CHALLENGING THE "JACKS OF ALL TRADES BUT MASTERS OF NONE" LIBRARIAN SYNDROME

ADVANCES IN LIBRARY ADMINISTRATION AND ORGANIZATION

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ADVANCES IN LIBRARY ADMINISTRATION AND ORGANIZATION VOLUME 39

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INTRODUCTION

This volume is of particular interest to me and is timely in its attention to the seemingly ever-changing role of libraries of all stripes. I am excited to be a part of a work that incorporates a variety of possibilities into one corpus that encourages us to reflect on what it means to be a library and how do we best accomplish that.

These chapters challenge the modern tradition of status-quo librarianship. Beyond not being your grandfather's or your mother's library, to many librarians, the roles suggested in the following chapters may make you think it isn't even your library. Some chapters are scans, others are deep-dives, covering primarily academic and public libraries, but with ideas that can be considered for school and special libraries.

For future reflection, if you agree that any or all of these roles are appropriate for your library, how do they relate to the modern interpretation of our primary purpose of providing access to information? If any of these roles resonate with you, but don't fit into the current interpretation of the library frame, what does that mean? Does it mean the new role doesn't belong? Do we need to look at the current frame from a new perspective? Or, do we need to create a new frame for what is a library?

This book can be a call to action on four levels. First, at the personal level, what can I learn and incorporate into my planning, actions, and thinking from these chapters? Second, at the institutional level, which of these align with our situation and how can we take advantage of the opportunities we have? Third, for library schools, how can we prepare librarians for these current and future roles in a way that creates appropriately resilient professionals with skillsets that can be adapted to our evolution? Finally, at the professional level, it is time for us to consider, phenomenologically, what a library is, why it exists, and then determine which roles are most appropriate for it?

I hope that, at a minimum, this volume makes you sit back, take a moment, and reflect on what roles librarians are masters of.

George J. Fowler Volume Editor University Librarian Old Dominion University This page intentionally left blank

"VITAL ASSETS": LIBRARIES AS PARTNERS IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Julie Biando Edwards

ABSTRACT

In 2015, the UN General Assembly introduced the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In 2014, in anticipation of the SDGs, the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) released the Lyon Declaration, asserting that the right to access information, and the skills to use it, is essential for development. Simply put, there can be no sustainable development without access to information. So, as the world looks toward sustainable development in the information age, what role should libraries play in meeting communities' needs? Sustainable development, whether on a local or global scale, requires that people have access to information in order to improve their abilities to make informed choices about their lives, livelihoods, and communities. Sustainable development is important for all communities, everywhere, and access to information is just one way libraries can contribute to development initiatives. Libraries, especially public libraries, provide not only traditional access to information but also engaged services and programs that are community centered. This chapter will explore the ways in which the profession at large is plugging into the SDGs, with a particular focus on the work that IFLA is doing to connect libraries to development. It will highlight a specific form of community development - Asset-Based Community Development, which focuses on using the strengths and capacities that already exist in communities of all sizes and economic statuses – as

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a theoretical and practical model to help librarians understand and leverage their own assets as they collaborate with their communities on building individual and community capacity. It will argue that an asset-based approach to integrating our services into the larger trend of sustainable community development can provide us with both direction for day-to-day engagement with our communities and an important way to reimagine our value.

Keywords: Libraries; public libraries; community development; sustainable development goals; asset based community development; UN 2030 Agenda

INTRODUCTION

In order to understand how libraries might contribute to sustainable development, we must first consider what sustainable development is and how it differs from what we might traditionally consider "development." In the seminal, *Our Common Future* (United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987) report on the environment and development, commonly known as the Brundtland Report, sustainable development is defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (p. 41). Nearly three decades later Green and Haines (2016) note that:

sustainability can be viewed as a concept, a method, or even a way of life. It allows communities to sort through development options and arrive at a strategy that takes into consideration the full range of economic, environmental, and social characteristics of a community. (p. 58)

Important in these definitions is the sense that sustainable development is not about development, *per se*, but about the present in light of the future. In this way, sustainable development as a concept, method, or way of life breaks down the binary between those communities and nations that are considered "developed" and those that are "developing." Because all communities and nations have at the heart of their self-interest a desire to survive into the future, sustainable development becomes essential for that survival and the responsibility of all communities and nations. Brundtland's look at sustainable development, now 30 years old, identified areas of development that blur the lines between developed and developing nations. Issues of population, economics, food security, fossil fuels, oceans, industry, and urban landscapes — to name just a few — are not bounded by the binary of who is "developed" and who is not. Sustainable development moves us firmly (but not fully) away from economics and into a more holistic view of the future. So-called "developed" nations have just as much a stake in the future as developing nations in this model.

