



How Libraries Support National Literacy Efforts

Workshop Report



**Hamburg, Germany
5 and 6 April 2016**

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A librarian from Medellin, Columbia conducts outreach reading activities for children

1 OVERVIEW

On 5 and 6 April 2016, twenty-eight participants, including representatives of public and community libraries and literacy stakeholders from the government and civil society sectors, convened at the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) in Hamburg, Germany, to discuss how public and community libraries can better support local and national literacy policies. The main goal of the meeting was to produce a set of recommendations for local, regional and national governments that will be incorporated into an upcoming UIL policy brief.

To provide participants with sufficient background knowledge, the workshop addressed the following topics:

- How libraries in different countries are currently addressing literacy challenges
- How government policies can be adapted to promote the inclusion and use of libraries
- How libraries can effectively mobilize communities around reading
- How countries can maximize existing literacy activities in libraries in order to reach their literacy goals

To devise draft recommendations, participants broke into the following groups:

- Policy and financing
- Training
- Engaging families and communities
- Evaluation and measurement
- Marginalized groups and multilingual issues

Each of these groups produced two to four statements which were consolidated into five general recommendations after the meeting.

2 WORKSHOP PROCEEDINGS

2.1 WORKSHOP OPENING

UIL Director Arne Carlsen welcomed participants to the workshop and asked them to consider how libraries can contribute to the transformation envisioned under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The world needs libraries, as they play an important role in creating literate environments, providing much-needed services to communities, and contributing to a better-informed society.

On behalf of the workshop co-organizer IREX, **Beyond Access Regional Director Ari Katz** highlighted the fact that the purpose of libraries is to provide people with access to information and literacy resources. But despite this mandate, libraries are not often involved in the development and implementation of policies tackling literacy challenges. This workshop was designed to address this gap and bring libraries into the conversation.

UIL Head of Documentation Lisa Krolak encouraged participants to think about literacy from a lifelong learning perspective. People at different ages and stages have different literacy levels and needs, and libraries should play a role in addressing the needs of everyone. Developing and sustaining literacy skills is a long and complex endeavour requiring strong commitment from parents, caregivers, teachers, librarians and society as a whole.

IFLA Board Member Ingrid Bon reminded participants that there are literacy problems in every country. Even in the Netherlands, one in ten adults faces challenges in reading. She highlighted four big opportunities for libraries:

1. *Involve men.* Studies have shown that the [impact of fathers reading with their children](#) is greater than that of mothers. So libraries need to focus on ensuring men come to the library with their children.
2. *Attract the reader.* Libraries are responsible for making reading appealing and enjoyable and need to ensure that books are easily accessible to all.
3. *Meet the needs of disadvantaged people.* Whether it's people with dyslexia or people facing other difficulties, libraries must be the place where everyone can find something to read that suits them.
4. *Let children experience the fun of sharing stories.* Libraries should make it easy for children to explore and experience pleasure in reading. People lose literacy skills if they are not constantly strengthened, so libraries must serve as a place where people associate fun with reading and want to come back for more.

Ms. Bon concluded by emphasizing that libraries must:

- Provide programmes and materials that support families with low literacy skills so that they discover fun in reading
- Are well-equipped and have active librarians
- Support teachers by providing them with good materials for the classroom
- Provide special collections of books at appropriate reading levels for both children and adults
- Provide training in twenty-first-century skills for children and adults

IFLA, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, is pleased that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes Goal 16.10 on access to information and Goal 4 on education and lifelong learning, both of which present clear roles for libraries.

On Day 1, three discussion sessions provided background for the development of policy recommendations scheduled for the following day.

2.2 DAY 1: BACKGROUND DISCUSSIONS

Session 1 - Libraries and literacy: What works?

This session explored the innovative ways in which libraries around the world are addressing literacy challenges in their communities.

In this session, there were brief presentations by:

- **Sanjana Shrestha, READ Nepal.** The community libraries of READ Nepal provide a literate environment where people can practise, enhance and retain their literacy and numeracy skills. They also provide many needs-based information services and outreach activities, such as livelihood training, answers to practical questions, and collecting and publishing local stories. Furthermore, they are a safe place for



