



International
Federation of
Library
Associations and Institutions

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UN Special Rapporteur in the Field of Cultural Rights
Call for Input: Cultural Rights and Sustainable Development

Response by: The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA)

Website: <https://www.ifla.org/>

What is your understanding of what “development” should aspire to?

Our federation affirms that, at the heart of sustainable development, is the aspiration to leave no person without the access to information, education, research and culture that they need to thrive. These elements are not only recognised human rights, and so legitimate ends in themselves, but are also essential to allowing people to learn, grow, cooperate, innovate, and take the best possible decisions for themselves and those around them. We believe that libraries are key institutions to help achieve this.

We echo the traditional definition of sustainable development as seeking to address the three pillars of sustainability – economic, social, and environmental sustainability – with the ultimate goal being to improve quality of life and secure better outcomes for all.

However, we stress that all aspects of development include a cultural dimension that, if ignored, impedes the ability to achieve sustainable development goals. Therefore, IFLA supports effort to recognise culture as the fourth pillar of sustainable development, and in doing so, mainstream culture across the global development agenda.

As a member of the Culture 2030 Goal (#culture2030goal) Campaign, we call for a stronger place for culture throughout the implementation of the current global development agenda (the UN 2030 Agenda), as well as the adoption of a distinct goal for culture in the post-2030 development agenda. Further, we call on governments to adopt a global agenda for culture – and approaches to implementation at all levels -which recognises and effectively integrates the cultural dimensions of development into development policies and strategies from the start.

Has your country developed and adopted a (sustainable) development strategy?

If so, please indicate what the main development model is, the aims that are communicated and monitored.

While we do not represent any particular Member State, we would encourage use of the reports prepared by the [Culture 2030 Goal campaign](#) analysing Voluntary National Reviews and Voluntary Local Reviews, which offer useful insights into approaches to SDG implementation, including strategies.

Who are the main stakeholders defining, driving and monitoring the (sustainable) development process? Please provide information on the various levels or sectors of stakeholders involved.

Policymakers at all levels are ultimately responsible for developing and implementing policy strategies that will further the sustainable development process. However, civil society, and notably cultural stakeholders, are important partners for helping to define, drive, and monitor the sustainable development process, improving outcomes and enabling citizen engagement in the process.

However, we find that too often, development processes are defined by just one or a sub-set of ministries, rather than including policy-makers (and stakeholders) from across the board. In particular, sustainable development is seen as a purely environmental concern – something that is of course important, but which risks neglecting to involve other actors with a crucial role, not least those in the cultural sector.

Libraries in particular are – or have the potential to be – key players in the sustainable development process. Specifically, IFLA stresses that libraries drive progress across the entire 2030 Agenda, contributing to improved outcomes in sustainable development by:

- Promoting universal literacy, including digital, media and information literacy and skills, with the support of dedicated staff;
- Closing gaps in access to information and helping government, civil society and business to understand local information needs better;
- Providing a network of delivery sites for government programmes and services;
- Advancing digital inclusion through access to ICT;
- Serving as the heart of the research and academic community;
- Preserving and providing access to the world's culture and heritage;
- Promoting and facilitating engagement in democratic processes, not least around the SDGs
- Complementing formal education by offering a platform or portal for lifelong learning
- Acting as sites for promoting behaviour change in populations, based on effective use of information

At the international level, IFLA coordinates with partner non-governmental and inter-governmental organisations to include the voice of civil society stakeholders in sustainable development policy processes, including directly to the UN. We work within networks to strengthen awareness of the cultural dimension of sustainable development, the Culture 2030 Goal (#culture2030goal) Campaign being one example.

This campaign is formed by several global cultural networks who are united to advocate for the role of culture in sustainable development. The Campaign is focused on the UN System, interacting with central organs like the UN General Assembly and Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), as well as agencies with relevant thematic mandates, including UNESCO, UNDP and UN-Habitat.

Similarly, IFLA sits on the international steering committee of the [Climate Heritage Network](#). This network mobilises a diverse range of stakeholders to highlight the arts, culture, and heritage as invaluable resources for supporting communities in achieving the ambitions of the Paris Agreement.

Within our organisation, IFLA works to empower the library community to build connections with national authorities and demonstrate how libraries can serve as partners to achieve local development needs.

Are there participatory processes influencing and informing the definition and evaluation of (sustainable) development policies? If so, how?

Performance is variable from country to country, with some performing far better than others in terms of providing meaningful channels and fora for ensuring that diverse voices – not least from libraries and the wider cultural community – are included in defining and evaluating sustainable development policies.

IFLA's own work has shown that sometimes governments are open and committed to engagement, while in others, SDG implementation is left to formalistic bodies which have little real impact.