Underlying, perhaps assumed, but sometimes overlooked is the role of information. As the world looks toward sustainable development in the information age, what role should libraries play in meeting their communities' needs? Sustainable development, whether on a local or global scale, requires that people have access to information in order to improve their abilities to make informed choices about their lives, livelihoods, and communities. Simply put, there can be no sustainable development without access to information.

THE LYON DECLARATION AND THE MOVE FROM THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS TO THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) recognized this and seized the opportunity to more closely and explicitly link information to sustainable development. In 2014, as the United Nations began the process of updating their Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) — a process that would eventually result in the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) — IFLA took the initiative to put access to information on the United Nations' agenda. They produced the Lyon Declaration, an "advocacy document that [would] be used to positively influence the content of the United Nations post-2015 development agenda." This document served as:

the basis of advocacy between the period September 2014 and September 2015. IFLA, in partnership with signatories, [organized] events and activities to raise the profile of the Declaration at national, regional and international levels, with the intention to ensure that access to information [was recognized] in the framework [...] launched by the United Nations at the end of 2015. (Lyon Declaration)

The Declaration itself, eventually signed by over 600 associations; national libraries and archives; public, academic, and special libraries; NGOs; and others, included its own interpretation of sustainable development:

Sustainable development seeks to ensure the long-term socio-economic prosperity and well-being of people everywhere. The ability of governments, parliamentarians, local authorities, local communities, civil society, the private sector and individuals to make **informed decisions** is essential to achieving it. (Lyon Declaration)

The Declaration further notes that:

a right to information [in the new SDGs] would be transformational. Access to information supports development by empowering people, especially marginalized (sic) people and those living in poverty. (Lyon Declaration)

The request of signatories was succinct:

We therefore call upon the Member States of the United Nations to make an international commitment to use the post-2015 development agenda to ensure that everyone has access to,

and is able to understand, use and share the information that is necessary to promote sustainable development and democratic societies. (Lyon Declaration)

According to IFLA:

after more than three years of negotiations and intense involvement from many stakeholders, including IFLA, the Member States of the United Nations agreed to a final version of the post-2015 Development Agenda – now known as the 2030 Agenda.

This agenda, released in 2016, declared that:

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), otherwise known as the Global Goals, are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity.

Comprised of 17 goals and related targets, the SDGs represented a significant expansion over the MDGs and included — as the name indicates — a distinct focus on how development was to be universally *sustainable* for all nations.

The advocacy of IFLA and other signatories seems to have paid off. SDG Goal 16 focuses on Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions and aims to "Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels." This goal makes explicit the linkage between information and sustainable development with the inclusion of a target that will "ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements." It was a victory for libraries, placing access to information as central to global sustainable development.

IFLA, LIBRARIES, AND THE SGDs

Stating that: "libraries are key institutions for achieving the Goals," IFLA wasted no time linking their initiatives to the SDGs. They focused much of their work, and continued advocacy, on detailing exactly how libraries can be "a development partner at all levels".