Women engaged in literacy retention activities at a READ Nepal community library

- **Juan Pablo Hernandez Carvajal, Medellin, Colombia.** Medellin is faced with many challenges because of the city's history of drug cartels and paramilitaries. While 94% of the city's residents has basic literacy skills, many people do not have functional literacy skills. To meet this need, libraries offer reading programmes to parents and families in remote areas of the city, storytelling sessions for children and a venue for adults to read books and then discuss them with family and friends. The libraries serve on an inter-institutional committee (local government and civil society) on literacy.
- **Neemat Abdulrahim, Abuja City Library, Nigeria.** Libraries must catch kids at a young age (between 7 and 14) in order to foster their interest in libraries and make reading fun. The Abuja City Library provides summer reading programmes, theme days and story time to stimulate children's reading activity. They also offer excursions to educational sites in order to introduce library users to culture.
- **Melanie Ramirez, Children's Section, National Library of the Philippines.** Librarians conduct interactive storytelling sessions, in which two or more people tell a story. They host puppet shows, arts and crafts workshops and read-aloud sessions (which sometimes use Skype) and share their knowledge in workshops for teachers and facilitators. They also conduct outreach to children in the community who need help learning to read and write.
- **Gonzalo Oyarzun, National System of Public Libraries of Chile.** Librarians are often not trained. Partnerships and alliances are important for libraries, especially with

groups like indigenous populations living in remote places, who have trouble gaining sufficient literacy skills. Libraries provide access to computers and training in information retrieval skills and livelihood training.

- **Yalew Zekele, CODE Ethiopia.** CODE aims to create and support literate environments in rural areas. It develops and refurbishes community libraries, and it helps local governments implement literacy initiatives. Advocacy and promotion are crucial to focus attention on literacy and raise awareness of library services.



Reading at a CODE Ethiopia library

During the discussion, participants made the following points:

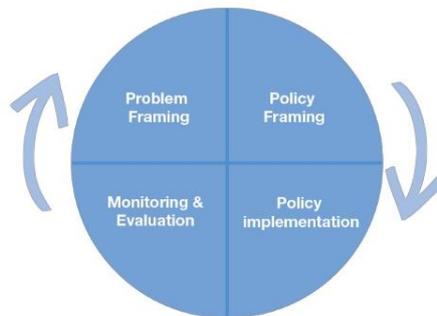
- Librarians must go beyond the walls of their libraries to provide services directly to community members.
- Librarians must be willing to talk to community members, listen to their needs and help them address and solve their problems.
- Librarians need to use transparent processes so as to gain the trust of people, especially in places where corruption is a serious problem.
- Libraries must not only be places for reading and writing, but also 'community development centres' and safe places for everyone.
- Libraries need to be places to have fun, enjoy and socialize.
- Libraries should identify, create and provide local content.
- Libraries must form partnerships with local government, ministries and NGOs in order to increase their participation in the policy-making process.
- Librarians, parents, family members and teachers need training in storytelling and reading aloud.
- Libraries need to work closely with schools, for example by equipping teachers with the skills to read a book with children and talk about it. Librarians and teachers can be trained together and collaborate in offering literacy activities. Teachers should be encouraged to promote library usage by encouraging students to read further at the library.
- Libraries need to cooperate with publishers, authors, booksellers and others who are interested in increasing literacy skills in the population.
- Libraries must market their services to generate interest and reach a broader audience. Young people can be engaged as marketers/facilitators, encouraging others to use the library's services. Community role models can be used as literacy ambassadors or as leaders in literacy campaigns.
- Librarians must learn from each other by visiting each other, exchanging knowledge and experience, and sharing good practices (including challenges and opportunities).

Some challenges noted by participants include:

- Organizing meetings of different stakeholders to agree on a literacy strategy
- Integrating indigenous knowledge into programmes
- Providing access for people with disabilities
- Training librarians to offer programmes that would produce relevant local content and reading materials
- Involving parents and children who do not already like to read

Session 2: Supportive Government Policies for Integrating Libraries into Literacy Efforts

This session explored how libraries could be better integrated into government policies and strategies promoting literacy for all. The policy cycle of problem framing, policy framing, policy implementation, and monitoring and evaluation served as the basis for the discussion on how libraries could enhance their role and engagement.



