Stichting IFLA Global Libraries
Report on Activities 2023

Background
Stichting IFLA Global Libraries Foundation (SIGL) is an independent public benefit foundation established in 2016. The objective of the foundation, which is exclusively charitable and educational, is to empower libraries to improve people’s lives and support growth of sustainable societies. SIGL was established as a Stichting (foundation) to manage the legacy funding from Bill and Melinda Gates Global Libraries Programme. The purpose is to build on over 10 years of work in the library field and “leave the library field strong.”

This report will focus on the activities undertaken by IFLA in support on the legacy initiatives throughout 2023.

Overview of phases and implementation
IFLA’s Legacy grant is shaped in three phases:

1. Discover and Launch (2017-2018)
As initially planned, this phase established a collective Global Vision (GV) among IFLA members and the library field and engaged IFLA’s Professional Units and members in synchronized planning to achieve the vision that will catalyse and promote change. It built a strong foundation for subsequent phases and prepared grounds for developing strong library metrics for better advocacy by launching the first Library Map of the World (LMW) and Development and Access to Information (DA2I) report.

2. Implement and Amplify (2018-2022)
This phase aims at implementing strategic and operational plans developed in phase one and aligns IFLA’s work to implement the Vision around an ongoing consultative cycle. It uses capacity building and knowledge sharing to build, connect and mobilize efforts of leaders at the national level, and begins the shift to strong regional leadership that will facilitate regional cooperation and progress on common challenges.

3. Grow and Thrive (2023-2026)
This phase will see IFLA and the library field reaching full capacity and operating with increased effectiveness and impact. All the work to build capacity and expertise will be in place and results will begin to be fully realized. Library leaders will be able to assess and communicate impact on local communities and at the national level to advocate for funding, resources and enabling policy environments. A cycle of strategic renewal and progression will be well-established that will ensure sustainability and lay the foundation for action beyond legacy.
The main activities to deliver started in the year 2017 and have continued over subsequent years:

1. Convene the library field to develop a global vision for the future of libraries that only a strong and connected library field can achieve. With the result of the Global Vision discussion (2017 and 2018), the IFLA Strategy was developed in an inclusive way with all members (2018-2019) and launched in August 2019. Since then we have both focused on the implementation of the Strategy, working with Members and sections alike, and reformed IFLA’s governance to match the ambition of the Strategy.

2. Conduct a membership survey to understand what members value in IFLA and what they hope for the future of IFLA (completed in 2018).

3. Create a plan to develop capacity to support regional operations and national development and learning (ongoing, linked to point 1).


5. Planning for Leader Mobilization (ongoing).

6. Launch campaigns to support the library field to adopt community engagement and outcome measurement (ongoing).

7. Modernise the IFLA website in order to ensure that it can act as an effective hub and support for the global library field (2018-2022, with ongoing changes).

8. Enable the updating of IFLA’s governance to ensure that it can better support the global library field into the future (2019-2022).

9. The restrictions on travel around the world meant that many projects were not possible in the first part of 2022. Nonetheless, 2022 was a year of renewed delivery against the priorities of the Foundation, thanks to renewed possibilities to travel and engage both with each other and external stakeholders in the second part of 2022.

Key highlights 2023 are as follows:

We have as an overall goal to see libraries delivering meaningful impact in support of the SDGs. We believe that to do this, we need to ensure the ongoing strength of the library field, and in particular to strengthen partnerships between libraries and other actors as defined in the Global Vision.

In 2023 we worked with IFLA on following projects to achieve our goal to strengthen the global library filed to improve people’s lives.
1. STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION
Under this overall theme SIGL has funded activities of bringing the library field together around an agenda for action.

SIGL funded two regional workshops organized by IFLA, in Nairobi (16-18 October 2023) and Brussels (21-23 November 2023). In each case, the workshop was followed by a meeting of the IFLA Regional Division Committee.

