

Closing the Information Gap in the Post-2015 Framework: Libraries as Champions of the Data Revolution

Access to information is a prerequisite for development across all sectors and at all levels. To safeguard the success of the post-2015 development agenda, the process must focus on ensuring that governments, civil society, communities, and individuals have the right to access information needed to make better decisions and solve problems. Within this process, intermediaries, such as libraries, play a central role in helping people locate, evaluate and use the information that best meets their needs.

Libraries and librarians have a history as trusted, community-based resources for supporting people's information needs. Public libraries are sustainable local institutions that can stimulate grassroots development by providing opportunities for community members to meet, learn, and research issues of their interest. Academic libraries sit at the heart of their campuses, and provide access to data and resources that help researchers, development practitioners, and policymakers make informed choices about project implementation and resource allocation. National libraries preserve this information for future generations, and ensure the cultural and scientific record is available for those who need to access it.

Access to Information and Sustainable Farming

In Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, a network of 12 Maarifa, or publicly accessible knowledge centers, annually reaches 1.5 million people in the most remote regions, serving as public libraries. These centers offer tools for people to improve their health, increase their incomes and better their lives. Access to information via this library network promotes sustainable family farming, stressing its capacity to address hunger, poverty, environmental degradation and climate change. The knowledge centers work with young people, farmers and extension workers to teach vital information and communication technology (ICT) skills, give them access to information and markets, and create youth employment opportunities. In weekday training programs, farmers are taught basic modern ICT skills including how to manage financial records and how to find market prices and connect with buyers of their produce.

Source: Beyond Access (2012.) How Public Libraries Contribute to Reaching the Millennium Development Goals? Report. Washington, DC.

Why are Librarians Key Partners in Development?

Information is a powerful tool for development that supports communities in a variety of ways: farmers learn improved agricultural techniques; community health workers access better data about local immunization rates; and start-up entrepreneurs find new markets and develop new services and products. Successful development initiatives must prioritize information needs in all communities as well as the services that help provide that information.

However, access alone is not sufficient: people need skills and services to effectively use information. Information intermediaries (such as librarians, community leaders, and media) are key to synthesizing and interpreting data into useful information. Research on the information needs of people living in poverty suggests that this population, and those in other underserved and marginalized populations, face problems in locating and using the right information for their own benefit.¹ Libraries around the world are powerful partners to help deliver services, including literacy and ICT skills training, that enable human development.

¹ UNDP. (2003) Practice Note: Access to Information. Oslo Governance Center, Oslo, Norway.

Librarians play an important role in helping curate local information and content such as traditional stories, local history, data, and maps. Libraries not only help in accessing information, but they also promote the development of local knowledge. For example, in Ukraine and other countries, libraries are serving as maker-spaces to provide community members with the necessary tools so they can create their own content and promote innovation.

There are more than **320,000 public libraries around the world**, with 73% of the world's total located in developing and transitioning countries. There are over **100,000 school libraries**, over **9000 university libraries**, and **tens of thousands more special and research libraries**. Librarians are experts with the power to be part of the data revolution; they understand the information needs of their user communities and create programs to meet these needs and boost local development. Librarians share their skills to help transform information into knowledge and help bridge the information gap.

Access to Information Saves Lives in Sub-Saharan Africa

650 million deaths in Africa are attributed to malaria, of these one-third of these are children. More than half of the children who die of malaria die within the first 48 hours. Fast and appropriate diagnosis and treatment of malaria is extremely important in reducing child mortality. According to the Multilateral Initiative on Malaria, 70% of the malaria cases that are treated at home are mismanaged and symptoms often go unnoticed or untreated. This is particularly worrisome since in sub-Saharan Africa up to 82% of all malaria episodes are treated outside of the formal health sector. Recent studies suggest that information and communication networks can substantially scale up the effectiveness of the existing resources for malaria prevention.

In preventing malaria, information may not have a direct impact similar to malaria drugs but it can certainly increase the effectiveness of the intervention strategies and resources indirectly. Timely information, immediate care and collective knowledge based treatment can be extremely important in reducing child mortality and achieving the millennium development goal.

Source: Marathe, A. & Mozumder, P. (2007.) "Role of Information and Communication Networks in Malaria Survival. Malaria Journal (6), pp.136

Libraries Improve Sustainable Access to Information and ICT

Libraries can help governments and people communicate, organize, assess and understand data that is critical to development. They do this by:

- Providing information on basic rights and entitlements, public services, environment, health, education, work opportunities, and public expenditure
- Identifying and focusing attention on the most relevant and pressing needs and problems of a population
- Using ICT infrastructure to speed up the delivery of services and provide access to crucial information at all levels, ensuring that development reaches all communities
- Organizing and providing access to crucial research data, and helping users visualize, share and re-use it
- Providing public forums and space for wider civil society participation and engagement in decision-making.

Powering Development with the Help of Libraries

Libraries are hubs for development. Libraries are not only focal points of information, but they are also places where community members can learn new skills. Some examples on how libraries and librarians are helping their communities in meeting development goals:

Table 1: Libraries Power Development

MDG	Initiative
Eradication of Extreme Poverty and Hunger	In Chile, the Toltén Public Library helps create new job opportunities for the Mapuche indigenous group. With the help of the program, community members have successfully launched their own tourism, agricultural, and craft businesses.
Achieving Universal Primary Education	In Kenya, librarians taught 120 school children from schools in the Kibera slum to use computers, helping them improve in key school subjects like English, mathematics and science.
Promoting Gender Equality	In Honduras, a library in Copán offers technology training and digital literacy programs to the girls and women in their community. The training improved school performance and is leading more girls to stay in school and seek educational opportunities.
Reducing Child Mortality	In Chile, Biblioredes, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Planning, libraries are working with local hospitals to spread awareness of methods to stimulate early childhood development.
Improving Maternal Health	In Ghana, the Northern Regional Library built health workers' and community ICT capacity, and sent over 3,000 phone text messages (SMS) to 94 expectant mothers with health information to support safe births and reminders about clinic and hospital visits.
Combating HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Diseases	In Kyrgyzstan, the Libraries Consortium's 'No to TB!' campaign reached thousands through 190 public libraries to support the government's initiative to combat tuberculosis.
Ensuring Environmental Sustainability	In Guyana, the Yupukari Public Library is working with the World Wildlife Fund and Conservation International to conduct community workshops on topics such as turtle preservation and prevention of deforestation.
Global Partnerships for Development	In Romania, Libraries are partnering with VISA Europe to deliver financial literacy training to more than 2,300 Romanians.

Libraries are also working on other development areas such as open government and –e-governance. In countries such as United States, Senegal, Sweden and Ukraine librarians are providing access to government services and are hosting in-person and virtual meetings with government officials.

What Libraries Want to see in the Post-2015 Development Agenda

Libraries take a leading role as partners in development, and should be seen by policymakers and implementers as essential partners in achieving the new sustainable development goals in 2015 and beyond. We believe that access to information is crucial for everyone, including those living in poverty. It empowers them to:

- exercise their political and socio-economic rights
- be economically active
- learn new skills
- hold their governments to account.

Access to information should be central to the post-2015 development agenda. Governments, the private sector, civil society and international institutions should make an international commitment to ensure that everyone has access to, understands, and is able to use and share the information that is necessary to promote sustainable development. Libraries stand ready to help realize this vision.

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