

Embrace digital facilitation to remain relevant and trending.

By Vivian Agaba

The just concluded 11th International Association of Facilitators (IAF) Africa conference was a buzz of activities.

Kampala-Uganda, the beautiful Pearl of Africa, was honoured to host the three-day conference from 23rd -25th September 2024.

To add icing on the cake, the Uganda chapter was thrilled to have been selected to host the conference in the same year the association celebrates its 30th anniversary of global existence.

The conference was organised under the theme: **“Facilitation in Africa: Past, Present, and the Future.”**

The event brought together about 30 facilitators, practitioners, and enthusiasts, both young and old, from Kenya, Tanzania, Togo, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, South Africa, and Uganda.

They networked, learned, unlearned, relearned, entertained each other, and shared ideas, skills, experiences, and knowledge. They also shared their plans and hopes for taking facilitation to the global level beyond Africa.

They were actively engaged in a cocktail of activities such as joint dinners, networking sessions, nature walks and spirituality, showcasing of the African traditional wear, their facilitation journeys and stories, facilitation types and tools, campfire conversation and storytelling (appreciating cultural diversity), the evolution of facilitation in Africa, generational gap as a strength, not a blocker, team building event at Tembuzi Amusement Park, and virtual remarks from IAF's Executive Director, Kathrina Loeffler.

Among the many things discussed, these topics stood out.

1. The call for facilitators to embrace technology to remain relevant.
2. The need to bridge the generational gap in facilitation and include the youth

3. The changing trends in facilitation in Africa
4. Youth as change makers: Leveraging facilitation skills to create impact.

Speaking of technological advancement, facilitators from across Africa were challenged to learn and embrace the use of technology to enhance their facilitated sessions and achieve better results to remain relevant. Otherwise, they risk being left out in this era of globalisation and emerging technologies that present enormous new possibilities.

Caleb Odhiambo, the conference Chairperson and a training practitioner, asked facilitators how they are embracing technology in their work, considering it can be a powerful ally for them, especially in the digital age where remote and hybrid work is increasingly becoming common.

Caleb, a community development practitioner, asked participants to ponder these questions.

“How have we prepared ourselves for the future? Where are we going? Is IAF’s future secured, or are we waiting for the future to hit us? We must change and move with the times or risk being run over by change. The use of technology is like a wave, and if you don’t embrace it, you can be swept away and become irrelevant.” He stated

In facilitation, technology can offer facilitators of tools to support their facilitation, such as learning and collaboration platforms, hosting video conferencing, online whiteboards, polling, surveys, and chats.

On the issue of chapters, Caleb said there is a need to make African chapters vibrant, adding that there is a lot to be done.

“We need to take stock of what we have achieved from the declarations and action plans we make during these conferences. Let us make our chapters vibrant and better so that we can grow other countries in the neighbourhood, develop each other, become the most vibrant African chapter, and set the tone for other chapters. “He said

Adding: “To build positive momentum teamwork and keep reaching higher strides, teamwork, resource sharing, and networking is essential.

In her opening remarks, the Regional Director Africa (IAF), Sophie Kange said the conference was an opportunity for the participants to reflect on the deep roots of facilitation within Africa.

She explained that Africa's traditional and Indigenous practices have long provided frameworks for dialogue, consensus-building, and community empowerment. These practices have not only shaped Africa's identity but also laid the foundation for contemporary facilitation methodologies.

Sophie, a trainer and transformational/business coach, stated that the landscape of facilitation is evolving rapidly, influenced by socio-political changes, technological advancements, and the pressing needs of our communities.

“Our discussions during this conference will delve into current trends and innovations that demonstrate the versatility of facilitation. Together, we will explore how our skills can address contemporary challenges, demonstrating our ability to inspire hope and foster change.”

She recognized the brains and innovation behind the Heart of African Facilitation, which has offered space for African facilitators to showcase their abilities, learn new skills, and make connections and relations with other great facilitators worldwide.

Furthermore, she also celebrated the facilitators who have stepped forward to facilitate diverse human and development processes in their different professions and philanthropies.

“Looking forward, we must envision a future where facilitation continues to play a pivotal role in driving transformation across Africa. Let us commit to harnessing these trends to enhance our practices and extend our reach. As we collaborate and share knowledge, we can collectively shape the future of facilitation, ensuring it remains relevant and impactful. - The world needs facilitators; we are lucky to be those.” Sophie said

Meanwhile, she stated that facilitation is not only a profession but a calling and called for inclusion, mentorship, and the involvement of young people in facilitation for continuity and sustainability purposes.

Kizito Otieno, a young facilitator from Kenya working with the *New Dawn*, revealed that young people in facilitation face a problem of mistrust, disrespect, and doubt from communities.

“In some spaces where, as young people, we go to facilitate, participants just look at us and don’t want to participate fully. They think we are young and have nothing important to say or contribute. We can change communities’ mindset towards young facilitators by improving our skills, mentoring, and being included in facilitation spaces by experienced facilitators. We shall not give up,” Kizito said

Dr. Aichi Kitalyi, a Development Facilitator Consultant from Tanzania, stated that there have been many trend changes in facilitation in Africa, from traditional methodologies to contemporary methods such as virtual facilitation.

She asked African facilitators if they were ready for the future. “The future of facilitation is virtual. As African facilitators, are you ready for this future?”

Kitalyi acknowledged that for African facilitators to fully utilise the opportunities presented by technological advancements such as virtual learning, there is a need to influence policy aimed at improving connectivity across the continent.

Members suggested vital actions necessary to improve and expand chapters in Africa.

Some of the suggested actions include:

- (a) strengthening the Africa chapter's leadership to connect with the global leadership.
- (b) Motivating volunteers for better commitment.
- (c) Organising annual global summits to bring together chapter members to collaborate and learn from one another.
- (d) Train chapter leaders to meaningfully run the chapters (development leadership pieces of training).
- (e) Establishing student facilitator clubs in institutions of learning, especially universities, to interest and groom more young people in facilitation.
- (f) Intentionally strengthen inclusivity by bringing in persons with disabilities and more youths, among others.

(g) Promotion of technological skills through pieces of training.

Regarding what the IAF members would like, they said programs should be pocket-friendly, adding that the courses are costly and out of reach for many of them.

They also noted that there is a need to increase publicity for AIF and its different chapters not only in Africa but globally. This will contribute to their growth and expansion and make it easier to influence policies.

Participants also said they want to see committed, active IAF members renew their membership.

In closing the conference, the Chairperson of the IAF Africa Conference 2024, Judith Bakwangira, appreciated the AIF leadership team in Uganda for successfully hosting the meeting. She thanked the IAF global leadership for allowing Uganda to host the event. She further thanked Sophie Kange for her leadership and guidance, which made the conference successful despite her absence.

Judith also appreciated the board representative, Sharda Naidoo, for her guidance, support, and presence at the conference and requested that she send the participants' appreciation to the global team. She appreciated the Uganda National NGO Forum for supporting and sending the participants.

She concluded her remarks by thanking everyone who participated and invested their time and resources in being part of the conference. She pledged Uganda chapters' commitment to continue working and supporting other chapters in Africa to transform facilitation on the continent and globally.

Conference attendees agreed that the next conference will be held in August 2025 in Dar es Salaam-Tanzania.