The structure used followed the model already deployed in Bangkok for the Asia-Oceania meeting in 2022, and emphasised the importance of planning, advocacy, support for emerging leaders, contributing to the Library Map of the World and impact assessment as key to ensuring the sustainability of libraries’ ability to deliver at all levels. A new element was a focus on partnerships, given the role of these in enabling libraries to deliver more for communities. As in 2022, the meeting included two days of workshops, and a half day of conferences with external partners in order both to apply advocacy skills and identify opportunities to make international engagement part of participants’ regular work.

In Nairobi, over 50 colleagues came together from 32 countries in the region, kindly hosted by the Kenya National Library Service in Nairobi, Kenya. The additional conference took place near the United Nations offices, and welcomed speakers from UN Habitat, the UN Environment Programme, UNESCO and the UN Economic Commission for Africa.

In Brussels, over 45 colleagues from 34 countries met at the Royal Library of Belgium in Brussels. The additional conference brought together representatives from Directorate Generals for Education and Culture, and Employment, as well as UNESCO and the Eurocities network.

2. REGIONAL CAPACITY
SIGL funded work in this area focuses on how IFLA can match the connections and strategic direction provided for the field at the global level with practical skills and structures at the regional level in order to deliver. It complements the regional workshops by providing opportunities to spread knowledge further as well as to strengthen the structures which allow for effective regional action and organisation.

2.1. Regional Capacity Building Workshops
SIGL support in this area has made it possible to make the most of participation in other activities (such as UN meetings and others) in order to hold additional meetings which bring together local librarians.

In particular, SIGL support in this area allowed for a workshop to be held with the Niger Library Association (in the margins of the African Regional SDG Forum), sharing knowledge and skills about the SDGs and advocacy in general, including with the support of SIGL Board Member Victoria Okojie. This was also an opportunity to meet with two ministries and underline messages that echoed those made by the national library field.

SIGL support also made it possible to take advantage of the African Youth SDGs Forum in Lusaka, Zambia, to provide a workshop focused again on the SDGs and how to use these as a
means of engaging with decision-makers, as well as wider lessons in library leadership. Over 50 library students and future leaders participated in the event, providing positive feedback.

2.2. Regional Council Workshop
Key to improve the work in the regions was the in-person IFLA Regional Council meeting made possible through SIGL’s support. This took place over two days, back-to-back with the IFLA Governing Board, and provided space and time to look at key questions around supporting emerging leaders, action on the SDGs and the UN in general, how best to respond to professional priorities at the regional level, communication, and a wider approach to building the strength and sustainability of regional library fields. In order to maximise synergies, IFLA’s Regional Offices and Language Centres also took part actively in the second day of the meeting.

2.3. Regional Division Workshops
SIGL funding enabled IFLA to organise three in-person Regional Division Committee meetings, respectively for our Sub-Saharan African (18-19 October 2023), Middle East and North Africa (5-6 November 2023) and Europe (23-24 November 2023) Regional Division Committees. In the case of Sub-Saharan Africa and Europe, these were deliberately timed to follow the respective Regional Workshops, allowing the committee to draw directly on discussions in order to shape action plans. The choice of region was driven by when each region had previously had such a workshop.

2.4. Regional Offices Liaison
SIGL’s support over 2023 enabled active work with IFLA Regional Offices, which, in turn, were better able to provide key support for the library field within their regions.

Most significantly, this included an in-person meeting of IFLA Regional Offices and Language Centres in December, partly overlapping with the IFLA Regional Council meeting (see above). This meeting, building on the positive experience of 2022, offered an opportunity to discuss and develop ideas about how we build capacity most effectively in different regions.

In addition to the in-person meeting, SIGL support enabled Regional Offices to participate at the World Library and Information Congress, helping participants from their respective regions make the most of their engagement there, as well as to hold valuable regional events, such as the Latin America and Caribbean Regional Division Committee’s mid-term meeting in Puerto Rico. This provided a strong opportunity to support emerging leaders, and in particular to do more to engage colleagues in the Caribbean region.

Finally, we started to explore possibilities for regional projects, with a view to building up a portfolio of activities that can demonstrate the ability of libraries to deliver on a variety of development goals. SIGL supported one small project in Sub-Saharan Africa, engaging both the Regional Office and members of the Regional Division Committee, focused on developing advocacy teams around SDG engagement. This proved useful in promoting engagement with the SDGs, reflection about advocacy and how to talk about libraries’ place in society, and new connections with governments.

