IFLA – the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions – is the global organisation for libraries. With over 1300 members in 145 countries, it represents all library types, and works both to support excellence in service provision, and to advocate for libraries with external stakeholders.

Libraries, and in particular public libraries, have a particular role within local communities. While their formal status varies from being fully attached to local government to having extensive independence, they have a special role as a space that is public, but not as formal as other institutions such as schools or police stations.

As such, they can – either as a partner, or as a unique arm of local government – play a valuable role in delivering services that in turn allow for the protection of human rights and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The below response focuses in particular on items 2 and 3 in the letter of 13 December[1].

2) Effective methods to foster cooperation between local government and local stakeholders for the promotion and protection of human rights, including reference to local government programmes

There is strong awareness within the library field of the role of our institutions in defending and promoting human rights. While most attention usually falls on Article 19 of the Universal Declaration, and in particular the right to seek, impart and receive information (usually abbreviated to freedom of access to information), libraries are also closely engaged in delivering the right to education, to participation in cultural life, to participation in government, and to a private life.

Traditionally, libraries have very much been the arm of local government providing access to information (Article 19) on a democratic basis. They have served to fill in where the market will not serve people, in particular the young, families, students, and those with fewer resources. For the most part, libraries have embraced the internet, offering terminals and wifi to users either as their only or as a complementary way of getting online.

A second, and connected area of library activity is access to culture. In line with Article 27(1), libraries play an important role in ensuring universal access not only to literature, but also to other forms of media.

For example, many libraries run summer reading challenges, which provide the means – and the impetus – to give more children access to books and develop a love of reading. Libraries

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[1] OHCHR (2018): https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/LocalGvt/LetterNGOs_EN.pdf

can also provide a crucial platform for volunteers to support this kind of access, for children and youth[2] or for other vulnerable groups such as refugees[3].

In both cases, the recipe for success is to ensure the local library has the facilities, staff and support not only to introduce and maintain innovative services, but also the freedom to work with volunteers and third parties.

Libraries are also a means for delivering cooperation in support of **participation in governance** and **privacy** at the local level.

For example, and in relation to Article 21 of the Universal Declaration (the right to participate in government), Toronto Public Library hosts hackathons using local open data[4]. The library, as well as providing the impetus for the event, crucially also offered a venue where data scientists, developers, and citizens could get together in order to deliver this right.

Another good example comes from Medellín, Colombia, where libraries were the venue for an NGO (Makaia) to work with the city authorities in order to install pollution sensors. These provided a great source of open data, which citizens could then use (with training) in order to engage more strongly in decision-making about local environmental issues[5]. Further examples of libraries supporting civic engagement are available[6].

As for the right to a private life (Article 12 of the Universal Declaration), the potential of librarians, as information specialists, to help people look after their rights in a digital world is increasingly being realised.

In Newcastle, the city council employs a librarian centrally who works to build digital literacy among the population. She has focused in particular on ways of developing awareness of privacy issues, and helping people to take the steps necessary to protect their data. Working alongside NGO Open Rights Group (ORG), she has been able to organise a cryptoparty in the library, allowing ORG to reach a wider range of people[7].

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[2] IFLA (2018) *How Libraries Provide Safe Spaces for (All) Youth:*
https://www.ifla.org/files/assets/hq/topics/libraries-development/documents/how_libraries_provide_safe_spaces_to_all_youth.pdf
[3] IFLA (2018) *Sanctuary, Storehouse, Gateway, Bridge: Libraries and Refugees*
https://www.ifla.org/publications/node/59297
[4] Toronto Public Library (2016) *Open Data Hackathon: TOProsperity*
https://www.torontopubliclibrary.ca/hackathon/
[5] Makaia (2017) *Significant Experiences in Open Data*, https://makaia.org/significant-experiences-in-open-data/
[6] IFLA (2018) *Patrons and Citizens: Libraries Supporting Civic Engagement*,
https://blogs.ifla.org/lpa/2018/10/31/patrons-and-citizens-libraries-building-civic-engagement/
[7] Haydock, Alex (2016) *What we learned from hosting our cryptoparty*
https://medium.com/@alexhaydock/what-we-learned-from-hosting-our-cryptoparty-3950c9721f3e

In the United States, a good example comes from New York. After close work between Brooklyn Public Library and a range of academics (such as Data & Society) and activists (such as Mozilla), Brooklyn, Queens and New York Public Libraries are launching privacy training for around a thousand librarians across the city, who in turn will spread their knowledge and skills among citizens, enabling them better to realise their right to a private life[8].

