

Closing Remarks and motivational Speech by Veno Kauaria, MP at SCECSAL XXIV Confrence. Safari Hotel, Windhoek, Namibia 8-11 February, 2021

Good Afternoon colleagues,
I was advised to stand by the Protocol Already establishment. Thank you MC and Dr Mchombu for the introduction.

As I was looking for a befitting topic for my motivational closing remarks, I stumbled upon this one:

“Librarians as Politicians”

Colleagues, gone are the days when librarians used to sit behind their desks and allow library technicians to run the libraries. With the current diminishing budgets every financial year, it is up to the librarians to become politicians.

Please hear me out, I know that libraries are neutral institutions and when we hear the word politics we shy away.

That’s the song we have been singing for decades. It is a good song, it has kept us and our institutions out of harms way because politics can be dirty!.

Let me explain what I mean: The kind of politics I am talking about is not political party politics. It is the kind of politics where you keep your neutrality but still get that extra budget and that’s the politics of engagement, communication and persuasion. In other words it is the politics of REACHING out and innovation!

Politics is everywhere. You can not avoid it, you just have to embrace it and use it to your advantage. You have heard of Office Politics (those staff members that goes behind your back and report you to the boss and sometimes organize strikes to discredit you? That’s politics in the workplace, we now have Church Politics, even pastors are now fighting over positions in churches (as they say, the Devil is a liar), politics is out there and around all of us.

When we talk of Library Advocacy, we are actually talking about engagement, communication, persuasion which equals REACHING out and that’s politics because you choose your audience. You organize when to meet them and polish what you’re going to say. You choose those who can advance your cause.

Advocacy is becoming more and more important and it could be within your reach.
Here’s one trick:

Now I am talking like a politician and not like a librarian. We are all coming from communities. We go to our villages during holidays. We go to church and attend parties and weddings. Politicians are also part of those gatherings. Do you know who your elected

officials are?, these are the people who decide on your budget in Parliament or at local authorities! If you don't know them, please get to know them.

These are some of the people you need to talk to, don't just go talk to them, know what to talk to them about. Some are parents, aunts or grandparents of children of school going age. Tell them why they should help you to get more funds for your libraries.

Here is the secret: Most Politicians like numbers and statistics, if you tell a politician who lives in your area how many youths are using your library and how many women etc. (he/she will translate that into votes, and constituency....joke). Once that equation is made, interest is heightened either to support the budget or to support your fundraising drive. Some of you have done excellent jobs in reaching out, you need to exelerate that. Jacob Muleka the other day was telling us that he approached one politician for assistance, that's an excellent example, what Joseph now needs to do is to compile a list of all the politicians within that constituency and ask for donations!

The same goes for your place of work. The people who allocate the funds for example the Executive Director, the Director of Finance should know what you're doing, you should also know what they need to support their work. Often the bit of funds goes to what can be seen. When Namutenya discovered that the Executive Director was doing her Ph.D, she reached out and NLAS got funding for e-resources that year. In communities, the youth is also good allies. They come from homes and are part of gatherings.

For University librarians. Your student bodies are your allies.

The faculty is your savior. If they see no value in what you're doing, they won't fight for you. I was intrigued by what Ms Niskala presented on Monday on the perception by faculty and that of students. Universities are very political. As librarians, we need to work on how people perceive us, If you think little of what you do, others will see that too. If you walk From students to faculty, capture them all. Visit their offices, REACH out! Call the student bodies, have meetings, hear what their needs are.

At this critical time when elearning is taking place, access to information can not be over emphasized. Lack of access is widening the digital divide further. Libraries have provided this needed service to those who can not afford technology at home for years.

However, that situation is slowly changing for the worse, the Majority of our libraries are slowly losing the computers procured a few years back and there's little prospect of replacing them.

Due to the increasing gab in the digital divide caused by a dominance of urban connectivity, rural schools and libraries are left behind.

The Inclusive Internet Index, in 2019 reported that only 29.5% of households in Namibia use the internet. With less than 30% of households using the internet, this translates into about 70% to 90% of learners and students with limited or no access to education if we close schools due to COVID-19. This doesn't begin to include the out of school youth or the University students who rely on access through public libraries.

Let's go back to politics:

As Librarians we stand for among others the following values:

- free access to information
- Freedom of expression

- Bridging the digital divide
- Life-long learning
- Fostering intercultural dialogue
- Cultural Diversity, supporting the oral tradition (these are values listed in the IFLA/UNESCO Manifesto for libraries.
- Which of these values would not be seen as political if you decide to stand your grounds and fight for them?

History has given us librarians who became politicians, let me give you a few names:

*Benjamin Franklin - was one of the Founding Father of the United States

*Chairman Mao Tse-Tung - China

*Mohammad Khatami - was President of Iran

*Golda Meir - was a prime minister of Israel

*Veno Kauaria (laugh...)

Cdes, as librarians, we have what it takes, let's not undermine ourselves. Not only do we have past Presidents as former librarians, we have poets, screen writers, authors the list is long and the sky should be the limit.

However, you can not reach the sky by settling for the bare Minimum. You can not reach the sky by being complacent! Let's adopt the new normal and go out there and politicize what we are doing! Librarians and information workers in general have grown from strength to strength, let's be proud of those achievements and walk with our heads up high!

I thank you!