

## UNISA/IFLA Public Lecture Turns 3 Years Old



Dr Sohair Wastawy, in the middle

The IFLA Regional Office for Africa in partnership with Unisa Library hosted their third annual IFLA Africa public lecture in April at the Florida campus. The lecture, titled: From North to South: African Librarianship in the 21st Century, was delivered by acclaimed Egyptian librarian Dr Sohair Wastawy of the new Alexandrina Library, and attended by various members of the library and information sector. In her welcome and introduction Unisa Library Executive Director Dr Buhle Mbambo-Thata stated that the lecture would pave a way to understanding “where we are going as African librarians”.

Dr Wastawy lecture focused on the impact of technology on the African continent as well as its librarianship, despite the stereotype of „the dark continent“. She urged libraries to heed the UN MDG“s call to report/record their available publications as over 90% of the African countries (with over a billion people) are not reporting to the UN about their publications.

She said that because of the digital revolution, libraries are changing into diffused and connected portals and therefore response should also be informed by the new generation of library users who are visually – and not necessarily text oriented. In this sense, collections are different and modes of research are also based on digital access.

In her vision, Wastawy urged librarians to use and promote usage of institutional repositories, cultivate strategies to working smarter in the 21st century. This also means a change in the patterns of relations among academic disciplines. Wastawy urged South Africans to continue strengthening their networks with global scientists in the areas such as biotechnology.

### Cyber infrastructure

Wastawy also stated the need to move towards cyber infrastructure, a domain which requires a multidisciplinary community with high levels of shared expertise, interest in what is going on globally, and tremendous amount of data, among others. In this case, the role Unisa can play includes developing the Unisa institutional repository, maintaining a digital research data as well as cooperation with different entities on and off campus – to enable group to group interaction in e-space.

Wastawy highlighted web 2.0 technologies as those about participation and understanding the impact of user created content and the challenges to traditional resources and

6

infrastructure. “Go mobile,” she urged, reflecting on the fact that in Africa, more people have no access to landlines but are connected to their cell phones. In 1999 Africa had 7 million mobile phone subscribers and 331 million in 2008. The UNISA Library’s AirPAC technology also plays a role in this regard.

Other developments highlighted by Wastawy include key national libraries being built in Africa such as in Sudan and in the North of the Sahara, “but just like it takes a village to raise a child, it also takes a world to build a library,” she concluded.

In his response to the lecture, Wits University's Mr Felix Obogu stated that as much as the library building is still relevant "we need to renegotiate our space through open access software and online resources among others, but also the preservation of oral literature and oral history are crucial in African librarianship". Obogu reminded librarians of plans for the national digital initiative under the mandate of the National Research Foundation (NRF) which seeks to encourage institutions to digitise their information resources.

Natalia Molebatsi

UNISA, SOUTH AFRICA