A series of documents and reports on libraries, development, and the United Nations is steadily growing on their website. These publications include toolkits, statements by IFLA standing committees on how their work advances sustainable development, and resources for taking action to promote libraries and their link to sustainable development at all levels. IFLA's recently released report on Development and Access to Information notes that:

if adequately supported in terms of connectivity, resources and legal frameworks, libraries can make a real contribution to development by providing access to information. At the global level, they are the backbone of innovation systems, supporting the research that allows for better decision making in governments and in international organizations. At the local level, they provide a safe, community-focused space for users to access and put information to work in a meaningful way. (IFLA, 2017, p. 8)

IFLA has clearly set the agenda for the international library community, and it makes sense for libraries to closely align their own initiatives and advocacy with the zeitgeist. But the idea of Global Goals can be overwhelming for libraries. How do local libraries — especially small public libraries, school libraries, and others without global pull and influence — advance information for sustainable development on the local level? As community-centered institutions first and foremost, libraries are responsible at the local level. This doesn't mean that they cannot be those essential partners for development — but that in working toward sustainable development and supporting such development at the local level through access to information, most libraries will find themselves in a position of having to scale down. Even as they link themselves to global initiatives they will be actually acting not on the global, but on the local level — something that libraries have always excelled at.

Sustainable development happens on the local level. Green and Haines (2016) point out that:

sustainability is relevant at the local level for several reasons. First, the local level is where people and the natural environment interact most often and directly. Second, local actions and strategies are frequently the most effective at addressing environmental, economic, and social problems. Third, individuals live in a particular place and can have an impact by altering how they consume and what they consume. (p. 61)

IFLA's global focus on information for sustainable development provides a strategic vision and direction for libraries of all types and sizes, and libraries would be smart to link IFLA's initiatives with their own local priorities and missions. In this way, they take local strategies and tie them to a global vision and agenda that depends on (and one could argue perhaps *relies* upon) local action.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the launch of the SGDs, librarians worldwide have considered the ways in which their institutions can advance the 2030 Agenda. Even before the launch, though, authors were concerned with the ways in which public libraries could contribute to the MDGs. Maret (2011) notes that the problem with linking libraries and the MDGs was "lack of integrating what we know, making the necessary linkages, identifying patterns, and acting on new knowledge," going on to argue that the best way to link public libraries with the MDGs was through thinking ecologically, or systems thinking, concluding that "the public library is powerfully situated in furthering human development within community" (p. 30). She argues strongly and convincingly that libraries and other community organizations and institutions must create connections with each other and with the MDGs. This is no less true six years later, as we consider our role in advancing the SDGs.

Much of the scholarship on libraries and sustainable development has come from IFLA, whose two most recent World Library and Information Congresses (WLIC) have focused at least in part on the connection between libraries and the SDGs. Papers delivered at the WLIC Columbus (United States) focused on the ways that national and academic libraries support the SDGs through cooperation, collaboration and partnerships across the globe (Dadzie, Martin-Yeboah, & Tachie-Donkor, 2016; Maepa & Marumo, 2016; Shin, 2016). Dadzie, Martin-Yeboah, and Tachie-Donkor in particular note that academic libraries' roles "in the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development is worth noting" (p. 3). Maepa and Marumo point out that the National Library of South Africa is taking the SGDs so seriously that they have "tweak[ed] [...] programmes (sic) and activities to ensure that they contribute meaningfully to the attainment of the SDGs" and that, where libraries can't be directly involved in advancing the SDGs, they should be providing information resources to those who can (p. 10). At the same WLIC, Garcia-Febo (2016) pointed out that our services at the local level can impact global goals, illustrating that libraries, associations, and other information organizations:

are working together to help develop innovative services that meet the changing needs of local communities and at the same time support sustainable development for the economies and societies of the world" and concluding that "our efforts can have a cascade effect going from impacting our local area to the city, the country, region and the world. (p. 2)

The 2017 WLIC in Wrocław (Poland) carried on the theme of aligning libraries with the SDGs. Ezeani, Ukwoma, Gana, Igwe, and Agunwamba (2017) explore the role that academic libraries must play in ensuring access to information and quality education for users with special needs, linking such access to the SGDs and providing a chart for evaluating services offered in line with SDG 4. Pinto and Ochôa (2017), in their study of public libraries in Portugal, assert that libraries are "development agents" (p. 2) and that there is a need to:

raise awareness of the role they can play in the next years [in order to] show proof of their contribution to UN 2030 Agenda and the SDGs by measuring and gathering [evidence] of their performance. (p. 8)

They also present a chart that serves as a framework for evaluating public libraries' contributions to the SDGs. Such tools are useful for libraries everywhere, as they consider how they can align services with the 2030 Agenda. Ferrari (2017), looking at the ways that the Brazilian Federation of Library Associations and Institutions is mapping library contributions to the SDGs, echoes the claims of Pinto and Ochôa, stating that "libraries are or should be strategic partners for the achievement of sustainable development goals" (p. 2).

