

IFLA is the global organisation for libraries and library associations, bringing together members from more than 150 countries worldwide. We welcome the opportunity to offer insights on the role development plays in supporting and promoting human rights, drawing on the experiences and insights from the global library field.

1. Please share your views on the contribution of development in promoting and protecting human rights, including its context, concept, specific aspects and means of implementation.

One of the key elements of development, which helps support and enable a broad range of development goals and human rights, is meaningful and universal access to information. This is recognized in the 2030 Agenda through the inclusion of public access to information in SDG 16.10.

This includes legal and policy frameworks that enable people to access information held by public authorities, which is an enabler of other dimensions of sustainable development – e.g. as highlighted in the Lyon Declaration on Access to Information and Development.¹ It helps monitor progress on SDGs, ensure communities’ access to publicly relevant information in such areas as water, sanitation, environment, healthcare and more.²

However, it also includes access to information in a wider sense, as encompassing the flow of and access to information of all types and from all sources - an interpretation which is fundamentally linked to freedom of expression.³ Access to information is therefore also reflected in other SDGs – e.g. “access to information and communications technology” (9.C), “access to sexual and reproductive health care, information and education” (3.7);⁴ “timely access to market information” (2.C), “relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature” (12.8), and others.⁵ As such, success in delivering access to information as an element of development is recognized as contributing to wider rights also encompassed in the SDGs, including economic, social and cultural rights including gender equality, health and education, as well as political and civil rights, as this submission will highlight.

Furthermore, it is helpful to consider the attributes and dimensions of *meaningful* access to information. This goes beyond the practical possibility to get online. Development and Access to Information (DA2I), a joint project between IFLA and the Technology & Social Change Group at the University of Washington Information School (TASCHA) highlights several key aspects and indicators of access to information that drives development - from connectivity infrastructure to the legal and policy environment that allows people to use and access information, to gender inequalities in ICT skills and use.⁶

Key elements of meaningful access to information includes access to specific types of content – for example, UNESCO has pointed out that at least 10 of the SDGs require constant scientific input and it is therefore crucial to ensure that these outputs can be disseminated to intended stakeholders.⁷

Skills that help people navigate, access and use information in today’s complex information environment can be highlighted as another aspect of meaningful access to information. For example, the 2019 publication “Understanding Media and Information Literacy (MIL) in the

¹ <https://www.lyondeclaration.org/>

² <https://www.article19.org/resources/access-to-information-is-critical-to-achieving-sdgs/>; <https://www.article19.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Open-Development-Access-to-Information-and-the-SDGs-2017.pdf>

³ <https://www.un.org/en/observances/press-freedom-day/background>

⁴ See e.g. <https://media4democracy.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/M4D-Ati-Practical-Guide-web-complet.pdf>

⁵ <https://da2i.ifla.org/wp-content/uploads/da2i-2017-introduction.pdf>

⁶ <https://da2i.ifla.org/da2i-dashboards/>

⁷ <http://www.unesco.org/new/en/communication-and-information/access-to-knowledge/open-access-to-scientific-information/>

Digital Age” discusses the link between media and information literacy and the rights to freedom of expression and to seek, receive and impart information, as well it being one of the requirements for empowering active citizens in line with the capabilities-based approach to development followed in the Human Development Index.⁸

The latter begins to point to how meaningful access to information, as an important aspect of development, can relate to human rights. The answers below therefore focus on meaningful and universal access to information – and it can be of particular interest here as a dimension of development that helps support and enable a wide range of human rights.

1.1 Civil and political rights

Access to information is fundamentally related to freedom of expression and freedom to seek, receive and impart information. In particular, when understood as access to information held by public bodies, it helps enable transparency, accountability and participatory decision-making in policy and governance.⁹ A free and open press is an essential complement to this. This, in turn, can support people’s right to take part in government - as defined for example in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and reaffirmed in the Convention on Political and Civil Rights.

1.2. Economic, social and cultural rights

There are several areas where access to information is key to social, economic or cultural rights. One such area is the right to health. Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organisation, pointed out that “the right to health also means that everyone should be entitled to control their own health and body, including having access to sexual and reproductive information and services”.¹⁰ Access to information can also support the right to work – a 2019 report discusses that a lack of accurate and up-to-date information – i.e. from relevant stakeholders like employers and training institutions – can make it more difficult for workers, trainers and employers to make informed decisions.¹¹

Access to information and knowledge helps deliver on cultural rights. In 2009, the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights shared the view that the human right to participate in culture can be understood as comprising three dimensions – participation in, access to, and contribution to cultural life. Here, access refers to the right to understand and learn about own and others’ cultures, “through education and information”. Two of three key elements enabling this right are the availability of “cultural goods and services” and their accessibility – “effective and concrete opportunities for individuals and communities to enjoy culture”.¹² Notably, the publication highlights both positive and negative obligations to this right – not just of non-interference with cultural practices and access to goods and services, but also taking measures to support and facilitate these practices and access.

Access to specific types of information, content and materials also is key to delivering on the right to education. A 2007 UNESCO publications points out that “schools are not accessible unless they have adequate educational materials.”¹³ More broadly, Article 17 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child also highlights the importance of “access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health.”

As such, measures taken to improve meaningful access to information can support a wide range of rights, from education to health to participation in governance. Our response to question 3 focuses on concrete examples of such synergies, drawing on the global library field experiences.

