IGF Dynamic Coalitions & the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
♦ DC on Public Access in Libraries

Public access in libraries refers to the possibility to get online, for free, through a shared connection in a welcoming, non-commercial environment, with support and training on offer. This allows for meaningful access to information, which – in line with the rights-based approach to development promoted by the UN 2030 Agenda – empowers people to take better decisions for themselves and their communities. This, in turn, promotes economic, educational, and societal well-being.

Just as the SDGs are globally applicable, so too is public access. For the 50% of the world who remain offline, libraries are essential places to get online and access information on almost every topic from health and employment to education and farming techniques. In countries where people have computers and internet at home, libraries complement home access, by providing access to support and skills, and companionship. Comparatively minor investments in three key areas would further leverage libraries' contribution and enable the attainment of the SDGs:

Infrastructure: Connecting public libraries is a relatively low-cost, high-impact means of bringing the benefits of connectivity to communities. Libraries pre-exist, are known and trusted spaces in communities, have skilled staff and are already included in government information programmes. The investment by Universal Service Funds and broader government budgets dedicated to providing access to information would be limited to purchase, installation and maintenance of computers and connections.

Train the Trainers: ICT skills training for librarians: Librarians' mission is to help people access the information they need, and the internet has become the major source of information. With advanced ICT skills, public librarians could improve their information services and the training they provide in their communities. In 2016 public library computer and internet training in just three countries, Ghana, Kenya and Uganda, brought 43,000 more people online (EIFL Annual Report, 2016)

Programmes and services: Adequately supported libraries, with strong internet connections and skills, can also deliver services that provide an additional boost to SDG delivery, for example:

Digital skills - Public libraries are provide digital skills training for marginalized and at-risk communities They also support formal education institutions by providing more specific skills for example, coding, robotics, web-design, supporting basic education (SDG4), gender equality in use of technology (SDG5), and the use of technology to drive development (SDG 17.8)

Employment programmes – libraries offer entrepreneurship training, and support people in obtaining financial support to start their own businesses. They also help develop job-relevant skills, prepare CVs and find the right post for them (SDG 8, contributing to eliminating poverty (SDG 1) and fighting inequality (SDG 10). In areas such as agriculture, they support farmers access market information and agricultural extension services, as well as rural development grants (SDG 2)

Improved health and wellbeing – libraries are key partners for sharing public health information, both actively (through campaigns) and passively (by providing a safe place where people can search for health information freely) (SDG 3). This is particularly important for women, who may face difficulties accessing the Internet at home, or even with owning a device (SDG5).