

Policies and strategies of social responsibility in Central America: a proposal

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Abstract:

For the countries of Central America, the implementation of policies that strengthen social engagement is a challenge, but it is also an opportunity to develop societies that are more inclusive, equitable, just, healthy, protective of the environment, educated, informed, connected and more human. In this context, Central American Federation of Library Associations (FECEAB) is convinced that the libraries working collaboratively, with strategic allies of government, public and private companies, are able to contribute to the achievement of this vision of society, “ensuring public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements”.

This paper aims to be a base document and frame of reference for working on the issue of social responsibility in the Central American region and promoting the development of best practices among university, public and school libraries, as well as library associations. Therefore, it proposes four strategic lines of work, which derive from the international and national policies, agreements and development plans of the countries, framed in the SDGs. Finally, challenges and reflections are pointed out for libraries and librarians, like, they must know the international and national policies, agreements, laws, development plans in order to developing targets, strategies, policies and indicators that enable measurement of the impact of the objectives and actions developed.

Keywords: SDGs in libraries, FECEAB, Strategies and policies for libraries, Social responsibility, Central American libraries.

I. Introduction

Central America as a region is currently composed of seven countries: Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama, with an approximate area of 522,762 km². It is geographically located in the centre of the Americas, with an approximate population of 44,680,000 million inhabitants. In this demographic and geographic context, the countries share many similarities, including cultural, social, political and economic conditions.

Central America, like the rest of the countries in Latin America, is at a crossroads. The region can move towards identifying serious solutions to its socio-economic and environmental problems, or can continue to follow the trend of a crisis of poverty, inequality, lack of employment and violence. Nevertheless, the region has great potential in its natural resources, a business macroeconomy which has diversified and expanded, to some extent, in recent years, and human capital with significant capacities (CEPAL: LC / PUB.2018 / 19).

The concept of regional *integrationism* in Central America is almost two centuries old, but government policies and commitments are not always fulfilled; therefore, the execution of policies has been slow, there have not always been adequate processes, follow-through, or impact measures. Faced with this scenario, a Central American strategy must be defined to face the crisis of globalization through progress in equality and integration within the framework of Sustainable Development Goals (CEPAL, 2018).

In these processes, the value of information and knowledge management remain in the value chain, so that libraries and librarians have a relevant role in society.

The international and national policies of each country must support libraries, as institutions that contribute information resources to the government, and must support capable and competent librarians who will develop actions that contribute to improving the quality of education, provide free access to information, and promote communication, work and economic growth, the reduction of inequalities, and environmental management.

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II. Libraries, librarians and library associations in Central America

The libraries and librarians represented through the associations in each country, and integrated into the Central American Federation of Library Associations (FECEAB), recognize the importance of working in a collaborative and integrated manner, considering the social, political and economic similarities of our countries.

Among the relevant policies related to the work of libraries are:

- The 2030 Agenda: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- IFLA and UNESCO Declarations
- Bilateral and multilateral agreements and commitments that have been assumed by the governments of the region, the legislation and the national development plans of each country.
- These policies represent the umbrella for the development of actions and projects with academic, school and public libraries in Central America.

In this sense, document DA2I argues that ...

Libraries can be reliable mechanisms to support the implementation of sustainable development programs around the world. Libraries provide opportunities for all. Libraries strengthen people in their own development. Libraries provide access to global knowledge. Librarians offer expert advice. Libraries are part of a society with different participants and libraries must be recognized within the framework of development policies.

III. Policies and strategies

Strategies are derived from international and national policies, and from these strategies, socially responsible actions are developed to minimize negative impacts on society and maximize positive impacts.

For the countries of Central America, the implementation of policies that strengthen social engagement is a challenge, but it is also an opportunity to develop professional capacities for access to information services. As IFLA- DA2I (2019) states:

... the combination of features that libraries have, continues to prove itself. Their activities - access to information and the capacities applied to such access - can generate multiple dividends: greater individual autonomy, better decision-making and support for research and innovation. These characteristics probably make libraries accelerate development, according to the Mainstreaming, Acceleration and Policy Support initiative of the United Nations Development Program.

It is important to emphasize that, at present, not all librarians in Central America are familiar with international policies, or know how to use them to support library development. Nor can we ignore that "libraries and politics are inseparable ... and that they have always been a political project" (Vitzansky, 2009 cited by Meneses Tello, 2014).

In this regard, librarians are committed to taking advantage of the strengths of resources and services for the development of policies, through strategies that generate impactful actions that identify potential sponsors, trainers, technologists, etc.

IV. General objectives of the proposal.

1. To propose strategies for the development of best practices of social responsibility, derived from international and national policies.
2. To strengthen and empower librarians and libraries to promote projects aimed at compliance with the SDGs

3. To promote collaborative work in the library sector and establish strategic alliances with public and private organizations in each country and in the region.
4. To sensitize decision makers in government, industry, and educational and development institutions, in order to economically and technically support the development of projects of social engagement through libraries.
5. Proposed timeline:



[Collect information on libraries and institutions working on SDGs - Sept. 2019.
Obtain results - January 2020
Impact measurement for the project - June 2020]

V. Policies and strategies: Components of the Project

This document proposes to work with two policies and other related documents

1. 2030 Agenda of the United Nations Organization
2. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) linked to libraries, according to the Report on Development and Access to Information 2019 (DA2I)
3. National development plans of each country of Central America

Strategy 1: Assessment: Understanding the landscape

Policy: 2030 Agenda and national development plans.