Outside of IFLA, other researchers have looked at aligning libraries with the SGDs as well, focusing on the challenges and opportunities of such alignment and the importance of Information and Communication Technology in

development (Bertot, 2016; Ifijeh, Iwu-James, & Adebayo, 2016; Mkumbo, 2016). Garrido, Fellows, and Koepke (2017) directly link access to information to 11 of the 17 SDGs. Chowdhury and Koya (2017) look at the alignment of iSchool curricula with the SDGs and propose a framework for iSchool education and research to support the goals comprising four key areas: sustainable information systems and infrastructure; sustainable information practices; sustainable information policies and governance; and sustainable user education, training, and literacy. They conclude that "sustainability should be embedded in every aspect of data and information management teaching and research in iSchools and other university disciplines so that the graduates can make appropriate management, research, and professional contributions at the workplace in every business and industry towards achieving the SDGs" (pp. 2135–2136).

Taken collectively, research seems to indicate that a lot of what libraries are already doing does in fact align with the SDGs, but that librarians and information professionals need to find ways to better communicate and assess their contributions, as well as new ways to build partnerships and collaborations toward SDG achievement. The literature here covers academic, school, public, and national libraries; national library associations; and information schools. Tellingly, all of the research cited here comes from outside of North America, with the exception of Bertot, Garcia-Febo and Garrido, Fellows, and Koepke, who are writing from the United States. This seems to indicate that librarians in North America are slow to contribute to the literature on how our institutions can align with the SGDs to promote sustainable development, a phenomenon that seems to bear our Maret's (2011) argument that librarians in this region think that development issues are primarily someone else's concern. Given the global importance of the SDGs, though, there does seem to be a push to move the conversation about libraries advancing the SDGs into American librarianship. In 2017, the International Relations Round Table of the American Library Association hosted their preconference meeting around the subject of supporting the SDGs with open access initiatives – an excellent example of aligning the work that libraries have long been interested in and working on with larger global initiatives.

BORROWING FROM COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

One model for library involvement in sustainability at the local level borrows not from the library literature, but from community development literature. Green and Haines (2016) point out that:

community development has always had a diverse set of objectives: solving local problems [...] addressing inequalities of wealth and power [...] promoting democracy, and building a sense of community. (p. 1)

Librarians, especially public librarians and those interested in the intersection of libraries and social justice, will recognize many of the same interests and objectives. Public libraries have an interest in all of these areas, and in many ways (from summer reading and summer food programs, to English language learning classes, to voter registration assistance, to resume writing and job seeking help, to the collaborations with social workers in the library and so many more) have been working steadily and quietly in their communities on these issues for years. The Aspen Institute, in their report on the Renewed Vision of the Public Library asserted that the "library's new activities include [...] helping people solve local problems" (Garmer, 2014, p. 18). We don't call it community development, but it is an essential aspect of the work we do. And whatever we call it, access to information is at the root of each of the objectives named by Green and Haines (2016), for whom "local institutions [...] [are] key factors facilitating the sense of community" (p. 2). In their own work on the relationship of community development and sustainability they note that while "sustainability is often considered an outcome of community development [it should rather be] a guiding principle throughout the process of community development practice" (p. 10). Alreadyexisting institutions are keys: "community institutions, such as schools, hospitals, and libraries, are potentially important resources for community development" as "the creation or restructuring of local institutions helps to better serve residents" (pp. 15–18). Libraries, explicitly identified as important resources, can contribute to global initiatives best by focusing on sustainable development at the local level.

