Communities

- Good morning friends and thank you. All protocols observed
- I am so pleased to be here at the second Public Library Summit on the continent. The first summit was held in 2012 and how very far you have all traveled
- At the closing session of the first summit I was both excited about the future of the Public Libraries Network and, I am afraid to say, very frightened that the meeting would end up like the hundreds of library summits I have attended in my career
- Best intention but little follow through.
- Here is a piece of what I said in those closing remarks:
- ***"I remain in such awe of this summit, drawing so many public librarians, leaders of the African library community and, very importantly, policy makers who have stayed with us and debated with us and committed to us. When each of you goes home, remember why this summit happened and why the organizers brought you here!"***
- ***I challenge you to make a pledge to yourself and to the people on your continent that you will do all within your power to make sure that this summit is a different summit. That you will go home and stay energized. That you will commit to building and strengthening upon what was started here."***
- So what happened after that?
- Well, my importantly, my fear was unfounded.
- First a group of 11 library leaders worked to create a vision and action plan for public libraries on the continent.
- That vision was aspirational and included these six key ideas:
- ***"... libraries have become central lifelong partners to the development of communities and the continent***

- *There is a critical mass of innovative, effective and sustainable libraries, led by well-trained, knowledgeable and motivated professionals.*
- *Through this effort, African libraries have developed a vibrant network offering a range of innovative products fully responsive to the needs of local communities.*
- *Librarians reach out with useful information services enabling improved livelihoods and broadening the choices of individuals for a better life.*
- *And as a result of this, Libraries have become the pride of their communities; they are community meeting and ‘happening’ places where all want AND CARE to be seen.*
- *The success of libraries has gone viral!”*
- There was much more to this vision and I recommend AfLIA put this vision on their constantly improving website. You should be testing your work regularly against this attainable vision.
- Which brings me to AfLIA !
- The second and most important thing that happened following the first summit is that AfLIA was created on July 5, 2013
- And what a difference AfLIA has made for everyone here.
- It took a lot of guts and courage of leaders to make this happen and all of you to invest your time, funding, membership (and buy all the great branded merchandise) they to make it real.
- But here we are and the responsibility for AfLIA’s future and the future of public libraries on the continent is in all of your hands!
- In Global Libraries, we strongly believe in AfLIA.
- I believe strongly in AfLIA.
- And what’s so exciting to me is that AfLIA knows that having strong **public libraries** is central to the success of Africa’s countries and the lives of the people throughout the continent.
- They know that there can’t be success and the ability to meet the challenges of the Sustainable Development Goals without strong public libraries.

- I'm enthusiastic about Gertrude's report on the Public Libraries Network. AfLIA has done so much in such a short time.
- And public libraries in Africa are changing rapidly.
- Just last week, Kenya National Library Service announced that all of its public libraries will be providing e-readers to the public.
- In Nigeria, librarians are holding Twitter chats to raise awareness of libraries and their role in sustainable development.
- These and other examples abound.
- Global Libraries is here because we believe in Africa's libraries. In fact, there is nowhere else my colleague Darren and I would rather be.
- Most of you likely know that Global Libraries is ending in two more years. When Bill and Melinda Gates made this decision, they asked us to "leave the public library field strong and resilient."
- This challenge and opportunity gives me a huge sense of responsibility and urgency.
- As we think about how to do this, we have become more and more convinced that collaboration and partnerships are critical.
- Collaboration and partnerships are also major priorities for AfLIA's leaders and I was asked to speak a bit about this today.
- Fostering collaboration to maximize our impact has always been a priority for GL.
- In exiting the library field, it become clear to me, that achieving success in the AU Africa 2063 Vision and Priorities as well as the vision I spoke of earlier where **"libraries are the happening places and their success has gone viral"** we all must change our behavior and ways of doing business to work more overtly as partners and collaborators.
- Collaboration IS NOT inviting someone to your meeting or sending them a White Paper/manifesto.

- We believe partnerships and collaborations are strategic alliances between organizations that are intended to achieve greater impact than any organization could generate on its own.
- I believe collaboration is about co-creating programs and efforts with your partners.
- Of course this will take more time, but I maintain that if we don't take this road, none of us will be as successful.
- When I talk about collaboration – I think of a collaborative mindset – a way of being – and not simply a project.
- I see it as something hard, something that takes more time, and requires giving up a bit of your “turf or ownership” and depends on trust.
- But what do you get? Five quick things for starters.
 1. Reduction in cost
 2. An elimination of duplication of efforts and services
 3. Access to more resources including **brain power** than would have been possible
 4. Ability to respond more effectively to complex issues and challenges
 - 5. And finally and most importantly, an increased voice, visibility, impact AND power**
- Learning to collaborate and co-create takes practice; it's like everytime I begin lifting weights again or biking; its super hard at first, sometime hurts, but very quickly builds new muscle.
- I believe this is muscle you need to embed.
- When you have it you will embed collaboration into how you think and act – as a default way of working.
- I love talking about this, so feel free to talk to me more.
- But know you can also speak with your own leaders. I heard great speeches and comments this past week from Rocky, from Buhle, from Gertrude, from the president of the South African Library Association.
- All of them stress the importance of collaboration; of no longer going it alone!

- I urge you to make the most of our limited time together. We are the lucky ones. We have a responsibility to the field and to all of our colleagues who aren't here with us.
- So, get out of your chair and meet new people
- Don't walk away from a stranger, walk towards them
- Building AfLIA and the Public Library network requires action from each of us.
- As you become more involved you will be part of the group knitting Africa together.
- Check out and participate on the APLN Facebook site – a great place for sharing examples, inspiring each other, learning from each other, and knowing we're not alone
- And, in case you aren't a member -- **get added** AND add your colleagues. Encourage the network, nurture it.
- We must, as a field, be more connected than an occasional conference or summit. We must draw in those unable to travel and share with them what we learned here and how we are implementing that learning.
- When you are out visit other libraries, talk to other librarians, share within your own country and across borders. Be humble and smart and learn from one another!
- And listen to today's speakers and make sure to talk to them throughout the summit and later!
- My good friends and colleagues, Victoria, Ramune, Hannelore, Mary, Joan. These are some of the coolest and most innovative women around!
- Attend the Market Place for Innovative Ideas this evening and engage!
- You are being offered a great summit so make the best of it.
- Global Libraries, in our exit, has made the African continent our key priority geography.
- Take pride in this, but also remember that with this pride comes responsibility and accountability.

- This responsibility belongs to you. What are each and every one of you going to do to make sure that these final investments from GL make a difference today and long into the future for the people of Africa?
- The future **is in your hands**. We at the Bill and Melinda Gates foundation believe in you, just as we believe in AfLIA
- My request is that you take this pride you have, this belief we have in you, and change the world **one patron, one library, one community** at a time.
- Thank you.