The discussion focused on ways that libraries could be integrated into and serve national literacy programmes. Commentary was provided by:

- **Mark Zammit and Marouska Falzon Cutajar, National Literacy Agency, Malta.** Malta aims to reduce the fragmentation of educational services and literacy programmes and foster a collaborative effort between government agencies, ministries and local councils, and schools and public libraries to raise public awareness of the importance of literacy acquisition. The [National Literacy Strategy for All in Malta and Gozo 2014-2019](#) calls for an increased role for libraries in providing literacy programmes and access to books outside of school. This strategy was realized through regular meetings among the partners. The 'Read with Me' programme conducts reading-for-fun sessions for children aged 0-3 and their caregivers in public libraries. The National Literacy Agency offers training for librarians to become reading session facilitators.
- **Iris de Graaf, Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, Netherlands and Ingrid Bon, IFLA.** The '[Count on Skills](#)' 2016-2018 programme is a coordinated effort from three ministries: Education & Cultural Services (which includes the department responsible for libraries), Health, Welfare & Sports, and Social Welfare and Employment. It provides milestones towards a fully literate country. The country's 2015 library law and a change in education law now makes libraries eligible for funding for literacy activities from municipalities. The effect of collaboration has been increased reading motivation, improved reading culture, and enhanced reading activities at schools.

- **Alhaji Jibrin Yusuf Paiko, National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (NMEC), Nigeria.** Nigeria started setting up libraries in Community Learning Centres (CLCs) in 2015. There is collaboration with publishers to produce literacy materials that encourage learning. There is the need to build learning environment with adequate facilities and equipment to attract youth and adults with insufficient literacy skills, out-of-school children and those learning in madrassas (Islamic schools) to participate in organized educational programmes. The government is planning to open new CLCs, in addition to those present in twenty of thirty-six states now.
- **Joy Ysaguirre, Belize National Library and Information Service (BNLIS).** The Belize National Literacy Strategy, presently in the planning stages, aims to ensure that all children acquire a strong reading foundation by age eight. Although the BNLIS has been the lead organization administering literacy development programmes for children and adults, they are not specifically represented in Belize's National Literacy Strategy. There is a need to more strategically harness all the efforts of governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, such as BNLIS, in the Strategy and in its literacy programmes to better collaborate and reach the goal of sustainable literacy for Belize. This will help address the needs of the youth and adult population (particularly vulnerable groups) and strengthen the whole book chain.
- **Maria Luiza Bueno, Communication Unit, Public Information and Publications, UNESCO Brasília Office.** Policies in Brazil are often not implemented or are not suitable to the context. For example, one policy states that only teachers, not librarians, may work in school libraries. Meanwhile, most of the country's 6000 public libraries are in urban areas, disconnected from schools. While reading materials are available in these libraries, they are often not in languages spoken in the community.

Discussion points included:

- National policies may exist, but countries face difficulties with implementation of policies and adjusting policies not suitable to the context (i.e. only teachers, not librarians, may be hired as school librarians).
- It is important to advocate for the inclusion of libraries in the framing and implementation of government literacy policies. There is a need for structural cooperation such as that between different ministries, in order for literacy policies to be effective.
- Libraries must collect data and stories to persuade politicians of the value of including libraries in literacy strategies. Monitoring of outputs and outcomes is important, such as the number of people attending activities and changes in reading/borrowing behaviour.
- Policies should include specifications on implementation and financial mechanisms.

Session 3: The Potential of Libraries in Mobilizing Communities to Support and Engage in Literacy

In the third discussion of the day, participants explored how libraries could serve as a hub to mobilize communities to support and engage in literacy. The discussion included commentary from:

- **Anny Gonzalez, Coordinación Educativa y Cultural Centroamericana (CECC/SICA), Costa Rica.** Libraries must address the needs of the community and be aware of issues in their communities, such as whether there are indigenous people who need to learn Spanish as a second language. They must collaborate with teachers and families, and provide materials that are culturally relevant. Libraries can reach out to the community with mobile libraries and book camps, or by opening homes for reading activities.
- **Sanjana Shrestha, READ Nepal.** Local library committees comprise esteemed and trustworthy leaders. Community engagement is necessary from the start of building a library, not only after its establishment. To promote community ownership and long-term sustainability, each and every household need to contribute, e.g. land, money or rice. Operational costs of the library are supported by connecting the library to an enterprise, engaging service providers and lining to the local community.
- **Catharina Rinzema, Reading & Writing Foundation, Belgium.** Libraries serve as places for non-formal and informal learning. Libraries supplement literacy services with social services because both are often needed by the same people. They also provide digital skills, which in turn, raise general literacy skills. It is often easier for people to admit they have problems with digital skills than with literacy.
- **Hollie Warren, Save the Children, UK.** Successful community engagement in reading starts with providing reading materials that people want to read and in formats that are convenient for people.
- **Rebecca Leege, World Vision, All Children Reading: A Grand Challenge for Development (ACR GCD).** Ensuring community engagement in the story development process allows for the production of reading materials that resonates with its readers. For example, ACR GCD is funding Creative Associates in Zambia to locally crowd-source stories. The stories are then levelled and sent out by SMS to homes to practice reading. The Lubuto Library Project is also providing 100 engaging digital literacy lessons in urban and rural community libraries in Zambia.
- **Lily Nyariki, Association for the Development of Education in Africa, Kenya.** It is important to engage publishers, because they need to address the lack of content relevant to Kenya and to produce books in local languages. One possibility for facilitating the local production of books is the new Bloom software sourced through ACR GCD's [Enabling Writers Prize Competition](#).

