The Regional Workshop on Promoting a Culture of Reading in Africa kicked off

Addis Ababa, 18 September 2019-

The African Union Commission (AUC) Departments of Strategic, Policy, Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Resource Mobilization (SPPMERM) and Human Resources, Science and Technology (HRST) in collaboration with the African Library and Information Associations and Institutions (AfLIA) in line with Agenda 2063 Aspiration 1, that is A prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development and Aspiration 5 that is An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, shared values and ethics, today organized a workshop on promoting a culture of reading in Africa.

The main objective of the workshop is to come up with a framework of action to boost the development of Culture of Reading in Africa to be adopted by responsible government bodies in Member States. Other specific objectives include:

- Reflect on current status of reading culture in Africa in relation to economic development, identify major issues and the reasons;
- Identify key ideas in formulating the policy;
- Identify ways to measure the impact of activities of ‘promoting the reading culture’ and thus their contribution to human and economic development; and
- Identify possible policy outlines and the way forward.

The expected outcome will be elements of a Draft Policy on Promoting Reading Culture in Africa which shall seek inputs from other major stakeholders in the book value chain, such as publishers, writers and others, and then it will be submitted to the STC- Ministers of Education, Science and Technology meeting that is expected to be held in November 2019 for consideration and endorsement for further action.
In his keynote address, the African Union Commission Director Mr. Mesfin Tessema observed that the development of the reading culture in Africa is an issue of high importance, but yet unanimously given insufficient regard especially in Africa. He said “Education starts and ends with reading. Children are taught at a young age that reading is one of the four basic skills they need to deal with in the educational ladder.” Mr. Tessema further added that conflicts, especially in developing countries, mostly are a result of the prevalence of lack of information and the lack of education is a problem that gives birth to multiple problems.

The SPPMERM Director underlined the fact that “No development aspiration can be realized without knowledge/education” and appreciated efforts of AU Member States with regard to adoption of approaches taken by many public and community libraries in Africa, to satisfy information needs of their users.

Mr. Mesfin Tessema mentioned some challenges faced in development of national, public, community and school libraries in Africa such as the lack of appropriate legislation; inadequate allocation of budgets; shortage of professionals in the sector; low ratio of libraries to the population in some countries in Africa, to the extent that one library is expected to serve about half a million population.

Mr. Tessema concluded by urging the participants to come up with high level recommendations, geared towards developing continental policy on promoting the culture of reading in Africa, which ought to fit into other pertinent polices of the African Union.

The opening session also addressed by the Head of Education Division, Dr Beatrice Njenga. She said that under the implementation framework of Agenda 2063 the African Union adopted the Continental Education Strategy for Africa, (CESA 16-25) to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all and to foster the skills, human capital, and education revolution in Africa. “Without wide reading, learners cannot develop skills of locating, selecting, organizing, manipulating, analyzing, evaluating and processing information. Pervasive illiteracy can pose serious challenges anchored in ignorance, including crime, poor health seeking behavior and inadequate participation in democratic institutions of governance. Much progress has been made in Africa, with the literate population currently about 70% compared to a world average of nearly 90%. But there’s more to be done to ensure sustained and functional literacy”, emphasized Dr. Beatrice Njenga.

She urged participants to advocate for policies to facilitate, among others, expansion of library networks, promotion of reading, removal of taxes and duties from books, support to local language publishing, etc., that would enable diversification of reading materials and
enhanced access to materials that are relevant to Africa’s social, cultural, and development agenda.

She reminded participants that Agenda 2063 aspirations and goals provide a clear vision that must guide the work of promoting reading. She concluded by calling on participants to take note of the fact that there is a wide range of stakeholders around the issue of reading cultures, including publishers, writers, book sellers among others; and work that has been already done in partnership with other agencies such as ADEA must be taken on board.

The former President of the AflIA, Mr. John Tsebe, in his opening statement said that Africa is driven by the fact that all countries are addressing the agenda of development to sustain the vision of the African Union is that of: “An integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in global arena”. He indicated that the workshop is an activity coming as a result of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between AUC and AflIA and he affirmed AflIA’s keenness to support AU in the realization of the Agenda 2063 aspirations.

During the three-day workshop participants will be discussing the following issues:

- Libraries for Reading Culture to enhance education and self-development
- Summary of Status of Libraries in Africa (with focus on Public and Community Libraries).
- Copyright Limitations and Exemptions for Libraries & Archive, current states of negotiations, comparative analysis globally
- Dealing with major interconnected challenges
  - Resources
  - Digital Technology
  - Physical resources / Facilities
  - Funding / Budgeting
  - Professional development / Training
  - National Policy, etc
- African Knowledge Base Platform – as a future of Integrated Essential Digital Resources on Africa

Notes to the Editor:

On 20 May 2019, the African Union Commission (AUC) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the African Library and Information Associations and Institutions (AflIA) to foster closer collaboration between the two institutions, as a strategic move to drive sustainable development of the continent, through education and skills revolution.

The collaboration seeks to encourage a reading culture in the continent and to enhance human intellectual capital, through provision of relevant resources.

The collaboration aligns to the African Union’s “Aspiration 1” of a prosperous Africa based on inclusive growth and sustainable development. Among the Aspiration’s goals, is to develop Africa’s human and social capital through an education and skills revolution emphasizing science and technology.

The MOU seeks to among other aspects, enable collaboration on;

- Enter into a reciprocal free of charge agreement towards the development of African information and knowledge society, national, academic and community libraries with
a view to enhancing delivery of the right information to the right person at the right time.

- Development of Library and Information Professional Associations, as promoters and driving force for equitable access to information, knowledge, and innovative services in Africa.

For information related to the meeting please contact:

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