3. SDG ENGAGEMENT AND DA2I
Work in this area is intended to provide opportunities, connections and tools for the global library field to assert its role as an essential partner for development. We believe that the SDGs are uniquely useful, both for the processes that they create, and the thought-framework they provide for articulating libraries’ contribution in ways that make sense to funders, decision-makers and potential partners.

SIGL direct funding here focused on steps to enable the meaningful participation of librarians in UN meetings, both as a means of raising awareness of the practical contribution that libraries make to wider development goals, and in order to take advantage of the possibility that such meetings offer for access to decision makers.

Preparation for the year started already in late 2022 as IFLA launched the process of raising awareness of Voluntary National Reviews, and how and why to get involved. This offered a way of identifying which countries and volunteers were most engaged, and so most likely to realise the potential of participation in meetings.

The five regional sustainable development fora that took place between February and April offered a first opportunity for librarians to engage. Thanks to SIGL funding, it was possible for IFLA to attend each of these, and further more to organise side-events where we could discuss the relevance of library contributions with stakeholders.

This work then came together at the High-Level Political Forum, where SIGL funding made it possible to bring a delegation of nine librarians, to New York, with seven coming from Voluntary National Review countries, including at least one from each region for the first time.

At the HLPF, IFLA held a side-event focused on libraries and information integrity, through a partnership with the UN Library. This has proved a useful way of underlining the relevance of libraries on this agenda, and led to a report which we shared with the UN Under-Secretary General.

In terms of results, the most powerful one is that for the first time, over 50% of countries publishing Voluntary National Reviews mentioned libraries, up from a previous high of 41%. This is a significant result, and allows us to argue ever more convincingly about the place of libraries in development.

In addition, all participants at the High-Level Political Forum were able to engage closely with government representatives, with a number securing meetings with ministers when they returned home. Their participation also offered a valuable means of demonstrating the role of librains to others, with one outcome for example being an invitation to join the Partner2Connect initiative, and to start work on geolocating libraries and their level of internet access.

With SIGL funding IFLA also, as in 2022, have effectively been able to build the cadre of individuals able to engage in international meetings on behalf of libraries, as well as developing new contacts in Permanent Missions to the United Nations.
Through SIGL support, it was possible to bring the Chair of the IFLA Regional Council to New York at the SDG Summit Action Weekend in September 2023, where he participated in a side-event alongside Mexico, Argentina and Chile. Participation at the Summit also offered an opportunity to meet the Director General of the International Telecommunications Union and other contacts around digital inclusion, and speak at a further side event where we consolidated libraries’ relationship with the Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

In the closing months of 2023, IFLA also launched preparations for the 2024 Voluntary National Reviews, notably by creating a community for those involved on Basecamp and encouraging regional webinars.

**Impact Research (SDG Consultancy)**

Under this action, two pieces of work have been commissioned financed by SIGL, one focused on delivering an overview of where major funders (both development agencies and major private funders) in order to assess where they already have a track record of supporting libraries. The idea of this is to support library associations and others in identifying potential supporters for their work – for example if libraries in country A can point out that development funder X has already worked with libraries in country Y, this may strengthen their argument. This work is almost complete, with a dedicated webpage being prepared alongside tools to facilitate use. The work is being carried out by The Doyenne Project.

The second piece of work is a white paper looking at the role of libraries supporting education for sustainable development. The idea is to gather evidence that demonstrates libraries’ ability to contribute in this space, once again with a view to helping library associations and libraries to form connections with potential partners.

**4. IFLA ACADEMY AND LEADERS MOBILISATION**

This overall area includes work to identify and provide transformative opportunities to individuals, and in particular promising newer professionals who have the potential to become major leaders in the future. It complements work to build systems that deliver by bringing forward individuals who can lead these.

**5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND OUTCOME MEASUREMENT**

Work in this area focuses on building a culture in the field of understanding community needs, and developing plans that can be and are properly evaluated, both in order to maximise effectiveness, and to generate materials and examples for advocacy.