



IFLA Statement on Libraries and Development

Access to information is a fundamental human right that can break the cycle of poverty and support sustainable development. The library is the only place in many communities where people can access information that will help improve their education, develop new skills, find jobs, build businesses, make informed agricultural and health decisions, or gain insights into environmental issues. Their unique role makes libraries important development partners, both by providing access to information in all formats and by delivering services and programmes that meet the needs for information in a changing and increasingly complex society.

As the United Nations moves to establish a post-2015 framework to guide development worldwide, IFLA calls upon all stakeholders to recognise that libraries, in every part of the world, can be reliable mechanisms for underpinning the delivery of sustainable development programmes. IFLA affirms that:

Libraries provide opportunity for all

Libraries are found in all locations – in the countryside and in the city, on the campus and in the workplace. Libraries serve all people, regardless of their race, national or ethnic origin, gender or sexual preference, age, disability, religion, economic circumstances or political beliefs. Libraries support vulnerable and marginalised populations and help ensure that no person is denied basic economic opportunities and human rights.

Libraries empower people for their own self-development

Libraries underpin a society where people from any background can learn, create and innovate. Libraries support a culture of literacy and foster critical thinking and inquiry. Through libraries, people can harness the power of technology and the Internet to improve their lives and their communities. Libraries protect the rights of users to access information in a safe environment. Libraries are socially and culturally inclusive. They can help all people engage with the public institutions they need to access services, and can act as gateways to civic participation and new e-government services.

Libraries offer access to the world's knowledge

Libraries are an essential part of a critical infrastructure that supports education, jobs and community growth. They offer meaningful, convenient access to information in all its forms, whether it is manuscript, printed, audio-visual or digital. They can support formal, informal and lifelong learning, the preservation of folk memories, traditional and indigenous knowledge, and the national cultural and scientific heritage. When national information policies aim to improve telecommunications and provide high-speed broadband networks, libraries are natural partners for the provision of public access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and networked information resources.

Librarians provide expert guidance

Library staff are trained, trusted intermediaries dedicated to guiding people to the information they seek. Librarians provide training and support for the media and information literacies people need to better understand and participate in the information society. They are also cultural stewards, curating and providing access to cultural heritage and supporting the development of identity.

Libraries are part of a multistakeholder society

Libraries work effectively with many different stakeholder groups in varied situations. They deliver programmes and services alongside local and national governments, community groups, charities, funding organisations, and private and corporate enterprises. Librarians are agile actors who are able to work alongside others in governments, civil society, business, academia and the technical community to help deliver policy goals.

Libraries must be recognised in development policy frameworks

As libraries have a natural role in providing access to the information content and networked services that underpin sustainable development, policymakers should encourage the strengthening and provision of libraries and utilise the skills of librarians and other information workers to help solve development problems at community levels.

IFLA therefore urges policymakers and development practitioners to leverage these powerful existing resources and ensure that any post 2015 development framework:

- Recognises the role of access to information as a fundamental element supporting development
- Acknowledges the role of libraries and librarians as agents for development
- Encourages UN Member State support of the information frameworks underpinning development – providing networks, information and human resources – such as libraries and other public interest bodies

Approved by the IFLA Governing Board in Singapore, August 16th 2013