2.3 DAY 2: POLICY PLANNING

On Day 2, participants formed groups to discuss how to apply the concepts raised on Day 1 to policy recommendations for governments. Five areas were considered:

Topic	Discussion highlights/questions
<p><u>Policy and financing.</u> <i>Where do libraries fit into national policies and what are the ways to involve them in policy design? What mechanisms must be explored to make sure libraries are getting the resources they need to offer community literacy services?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● National coalitions and frameworks for literacy should include libraries and other literacy stakeholder organizations ● The value of libraries and their potential for supporting literacy should be recognized and adequately financed ● Holistic and integrated thinking is needed to determine where literacy fits into the education and sustainable development agenda ● Countries should have a national library infrastructure and should develop minimal quality standards for library services
<p><u>Training.</u> <i>What skills must library staff have in order to provide relevant literacy services?</i></p>	<p>For librarians to fulfil their potential to support literacy initiatives, they must be trained in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assessing community needs ● Understanding literacy challenges and potential services and activities to address these ● Knowing their local and national literacy policies ● Coordinating with partner organizations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Maintaining a friendly space where people, especially families, are comfortable ● Identifying and curating local content <p>Regular training for all library staff and volunteers is needed and can be provided through online education platforms.</p>
<p><u>Engaging families and communities.</u> <i>With whom must library systems engage in order to serve as a useful part of the literacy ecosystem? What are the ways they must reach those who can most benefit from their services?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Training for librarians should ensure they are capable of involving different generations simultaneously ● Physical access to books, complemented by online resources to facilitate access in remote areas. <p>The groups proposed one question for further investigation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How close do libraries need to be to their target populations in order to be convenient?
<p><u>Evaluation and measurement.</u> <i>How can we usefully measure the result of literacy activities at libraries?</i></p>	<p>There was an understanding that for general library services, it is difficult to evaluate and isolate the impact of library interventions on literacy levels. This is easier in the school environment due to their grading systems.</p> <p>In order to understand libraries' contribution to local and national literacy programmes and to have evidence-based literacy policies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Both quantitative and qualitative data are needed ● Libraries must do ongoing monitoring and evaluation of their literacy activities

Marginalized groups and multilingual issues.

How can countries mobilize their libraries to provide services to those who are typically left behind by literacy programmes?

Policies addressing the marginalized and speakers of minority languages will consider:

- Libraries can serve as safe and welcoming spaces
- Library resources can be used for community outreach
- Libraries can help facilitate sharing of space and resources within communities
- Librarians need training in how best to reach these groups



Group discussion at the UIL workshop

Following the individual discussions, facilitators consolidated the discussion points into recommendation statements, which were then voted on by the entire group. Participants prioritized the recommendations they felt most critical. The result was eleven recommendations, which were further distilled after the workshop into five statements for the policy brief.

The following eleven recommendations were agreed upon:

1. All library staff should be trained to create friendly space for families to feel comfortable spending time reading together.
2. Training for all library staff should help librarians identify, curate and support the creation of local content relevant to communities.
3. In order to offer useful services, training for all library staff should help them understand literacy challenges and solutions, the process of learning to read and national policies on literacy
4. Governments should provide frameworks for all literacy stakeholders, including libraries, on how to measure and evaluate their literacy contributions.
5. Governments should ensure librarians have the skills to connect literacy services with people's needs for socio-economic and sustainable development.

6. Governments should ensure that representatives of the library community are included, along with other public and private literacy stakeholders, in the policy dialogue for the development of a national literacy strategy.
7. Governments should assess population access to library services in order to provide appropriate reading spaces.
8. Governments should ensure that libraries have resources to provide a safe and welcoming space for marginalized groups to access literacy services.
9. Governments should ensure libraries have the resources and training to provide relevant literacy materials for minority language groups.
10. Governments should ensure that libraries collect quantitative and qualitative indicators, such as:
 - Increased reading motivation*
 - Number of books borrowed
 - Increased library use
 - Increased library use*
 - Number of library visits (in person and online)
 - Number of literacy activities in libraries
 - Satisfaction of participants
11. Governments should support regular training programmes for all library staff that provide ongoing skills development in modern topics, including community literacy services.