In these cases, the method applied by local governments has been to make full use of the potential of libraries as places with a long history of working with information, as well as a natural focus on the community, in order to promote key human rights and give people the skills to realise them. In doing this, they have both delivered directly through libraries, and provided a platform for others to deliver. Much the same goes for the work of libraries in delivering the rights highlighted in the Convention on the Rights of the Child[9].

Finally, libraries are also active in promoting human rights. They can offer an important 'shop-window' for local governments and others. The 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in December 2018 offered an opportunity to highlight examples, for instance from Poland, Dubai and Turkey[10].

3) Ways in which local governments raise awareness about, and contribute to, the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the New Urban Agenda, including by ensuring participation of local stakeholders

While much more recent than the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 2030 Agenda has captured the attention of many in the library field. It has served as a powerful means of articulating the different ways that libraries, as branches of local government, improve lives. The International Federation of Library Associations itself has placed a particular focus on the Sustainable Development Goals, with many of those involved in its International Advocacy Programme working in the public library sector.

A major part of this programme has focused on awareness raising around the SDGs. This has focused not only on librarians themselves, but also on the communities they serve, through displays, discussions, and even SDG-themed furniture. Nearly 63 000 members of the public were reached in this way[11].

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[8] Caldwell-Stone, Deborah (2018) *Brooklyn, Queens and New York Public Libraries launch a new digital privacy initiative*, https://www.oif.ala.org/oif/?p=11782
[9] IFLA (2018) *From the Earliest Age: Libraries and the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, https://blogs.ifla.org/lpa/2018/11/20/from-the-earliest-age-libraries-and-the-convention-on-the-rights-of-the-child/
[10] IFLA (2018) *How libraries celebrate human rights around the world*, https://www.ifla.org/publications/node/91749
[11] IFLA (2018) *International Advocacy Programme Brochure*, https://www.ifla.org/publications/node/60849

In addition to awareness raising, there are many good examples of working through libraries (both as delivery agent and platform) allowing local governments to realise the SDGs.

A first example is the work libraries do to support literacy and skills (SDG4). As highlighted in our response to point 2, offer unique possibilities to help young people and vulnerable groups. They complement the work of schools in this respect, especially in the case of those who need more time or a different atmosphere to learn most effectively.
A good example comes from Stonehaven in Australia, a community with a large share of households made up of older people. Local libraries, working with the local government and a local school created the Gen Connect programme. This paired older and young people, so that the young could answer questions and share knowledge about use of technology with their seniors. This has received very positive feedback, and has seen older residents develop new skills and be able to make better use of the internet (an issue also highlighted under SDG17)[12].

Libraries can also make a major contribution to SDG3 (health). For example in Indonesia, state governments worked with the CocaCola Foundation to bring internet connectivity to libraries. Subsequent evaluation showed not only that a very high share of women used these facilities (the opposite of the situation with internet cafés, for example), but that they were more likely to seek out health information in order to keep themselves and their families well[13].

Elsewhere, it is increasingly accepted both that information is vital to public health, but that more needs to be done than simply make it available – the environment for accessing it, and support from skilled professionals – can make the difference[14].

As regards SDG 13, libraries can also be key places both to showcase examples of sustainability, and to promote education and understanding of climate change issues. Brooklyn Borough Council in the United States, for example, decided to make the new Greenpoint Public Library into an exemplar of new techniques, and co-located it with an environmental education centre[15]. 'Greening' exercises have taken place across the world, and have provided inspiration for users to change their own behaviours[16].

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[12] IFLA Library Map of the World (2018) *Connecting generations to build technology skills at the library*, https://librarymap.ifla.org/stories/Australia/CONNECTING-GENERATIONS-TO-BUILD-TECHNOLOGY-SKILLS-AT-THE-LIBRARY/125
[13] See the TASCHA Global Impact Study: https://tascha.uw.edu/projects/global-impact-study/
[14] Chaplin, Simon (2017) *A2I for Better Health*, in Garrido and Wyber (eds) (2017) *Development and Access to Information 2017*, https://da2i.ifla.org.
[15] See Brooklyn Borough Council: https://www.bklynlibrary.org/locations/greenpoint/reconstruct
[16] IFLA (2018) *Exemplars, Educators, Enablers – Libraries and Sustainability*, https://www.ifla.org/publications/node/81763

There are a wide range of other areas where working with libraries can help local governments to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals[17]. Nonetheless, the message from these examples is much the same as that underlined earlier – libraries have a unique potential to help local governments fulfil their ambitions – and their responsibilities. To do this, it is important to recognise their potential, and provide the support and freedom necessary to make this happen.

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[17] IFLA (2016) *Access and Opportunity for All: How libraries contribute to the 2030 Agenda*, https://www.ifla.org/publications/node/10546