We advocate for libraries to be recognised as essential partners for inclusive, sustainable development, through their work to provide meaningful access to information for all. Collecting and amplifying examples of library engagement in implementation of sustainable development adds to a body of evidence that can be drawn upon to influence the definition of development policy that recognises the potential of cultural stakeholders.

IFLA invites libraries to share stories on their measurable impact towards achieving the sustainable development goals with us through [SDG Stories](#), as part of IFLA's Library Map of the World.

Voluntary National Reviews (VNR) offer an opportunity for libraries to receive recognition for the work while growing cooperation with policymakers and seeking new commitments. Each year, IFLA produces [guides](#) to help library stakeholders engage in preparing these reviews.

Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) are a growing phenomenon, led by local and regional governments who are enthusiastic to assess, and demonstrate, how they are achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

We have found that Voluntary Local Reviews are leading the way in recognising culture as a pillar of sustainable development, and IFLA has seen a gently rising trend of the presence of libraries in these reports over time [[source](#)].

Greater encouragement for civil society stakeholders to engage with their local policymakers within the context of creating VLRs offers the potential for greater recognition of the key contributions from a variety of stakeholders towards achieving the 2030 Agenda.

In designing the strategy to achieve the SDGs, what consideration has been given to their cultural dimensions and to cultural rights? Which aspects have been considered?

Overall, we are concerned that insignificant attention has been paid in strategies to achieve the SDGs to cultural rights. The temptation remains to address policy goals in a purely sectoral way, and to skip evaluation of cultural factors and concerns in policy design, and cultural actors in their implementation. As a result, cultural rights are too often left behind, or treated only as an afterthought. Within the cultural policy community too, there is a risk of focusing too much inwards, and not on advocating effectively for the importance of culture to policy makers across government. To a large extent, we would argue, this is down the lack of adequate explicit focus in the 2030 Agenda and other key texts.

Within our field, we have worked to rectify this. Since the adoption of Agenda 2030, IFLA has advocated for libraries – and cultural actors and considerations in general – to be recognised as essential partners for inclusive, sustainable development, through their work to provide meaningful access to information for all.

We recognise that universal access to information is essential for upholding cultural rights, and this has increasingly featured as an aspect of [IFLA's work in sustainable development](#).

The close integration of cultural rights and library issues has taken a greater focus in IFLA's advocacy efforts. In this, we have endeavored to empower library professionals to embrace their role as human rights – and cultural rights – defenders.

This theme touches many areas of IFLA's work, as libraries defend cultural rights by:

- 1) Ensuring the safeguarding of the memory of the world in all its diversity: respecting the will and interests of originators.
- 2) Enabling engagement with culture and promoting freedom of creation and expression for all. Libraries are key parts of the cultural infrastructure, open for all, and can create the space and spark needed for new ideas and expression to emerge
- 3) Providing a space and support for inter-cultural dialogue and understanding: libraries draw on their collections, as well as the expertise and dedication of their staff, to offer unique opportunities for exploration, exchange, and open dialogue.

Actions within each of these areas help to bolster the understanding of culture as essential for a rights-based approach to sustainable development.

For a recent example, IFLA has been involving libraries in engaging further with cultural rights in the preparatory process of the upcoming UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies and Sustainable Development, Mondiacult 2022.

IFLA's ResiliArt x Mondiacult event, titled [Libraries Enabling Inclusive and Meaningful Access to Culture](#), added a library perspective to a worldwide discussion on culture's role in tackling global challenges.

Within this event, IFLA brought together a diverse panel of experts to discuss ways in which libraries enable inclusive and meaningful access to culture. They shared ideas for initiatives or policies at the local, national, international level(s) that might be needed for libraries to enable their community's participation in culture more effectively.

The outputs of this event are summarized in this [report](#), see Annex A.

How was the planning, implementation and monitoring of the strategy adapted to the cultural values, world views, practices and identities of the concerned persons? How was respect for diversity integrated in the process?

We have seen positive examples, in particular at the local level, of decision-makers looking to reflect, celebrate, and build on culture as an asset for development, and indeed a determinant of policy effectiveness. These authorities have recognised that real-world change depends on changes in attitudes and behaviours which are strongly associated with culture.

Concerning our work, respect for diversity is an essential aspect of IFLA's activities. With our membership base spanning nearly 150 countries in all regions of the world, we are the most international library organisation in the world.

International and intercultural groups of professionals make up each of IFLA's specialized committees, which address key issues relating to librarianship, and intersecting with cultural rights and sustainable development.