In an excellent piece on strategies to achieve the SDGs, Awortwi (2016) argues for the success of a decentralized approach. Pointing out that implementation flaws of the MDGs were often due to centralization, he argues that "decentralization and local governance should be considered a key 'strategic enabler' for implementing the SDGs" (p. 41). Writing mainly for countries where centralization is the norm, the model works naturally with the decentralized role of libraries and local communities in the United States. Public libraries already work in a decentralized model and can leverage this to achieve progress toward the SGDs on the local level, concentrating on those aspects of the 2030 Agenda that are most relevant for their local communities. Importantly, Awortwi advocates for a change in institutional orientation from a "service delivery to a development approach" (p. 58). This is of extreme importance for librarians, who easily understand our role within local service delivery but who must, in order to advance the SGDs and highlight the value of our institutions, think of what we do as development work. Awortwi's argument, that we should translate the post-2015 agenda in local strategies, is in line with Green and Haines and should put libraries in a position of confidence to approach local development concerns and initiatives.

Librarians themselves have recognized this, long before the current SGDs or even the MDGs. Kathleen de le Peña McCook, in her influential book on

community building A Place at the Table (2000) defined community development as an "area of focus [concerning] efforts to create and maintain positive neighborhood environments, including building and reconstructing housing, social services, and economic development" (p. 83). McCook argues that "libraries and their services fit very well into the schema of the national community building model" (p. 80) and, in the nearly two decades since A Place at the Table was published, libraries have indeed recognized and built upon their services in communities. Libraries have developed programs and services focused on sustainable housing and energy; community gardens and local seed libraries; people currently experiencing homelessness and community initiatives to address homelessness; resume writing, job training, and job placement; small business and enterprise incubation and development; and a variety of social services, including the recruitment of social workers and public health nurses into library space. Each and all of these are aspects of community development initiatives in which libraries have been involved and represent attempts to "make a meaningful connection between the work librarians do and the national movement to build community" (McCook, p. 80). Our work now is to look at sustainable development on the global scale and make meaningful connections on this larger scale.

ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND LIBRARIES

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD), as pioneered by Kretzmann and McKnight (1993), provides a way for libraries to link their work with sustainable development in a way that is local and intentional. ABCD is a theory and method of development that eschews a needs-based, deficiency approach in favor of building upon the skills and assets already existing in a community. ABCD maintains that individuals are experts in their own communities and are capable of leveraging their strengths for self-directed community change. It is a "grassroots model that builds on the assets, or skills and talents of local residents, associations, and organizations" (Edwards, Robinson, & Unger, 2013, p. 24).

As opposed to need-based models of development, which often focus on outside agents addressing deficiencies, ABCD focuses on building individual and community capital using the strengths and capacities that already exist in communities of all sizes and economic statuses. ABCD leverages community assets for localized, intentional development driven by community members, and its premise "is that all communities [...] possess strengths, assets and energies that can contribute to a self-sustained, improved quality of life" (Nel, 2015, p. 512). People become active in their own community development as citizens, rather

than clients (Mathie & Cunningham, 2002). From the start, Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) recognized that:

libraries are natural community centers that do much more than just lend books to interested readers [...] libraries can play an essential role in the process of community building and should be seen as vital assets that exist at the very heart of community life. (p. 191)

Librarians who have used asset-based methods note that such methods allow them to:

understand community identified information needs, determine existing community strengths and assets, and [...] understand the library's role in developing service and program responses." Ultimately this leads to "community based mobilization, empowerment, and sustainability. (Williment & Jones-Grant, 2012, p. 2)

What are our assets? On the most basic levels they are our physical spaces, our collections, and our staff. The Aspen Institute (Garmer, 2014) lists "content, human capital and expertise" as assets that libraries can draw upon "for community engagement [in such a way that] allows people to contribute their knowledge and expertise to those assets" (p. 18) and the Families and Work Institute (2015), focusing on children and families, lists six assets that "museums and libraries can use to promote executive life function skills:

- 1. Proven success and capacity to engage, inform families, and support them as their children's first teachers;
- 2. Programatic focus on early literacy and school readiness;
- 3. Use of play and inquiry-based approaches supported by rich collections and materials:
- 4. Leadership in the Science, Technology, Engineering, Math (including the Arts) STEM/STEAM field;
- 5. Innovation and universal access to digital technology and tools; and
- 6. Capacity and mission-driven development of diverse community partnerships (p. 7).

