

WELCOME ADDRESS BY PROFESSOR CHINWE VERONICA ANUNOBI, NATIONAL LIBRARIAN/CEO NATIONAL LIBRARY OF NIGERIA AT THE ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, E- GOVERNANCE AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION ORGANISED BY NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON INFORMATION FOR ALL PROGRAMME IN NIGERIA (IFAP) IN COLLABORATION WITH FEDERAL MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS AND DIGITAL ECONOMY ON 4TH OCTOBER, 2022.

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you all to this auspicious occasion that is convened to mark the 2022 Universal Access to Information Day which theme is artificial intelligence, e-governance and access to information. The global celebration took place in Tashkent(tash-kent), in Uzbekistan(uhz-beh-kuh-staan) on 28 and 29 September 2022, with a high-level opening, an inter-ministerial roundtable on Access to Information and Artificial Intelligence with the participation of international experts. The last decade has witnessed technological development in the field of artificial intelligence at a scale and speed unprecedented in the history of humankind. One of the major challenges the world faces today is the implementation of artificial intelligence, e-governance and access to information. It is within this back drop that a need arose for brainstorming on provision of reliable access to and use of print/ electronic information and artificial intelligence within government, between governments at the international, national, state, municipal, and local level governments, citizens, and businesses for sustainable national development as well the need to take a position on international policies and guidelines for action on access to information and knowledge in knowledge-based societies.

Hence, the National committee on Information for All Programme (IFAP) convened this roundtable with all stakeholders to brainstorm on the benefits and risks, against the backdrop of good governance principles including harnessing opportunities of e-governance and artificial intelligence for informed and empowered citizens, measuring progress on access to information. There is urgent

need to assess the role of e- governance and artificial intelligence in promoting inclusive approaches for access to information as well as Open data to support transparency, innovation and e-governance. We need to proffer and advocate for policies, strategies and action plans that will position Nigeria as a competitive global player in the way we use technology and information to reshape the way people work and live.

The Information for All Programme (IFAP) is one of the Intergovernmental Council of UNESCO, established in 2001 to promote and widen access to information in the public domain through the organisation, digitization and preservation of information among others. It is also expected to serve as a platform for international policy discussion and guidelines for action in the area of access to information and knowledge in knowledge-based societies. Nigeria as a Member State of UNESCO has a National Committee for IFAP, established under the auspices of the Nigerian National Commission for UNESCO in March 2007, with the secretariat at National Library of Nigeria, while the National Librarian/CEO is the Chairperson.

The National Committee is expected to pursue the goals of IFAP at the national level, by serving as a meeting point for various stake-holders and as an avenue for the transfer of knowledge from the international to the national level.

The objectives of the programme are to:

- promote and widen access to information in the public domain through the organisation, digitalization and preservation of information;
- support training, continuous education lifelong learning in the fields of communication, information and informatics;
- support the production of local content and foster the availability of indigenes' knowledge through basic literacy and ICT literacy training;

promote the use of international standards and best practices on communication, information and informatics in UNESCO's fields of competence; and

Promote information and knowledge networking at local, national, regional and international levels.

The overall goal of IFAP is to help UNESCO Member States develop and implement national information policies and knowledge strategies in a world increasingly using information and communication technologies (ICT). In order to achieve this goal, the Programme concentrates its efforts on the six priority areas:

Information for Development

- Formulation of policies and strategies to strengthen global standards on social media and internet governance;
- Promotion of Knowledge Society Policy in Member States for adaptation in their national information policies and strategies
- Celebration of International Day for Universal Access to Information;
- Mainstreaming Universal Access to Information in the development process.

Information Literacy

- Fostering Media and Information literate societies;
- Gathering data on the status and availability of competencies on Media and Information;
- Other Media and Information projects.

Information Accessibility

- Guidelines to combat online radicalization of youth and violent extremism;
- Internet and Youth Radicalization leading to violence;

- Creation of a network of institutions working on online radicalization;
- MIL and online life skills;
- Establishment of info-ethics advisory board;
- Awareness on Policy Options for Managing Radicalization on the Internet.

Information Ethics

- Upscaling ICT/mobile application initiatives;
- Promotion of the Guidelines on inclusion of Learners with Disabilities in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) in higher education.

Multilingualism in Cyberspace

- Promotion of indigenous languages in cyberspace;
- Monitoring and usage of the online tool: The World Atlas of Languages;
- Ethical dimensions of making information of indigenous communities accessible.

Information Preservation

- Assess implementation of the Recommendation concerning the Preservation of, and Access to, Documentary Heritage;
- Raise awareness on the importance of documentary heritage;
- Initiatives related to software heritage.

It is worth noting that while Nigeria is doing great in these priority areas, it seems we are working in silos and have not been able to present a common front and a well-crafted intervention during the UNESCO general conference.

By way of refreshing our memory the membership of IFAP includes: National Library of Nigeria, National Archives, Federal Ministry of Information and Culture, National Information and Technology Development Agency, Nigerian Library Association, and Educational Planning, Research & Development of Federal

Ministry of Education. Others include, Secretary Senate Committee on Information, National Assembly, Secretary House Committee on Information, National Assembly, National Communications Commission, UNESCO Office Abuja, African Regional Centre for Information Science and the Secretary-General, National Commission for UNESCO serving as the Secretary.

The Committee has made modest achievements since its inception some of which are:

The Committee contributed to the facilitation of the passage of the Freedom of Information (FOI) Bill in Nigeria.

Within the framework of the Information for all Programme (IFAP), a retreat for the final review of the National Information Technology Policy was organized with support from UNESCO, in collaboration with the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) in 2009. The IT policy served as a working document to map out an achievable plan to build capacity in the area of IT in order to drive various sectors of the economy using IT by focusing on core competencies in IT and to efficiently and effectively anticipate and meet the IT requirements for successful attainment of the national vision.

The Committee was represented by the Prof. Chinwe Anunobi during the Online Orientation meeting held on the 14th of April, 2022 presided over the UNESCO IFAP Chair Ms Dorothy Gordon. Every member nation was enjoined during the orientation to engender intergovernmental partnership and collaboration for the realization of the IFAP (UNESCO) mandate with emphasis on North-South and South-South partnership while extending hands of fellowship to civil societies and private sectors. She highlighted that such engagement is key to strengthening access to information. These partnerships and collaborations may not take effect until we appreciate

who we are and what we can do in the world of artificial intelligence and access to information as the key to effective e-governance. It is only then we can take a bold step and solicit for partnership.

Therefore, the Roundtable is timely as we will be exploring the major concepts of artificial Intelligence, E - Governance and Access to Information which has the potential to accomplish overarching goals in advancing the current state of government services by way of minimizing processing time, reduce cost and improve citizens' satisfaction.

With the quality of attendees and the resource persons beginning with the keynote speaker who wears the fitting cap, we will come up with a working document that could be utilized by the stakeholders for policy development and implementation. By so doing we will add our voice to the global community using IFAP window on Communication and Information Section of UNESCO. If you don't say I am nobody will say thou art.

Ladies and gentlemen, I believe that at the end of this high-level discussion, we would have put to rest our concerns on artificial intelligence, e-governance and access to information as it affects the Nigerian out there, the nation and international stakeholders.

God bless you as you give your time and intellect.