2.4 WORKSHOP CLOSING

Participants were informed that all important documents (e.g. presentations, detailed minutes of the workshop, flipchart notes, pictures) are available on [Google Drive](#).

A [literature review](#) on the topic of libraries and literacy for the period 2011-2015 shows many examples of the impact of literacy activities in libraries, e.g. promoting reading, creating literate environments, providing access to ICTs and supporting early literacy development.

Ideas for continued engagement on the workshop's themes were shared, including:

Follow-up ideas:

- IFLA shall coordinate with the UIL Library to systematically collect national literacy and reading plans/strategies.
- Interesting and innovative literacy practices in libraries shall be added to [Litbase](#), the UNESCO database on Effective Literacy and Numeracy Practices, managed by UIL. A compilation of effective library practices from LitBase is in the planning process.
- Participants are encouraged to apply for a UIL research scholarship, in order to do in-depth research on the topic of libraries and literacy.
- Establish an online forum among participants to share what has changed/improved.

- Maintain partnerships with each other to continue learning from each other (e.g. partnerships between READ Nepal and ADEA, and between CODE Ethiopia and NMEC).
- Use International Literacy Day (8 September) to promote and distribute the upcoming policy brief, which will be translated into French, Spanish and Arabic.
- The National Literacy Agency of Malta has offered to host a follow-up meeting/activity.

Possible venues for further discussion of libraries and literacy with a broader audience include:

- ADEA welcomes a partnership for the next [Triennale](#) (Marrakesh, 15-17 March 2017) which will be on the topic 'Revitalizing Education towards the 2030 Global Agenda and Africa's Agenda 2063'.
- The upcoming [CONFINTEA](#) mid-term review (International Conference on Adult Education) in Spring 2017 might include a space for further discussion.
- The [Global Alliance for Literacy](#), whose core group met for the first time on 23 May 2016 in Paris, should include a voice for libraries.

Topics for further investigation and exploration:

- How to advocate for the recommendations and/or how governments implemented the recommendations.
- How the use of technology benefits and supports the role of libraries in literacy development.
- Identifying measurement techniques for libraries and literacy, including impact assessment.
- Developing practical guidelines, toolkits, lists of inspiring examples, etc.

3 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the consensus recommendations, the organizing group further refined the recommendations to the five draft recommendations for policymakers below, which will be included in the upcoming policy brief.

1. Involve libraries in the policy dialogue surrounding literacy and ensure that libraries are an integral part of local and national literacy strategies and efforts.

Given libraries' unique mission, governments should ensure that representatives of the library community are included, along with other public and private literacy stakeholders, in the policy dialogue for the development and implementation of local and national literacy strategies and efforts.

2. Enable libraries to provide a literate environment for everyone to develop, enhance and sustain literacy skills within a lifelong learning perspective.

Governments should ensure that libraries are able to provide free access to reading materials, literacy activities and (online) information in a safe and friendly environment, where families and individuals can read and learn together. Libraries support literacy and learning needs from birth through senior years and are an ideal community space to facilitate intergenerational and family learning.

3. Ensure libraries are inclusive and have the knowledge and resources to provide relevant literacy materials in a welcoming space for marginalized, vulnerable and minority language groups.

Libraries should serve as a convenient hub where diverse groups can find relevant literacy materials and support. This includes materials, services and activities for people with different literacy levels and abilities. Where availability of materials in minority languages is limited, libraries should support the creation of local content relevant to the community.

4. Institutionalize professionalization and invest in ongoing training for all library staff.

Training should help library staff to be professionals with a service and needs-based approach to modern libraries, including an understanding of literacy challenges and solutions, the process of learning to read and write, and the extent of local and national policies on literacy. Training should also involve using ICTs to develop and sustain literacy skills and teaching digital skills.

5. Collect and analyze the data provided by libraries for better informed policy-making and coordination of the various literacy efforts of different stakeholders.

Libraries should measure and evaluate their literacy activities and services and share their findings with governments and the general public. Libraries need to understand and be able to communicate the impact of their literacy work, including how their literacy efforts can best support the achievement of local and national literacy goals.

4 Annex

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4.2 AGENDA

For the full text of the agenda please see <https://goo.gl/UNTe7o>

4.3 CONCEPT NOTE

For the full text of the concept note please see <https://goo.gl/KLxzkZ>