⁸ https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/gmw2019_understanding_mil_ulla_carlsson.pdf

⁹ See e.g. https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/40736/4/S1600930_en.pdf

¹⁰ <https://www.who.int/news-room/commentaries/detail/health-is-a-fundamental-human-right>

¹¹ https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB10074.html

¹² <https://undocs.org/en/E/C.12/GC/21>

¹³ <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000154861>

2. How to ensure that development contributes to promoting and protecting human rights?

2.1 At the international level

One of the key dimensions of meaningful access to information is digital inclusion, which is why international cooperation to support effective connectivity – access, affordability, digital skills and relevant content – remains crucial. It is important to continue to foster a global exchange of good practices which can help bridge the persistent digital divide, especially seeing as the pace of growth of connectivity appears to be stagnating.

On the side of access to relevant content, it is also important to ensure that an enabling intellectual property regime - effective cross-border copyright frameworks and exceptions for libraries – facilitate equitable access to key materials, knowledge and information that help deliver on these human rights – e.g. digitisation of cultural heritage, access to educational materials, preservation of the historic record and so on.

The Marrakesh Treaty offers one model of an international mechanism that facilitates access to key content – for people with print disabilities to have access to accessible materials. Similarly, it has been pointed out that Open Educational Resources and copyright limitations and exceptions for education are particularly important and relevant in light of the education crisis in light of the COVID-19 pandemic because they lower licensing and cost barriers to all institutions.¹⁴

2.2. At the national level // 2.3 Through global and regional partnerships, civic space and engagement

At the national level, various measures can be taken to support digital inclusion and connectivity access affordability (including, for instance, making use of Universal Service Funds to support public internet access solutions); to support digital skills-building, and of course making use of existing flexibilities in copyright laws to enable access.

Such initiatives can also build impact by engaging with stakeholders who are in a position to support digital inclusion: the 2020 IFLA Library Pledge for Digital Inclusion, for example, encourages libraries to leverage their infrastructure, resources and competencies to support low or-no cost access to the internet and ICT, content, and digital skills-building.

3. Please share any concrete examples of best practices of contribution of development to the enjoyment of human rights

There are many examples of how the potential of libraries are leveraged to support access to information as a form of development and champion the human rights discussed above. Measures to broaden access to information (e.g. digital inclusion), by providing relevant content, training in the skills to find, access, navigate and use information, and establish policies that enable and support people to engage and make use of it, can all help deliver on these rights.

- Lithuania saw a series of projects and policy interventions that set up a large network of public internet access facilities in public libraries across the country. In a recent survey among internet users in Lithuanian libraries, 8 percent of the respondents said it helped them find a job.¹⁵
- In the UK, a Business & IP Centre National Network operating in libraries offering access to market research information and support, which helped support the creation of over 10000 businesses, over 7000 new jobs; notably, about 10% of people who made use of the service were unemployed or job searching at the moment when first turning for help, of which later 46% started running their own business and further 23% found employment.¹⁶

¹⁴ <https://creativecommons.org/2020/03/31/education-in-times-of-crisis-and-beyond-maximizing-copyright-flexibilities/>

¹⁵ <https://www.lnb.lt/en/news/5063-latest-survey-reveals-public-libraries-improve-the-quality-of-life-for-visitors>

¹⁶ <https://www.librariesconnected.org.uk/page/local-advocacy-libraries-essential-part-local-recovery>

In the field of health rights, measures to broaden access to information can be both helpful and in demand.

- A government-led initiative “Healthy Ireland At Your Library” engaged public libraries to provide access to reliable and free health/wellbeing information and support to communities.¹⁷ As part of the program, a wide range of health resources were made available in libraries – print and audio books and online resources; over 650 events (workshops, physical activities, talks, etc) took place across the country; and library staff took on the roles of offering users assistance and guidance on health information and resources.

The evaluation of the programme indicated that 90% survey respondents were (extremely, very or somewhat) likely to use the service again; that participants used a variety of resources and services and found the availability of multiple information sources and channels helpful.

Partnerships between stakeholders from different fields can also strengthen people’s access to health information to help deliver on their right to health.

- The Rural Education and Development (READ) Global initiative set up a network of rural health libraries in Nepal, Bhutan and India, with the support of local government. These offer information and safe spaces to learn about such key health topics as hygiene, reproductive health and nutrition.¹⁸

Numerous cultural and memory institutions and other stakeholders undertake digitisation projects that make it possible for more people to freely access valuable cultural and heritage materials easily online.

- Singapore National Library hosts large collections of digitised materials – e.g. BookSG and NewspaperSG platforms – that allow the public to access many heritage and cultural publications easily, including rare and special materials and materials in minority languages¹⁹, thereby delivering on the right to culture.

Digitisation initiatives offer unique opportunities for public engagement – equitable opportunities for participation, meaningful interaction and co-creation of culture. From Spain²⁰ to Australia²¹, there are examples of platforms offering people an opportunity to not just access but to transcribe, add metadata or otherwise help process digitised heritable materials.

More broadly, measures that help improve meaningful digital inclusion for the public – especially more vulnerable or underserved communities and social groups – can also help deliver on the human rights discussed above. For example, the 2018 Global Information Society Watch report focusing on community networks as a way of bringing more people online discusses the various impacts of several Community Network projects in different countries. These impacts included supporting education and learning, access to health services, or supporting business or employment.²²

In summary, steps to improve meaningful access to information – digital inclusion, skills training, library connectivity and equipment as well as copyright and other policy frameworks enabling these can help deliver on a range of human rights – from education to health to work and access to culture.

¹⁷ <https://www.slideshare.net/CILIPireland/healthy-ireland-at-your-library>

¹⁸ <https://da2i.ifla.org/wp-content/uploads/da2i-2017-full-report.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://www.nlb.gov.sg/WhoWeAre/AboutUs/AboutNLB.aspx>

²⁰ <http://library.ifla.org/2560/1/181-sanchez-en.pdf>

²¹ <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/tp/files/76878/SLNSW%20-%20Annual%20Report%202018-19.pdf>

²² https://www.apc.org/sites/default/files/2018_community_networks.pdf