For an example of how this work also impacts on issues of sustainable development, IFLA's Indigenous Matters Section will focus [upcoming actions](#) on engaging with the UNESCO Decade of Indigenous Languages. Their work will highlight the important intersections between libraries and access to knowledge, education, culture, and language – all of which is aligned with rights-based sustainable development.

Have international development and financial agencies taken into account cultural rights in sustainable development initiatives?

We have seen welcome focus, in particular from UN Habitat and successive Presidents of the UN General Assembly, on the importance of culture, as well as from organisations such as the OECD and World Bank. However, there remain crucial questions about the models that some of these bodies pursue, and whether these lead to the paradigm shift that we need.

More broadly, however, culture is too often left to one side, or considered as the preserve of just one organisation, which poses risks for the integration of culture and cultural rights more effectively across the board.

We believe that crucial to progress here is a drive to give clearer recognition of the importance of culture alongside other policy areas. During deliberations in the lead-up to the adoption of Agenda 2030, IFLA was one of several global cultural networks to participate in a campaign titled, "[The Future We Want Includes Culture](#)". The goal of this campaign was to secure a dedicated goal for culture in the post-2015 development agenda, or to see culture meaningfully integrated across the sustainable development goals.

According to the [final report](#) of *The Future We Want Includes Culture* campaign, the 2030 Agenda took a "significant step forward with regard to the acknowledgement of the role of culture in development processes". This refers to the presence of culture in the preamble and in several targets.

However, the report, and those networks involved in the campaign, felt that Agenda 2030 falls short of fully understanding and affirming the important role of culture in sustainable development. Agenda 2030 fails to fully grasp that culture is a driver and an enabler of sustainable development, and as such has a role to play in each of the sustainable development goals.

The members of the campaign committed to continuing this work, and re-launched the campaign in 2019 under the name #culture2030goal.

An example of work that has since been undertaken to highlight the role that culture is playing (and should play) in the implementation of the SDGs is the report entitled "[Culture in the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda](#)" (2019).

This report notes the limited presence of culture in the VNRs and relevant ministerial and political declarations. There is a noted lack of recognition for culture's role in SDG16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) and SDG17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

As libraries have a role in achieving both SDG16 [[examples here](#)] and SDG17 [[examples here](#)], addressing this lack of recognition will be important moving forward.

In 2021, IFLA [reported](#) that a record 44% of VNRs reports published that year refer to libraries. In every world region with countries undertaking VNRs, there was at least one report with a reference to libraries. These references covered at least ten of the seventeen SDGs.

These included more broad references to culture as well, for example, through [Norway](#) setting out the role of libraries in allowing the country to 'enable all citizens to empower themselves through free access to information, cultural integration and social inclusion', [Spain](#) underlining the work of regional authorities to digitise heritage, and [Germany](#) citing the number of objects in the German Digital Library as an objective.

For IFLA, this suggests progress is being made at the national level to connect the impact that culture, and memory institutions specifically, have on achieving a broad range of development goals.

Where cultural resources and creative capacities were leveraged in achieving the SDGs, what were in your experience the results, successes, weaknesses, or lessons learned?

IFLA affirms that including a cultural dimension in development strategies leads to more effective and inclusive outcomes towards achieving the SDGs.

This affirmation is supported by a body of evidence collected from global libraries showing the impact of their efforts on addressing key development goals. IFLA's [SDG Stories](#) presents a collection of such stories, which have made measurable impact on each of the SDGs.

For example, Colombia has shared the [Mobile Public Libraries Project](#) (BPM), a social and cultural initiative rooted in the principle that culture has an enormous potential to reconstruct, shape and expand social capital, or the degree of trust existing among social actors and respect of civic rules.

Many more examples like this can be explored on the [Library Map of the World: SDG Stories](#).

One notable weakness that must be addressed in order to leave no one behind are the historic linkages between culture and marginalisation. We must ensure that culture is not used as a tool to perpetuate inequalities or marginalization.

Finally, a notable lesson learned from the COVID-19 pandemic is that culture brings inspiration, comfort and hope into our lives. It has further demonstrated the role of culture as an accelerator of development.

In 2020, IFLA, alongside partners from the Culture 2030 Goal Coalition, organised a side-event at the UN High-Level Political Forum exploring this theme.

In this context, HE Mr Jerobeam Shaanika, representing the President of the General Assembly, stressed: 'Let there be no mistake, incorporating culture into COVID-19 recovery plans can thus help accelerate 2030 Agenda implementation'.

He further noted the particular role of libraries: "Libraries... are prized repositories of knowledge, and experience, passed through generations, which strengthen humanity's capacity to overcome adversity and envisage a better future."

Such affirmations are important in accelerating the wider recognition of the role that culture plays in building back better following the pandemic, and in securing better outcomes for all.

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