Broadening outward from here, it is important to note that many libraries have made it a priority to extend these assets to their communities at large, for example by making collections (including important and unique online collections) digitally available through ICTs. If libraries can leverage these assets in their communities, in partnership with other community organizations and with a focus on local and individual assets and capacity building, we can help promote and advance sustainable community development at the local level.

"To understand community sustainability [...] we need to discuss concepts of scale. The now familiar adage 'Think globally, act locally' addresses the idea of scale" (Green & Haines, 2016, p. 61). IFLA has made it clear that their focus is on libraries and support of the SDGs. Libraries on the local, community level might find it hard to imagine how they can make a global impact and should

instead think about how they can scale down global initiatives in order to scale up the impact of information for sustainable development. Their focus should be on making small local impacts, building on what works in the community and leveraging library assets in partnership with other community assets is a way forward on the local level.

Keeping scale in mind, though, libraries worldwide and of all sizes would be wise to explicitly link their work with the goals and initiatives of ILFA. As the international organization of library organizations, IFLA managed to secure a spot on the *global agenda* for access to information. This is both something for libraries to celebrate and to build upon. Linking the good work they are already doing in their communities with the global agenda is a smart way to demonstrate that libraries are indeed the vital asset Kretzmann and McKnight claimed they were nearly three decades ago.

There are many ways for libraries to do this and librarians looking for ideas on where to start will find examples from across the world available on IFLA's website. Library action and reorientation can happen in many ways:

- Consider linking your library's mission and vision statements to the SDGs.
 This global agenda will take us through 2030, so there is time to enshrine the connections between libraries and sustainable development in our own governing documents.
- Review your strategic plan are there places where you can make explicit the links between your goals and action items with the SDGs? Is there a way to rewrite your strategic plan so that it aligns with some of the SDGs most relevant in your communities? Maret (2011) argued that development goals should be "connected [...] to library planning [and] program development" (p. 36).
- Maret recommended looking at how we can "polish [...] outcomes based assessments" to align with the MDGs (2011, p. 39). The same can be done with the SDGs can your library link outcomes with the SGDs in your assessments?
- Get libraries and sustainable development on the agenda of your state and regional conferences. Organize sessions, workshops, or special issues of library newsletters or regional journals that focus on advancing the SDGs.
- Who in your community is working on a sustainable development issue? Seek them out and discuss ways to collaborate.
- How many people in your school or community know about the SDGs? A simple way to get people thinking about them is to print some of the graphics on the UN and IFLA websites and display them in your library. This is a great place to start, but not to stop!
- Consider your collection does it reflect the most important sustainable development needs and goals in your community? Pull relevant materials and display them.
- What does your space look like? Do you have meeting rooms you can offer for groups who are working on SDG issues? Are there ways in which you

- can make your library building more sustainable, forwarding the goals and serving as a project-example for your community?
- What is your community concentrating on? Gavin Woltjer, director of the Billings Public Library in Montana, approaches library initiatives and programing holistically each year the library concentrates on one major issue or theme medical and health literacy, financial literacy, cultural literacy, civic literacy, for example. The library takes a look at what the community concerns and needs are and develops all of its programming around that topic (Khan, 2017).
- Does your community not know what to concentrate on? Bring the SDGs to other community leaders, organizations, governing bodies, and educational and cultural institutions and see if you can create broad-based collaborative community partnerships that choose and work on one SDG a year.
- Let your staff lead. What interests and skills do to they bring to your library, and how do they align with the SDGs? Can you develop programing or partnerships with your staff leading the way?

Libraries have long been involved with leveraging their own assets to strengthen individual and community assets. Maret (2011) asserted that libraries can align with development goals as part of "focused service and programming" (p. 36) and that "through re-imagining data collection methods and community partnerships, librarians and information workers have an incredible opportunity to work with allies" in advancing development. Though focusing on the MDGs, these words are no less relevant today. Putting local community development work explicitly in line with the SDGs and IFLA's initiatives helps provide important context for our work and establishes us as vital assets in community development. An asset-based approach to integrating our services into the larger trend of sustainable community development can provide us with both direction for day-to-day engagement with our communities and an important way to reimagine our value.

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