



INTERNATIONAL
AUTHORS FORUM

IFLA-IPA-IAF-RWF Joint Statement on Literacy and Reading For International Literacy Day

CALL TO ACTION:

UN Member States are now drawing up national sustainable development plans to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Yet it will be impossible to fully deliver the SDGs to low literate persons unless action is taken.

If we want the Sustainable Development Goals to realise universal literacy then we must use the huge network that libraries, authors and publishers have to offer!

We call for:

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), the International Publishers Association (IPA), the International Authors Forum (IAF) and the Reading & Writing Foundation (RWF) have a core mission in promoting reading and literacy. We call on UN member states to support the SDGs by implementing **coherent and appropriately resourced national comprehensive literacy strategies**, targeted at addressing persistent failures in literacy attainment and make use of all existing resources, including public libraries.

Why now?

The UN's new development framework has a vision for a world with universal literacy¹. SDG 4 calls for inclusive and equitable quality education and the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all. Target 4.6 specifically addresses youth and adult literacy and is to be applauded. The framework correctly recognises the link between education and sustainable development.

Yet for the new framework to succeed in its entirety, we must go further than achieving Goal 4. People must be able to access information relating to *all* the goals and targets. To achieve the SDGs it will be essential to ensure that everyone has access to, and is able to understand, use and share relevant information². It will be essential that everyone can read and write. A learning community is needed where libraries are the central node supporting literacy activities for everyone regardless of age, gender or level of education.

What needs to happen next?

Literacy allows the SDGs to be effective in the first place. Every human being should have access to books and literacy programmes by 2030. National sustainable development strategies should include a long-term plan for literacy programmes, for libraries and for local book writing and publishing. Rather than working top down, libraries, authors and publishers should be made central to these strategies to ensure that no one is left behind. **IFLA, IPA, IAF and RWF commit to support the achievement of Target 4.6, and will develop a strategy to ensure that libraries and publishers contribute to the development of, and are included in, national development sustainable plans to achieve change by 2030, if not before.**

¹ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>

² See the call recognized by the signatories of the Lyon Declaration, August 2014. Available from: <http://www.lyondeclaration.org/>

Why reading matters more than ever in tackling 21st century challenges

“Literacy is a bridge from misery to hope. It is a tool for daily life in modern society. It is a bulwark against poverty, and a building block of development, an essential complement to investments in roads, dams, clinics and factories. Literacy is a platform for democratization, and a vehicle for the promotion of cultural and national identity. Especially for girls and women, it is an agent of family health and nutrition. For everyone, everywhere, literacy is, along with education in general, a basic human right.... Literacy is, finally, the road to human progress and the means through which every man, woman and child can realize his or her full potential.” – Kofi Annan

Across the globe literacy attainment is low with a significant gender gap. In 2011, the adult illiterate population was estimated at 773.5 million, with 63.8% being women. In the same year 123.2 million youths were considered illiterate, 61.3% of which were girls³. Literacy is a problem for the most developed nations as much as in the developing world. Even across developed countries, an estimated 20% of adults lack the literacy skills they need to function fully in a modern society⁴. The economic, social and cultural impacts of low literacy are severe and can be traced across all areas of public life: for example, 50% of youths with a history of substance abuse have reading problems⁵.

Literacy — the ability to read (step 1) and to assimilate information (step 2) — is a basic skill everyone needs. Without it, most people will be condemned to live poorer, less fulfilled lives in a less cohesive and productive society. But with it, every other skill is attainable. And as the world grows ever more digitized and networked, it will become even more important that every citizen is given the skills that literacy affords so that they can find gainful employment, increase personal skills, take part in social activity and participate politically.

Being read to for at least 15 minutes a day during childhood promotes a growing engagement with reading, supports personal and social skills — and puts children as much as one year ahead of those who are not being read to.

All schools are crucial for literacy and early - and ongoing - intervention is key. But it takes a village to raise a child and a reader, and given the limitations of schools, access to a library (both at home and in the community) is a fundamental indicator of success. For adults, having access to a public library is crucial when they look for an accessible, trusted and safe place to improve the literacy skills they did not attain during their formal education.

³ UNESCO Institute for Statistics, *UIS Fact Sheet, Adult and Youth Literacy – September 2013, No. 26*. Available from: <http://www.uis.unesco.org/literacy/Documents/fs26-2013-literacy-en.pdf>

⁴ EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy, *Final Report, September 2012*, page 24. Available from : http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/school/doc/literacy-report_en.pdf

⁵ The Survey of Adult Skills is an international survey conducted in 33 countries as part of the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC). It measures the key cognitive and workplace skills needed for individuals to participate in society and for economies to prosper. Available from: <http://www.oecd.org/site/piaac/surveyofadultskills.htm> and see the Dutch report for 2012: http://www.piaac.nl/_images/user/20131008101818ecbo.13-180-PIAAC-Kernvaardigheden-voor-werk-en-leven-survey-2012.pdf

What libraries, authors and publishers can offer:

In every country around the world the infrastructure of public libraries exists: there are 320,000 public libraries worldwide of which 230,000 are in developing countries. The public library is a meeting place for everybody. Besides collections of reading materials in different formats they offer a community a place to meet and a place to learn, and they are open to everyone. They support and initiate projects and programs on reading promotion and media literacy for all ages. Public libraries are also linked to larger networks that connect schools and academic and research institutions, creating a deeper learning community to reinforce reader development.

Since the invention of the printing press, an estimated 150m different book titles have been published around the world, a number set to increase dramatically in the next decade through digital publishing. A healthy local publishing industry will publish 500 titles per million inhabitants, at least half of which should be from local authors.

Authors write in order for their works to be read. Worldwide, authors' very existence depends upon a literate population who can access their works, just as literacy is fostered through the books and information authors provide. To reach the most diverse audience, authors' works must have the opportunity to reach all communities including the marginal.

Many authors take an active role in ensuring their works are accessible to those who must overcome the greatest obstacles to learning to read and write, for example by working in schools, prisons, hospitals and local communities. It is essential for authors to have the support of skilled and sensitive publishers, as well as provision of appropriately resourced public libraries, to continue their fundamental role in inspiring the development of literacy skills by everybody.

Note for Editors: About the Signatories

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), the International Publishers Association (IPA), the International Authors Forum (IAF) and the Reading & Writing Foundation (RWF) support, defend and promote intellectual freedom. As defined in Article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and Article 13⁶ of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, we affirm that everyone has a fundamental right to access information, expressions of knowledge, creative thought and intellectual activity, and to express their views publicly – through any media and regardless of frontiers and disabilities.

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⁶ <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>