Objectives:

- Analyse the application of international policies in national development plans and their impact on the libraries of each Central American country
- Analyse and follow up on the plans and initiatives of the countries whose libraries have already begun working with the 2030 agenda.

Target group: Libraries, librarians, library associations of Central America.

Expected results of the assessment:

- The initial assessment will determine to what extent the 2030 Agenda is present in the development plans of each country and in the national political agenda. Which SDGs are being applied most in the country? Which sectors are having the greatest impact?
- Evaluate the extent to which libraries are included in the countries' political plans and agendas.
- Identify impact studies of the SDGs that have been carried out in each country.

- Identify best practices in libraries that relate to the goals of the SDGs on education, access to information, environmental management, work, economic growth and reduction of inequalities, peace and justice.
- Evaluate information on the characteristics, strengths and weaknesses of libraries applying the SDGs.
- The assessment will be an instrument for strategic planning of the work of each association related to social responsibility and sustainability.
- It will be a tool to generate ideas, projects, and decision making.
- The assessment will be a tool for analysing the sustainability context of the SDGs for associations and their strategic plans.

Stages of the Assessment

- Development of the assessment with library associations
- Determination of indicators for diagnosis (SDGs)
- Methodology for the assessment
- Building instruments to collect information
- Analysis of results
- Communication of results at the national and regional levels

Evaluations and Lessons Learned

In March 2018, the Association of Librarians of El Salvador held a workshop about SDGs in libraries, where representatives of Central American library associations participated. This activity had a multiplier effect for the attendants. Workshops were subsequently held in each country to communicate information about the SDGs and national development plans.

This activity served as a starting point for actions in each Central American country. The Association of Librarians of El Salvador published a document that includes best practices carried out by each association in 2018 and 2019.

Strategy 2: Organized, we work better

Policy: International and national development policies and plans.

Objective: To determine lines of work and actions in conjunction with the social responsibility policies and the development plans of each country.

Target Group: Librarians, libraries, and related institutions.

Proposed actions:

Key actors in education and environment:

The library associations will identify the key actors to work on actions and projects with the SDGs. The Ministry of Education, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of the Environment, universities, elementary and secondary schools, non-profit civil organizations, educational foundations, private and public companies in each country.

Digital directory

A database will be created with the information of the institutions and contact information of the key actors. The database will be administered on a rotating basis by each country, in order to keep it available and updated.

Document Database

All documentation, legislation, development plans, action plans, and operational plans of the political agenda will be identified and collected, as well as treaties, manifestos, decrees, agreements, educational reforms, and national reading plans. These will serve as input for the development of projects, statistical analysis, and educational research.

The updated database will also provide data for the IFLA 'Library Map of the World' - <https://librarymap.ifla.org/>

The Central American Federation of Library Associations (FECEAB) should prepare a strategic work plan, from which lines should be derived to work on SDGs 4,5,8,10 and 16. Work will be defined by commissions, following the guidelines of the IFLA Strategic Plan, in accordance with the work plans of each association

Best practices of libraries will be compiled on an ongoing basis and shared with IFLA and through the websites and social media of IFLA and the library associations.

Evaluation: The processes and results of the planned actions will be evaluated.

Resources: FECEAB will look for sponsors for the projects of the region and each association will also do so locally. Projects will be developed for each line of work and presented to national and international sponsors.

Strategy 3: Contributing libraries: SDGs 4,5 and 8

Policy: Sustainable Development Goals and Indicators: SDGs 4,5 and 8

Objectives:

- To contribute to educational institutions, through high quality, open, inclusive and diverse information services and resources. Offer these resources and services to all educational levels, in urban and rural areas.
- Contribute to training professionals, future employees, and employers with values, skills and abilities, according to society's demands.

Target Group: Citizens, children, young people, teachers, researchers, librarians and educational institutions.

Proposed actions of each association:

- Establish agreements and cooperation with key actors and educational institutions at all levels, with the purpose of promoting the application of SDGs 4, 5 and 8 as institutional policy in each country. (Ministries of Education, Culture and universities).
- Promote and seek financial support for projects to strengthen libraries through Central American organizations such as CSUCA, SIECA, SICA, BCIE and others.

- Plan and develop workshops on the application of the SDGs in libraries, archives, museums, schools, schools.
- Involve education and library science students, librarians, association members, and volunteers in these activities.
- Develop proposals to strengthen library education, archival management and formal research in the region.
- Develop forums, conferences and workshops on the SDGs, aimed at universities, private and public companies that train professionals who will enter the labour market, with the support of experts from the United Nations and International Labour Organization in Central America.
- Strengthen and formulate of systematization and document digitalization projects for the preservation and conservation of archival information, in partnership with the National Memory of the World Committees, in each country.
- Analyse the legislative situation of academic, public and school libraries, and support the creation of laws, in the case of Central American countries that have obsolete or no legislation, or repealed laws.

Evaluation: Evaluate the processes and results of the actions planned according to the Strategic Plan of FECEAB.

Resources: FECEAB will look for sponsors for national and international projects and will seek strategic alliances.

Strategy 4: Libraries on the move: SDGs 10, 13 and 16

Policy: SDGs10, 13 and 16 and national development plans.

Objectives: Promote access to information and the right to connectivity throughout the Central American region, including in rural areas and among diverse multicultural groups.

Target Group: Citizens, children, young people, teacher, researchers, librarians and educational and environmental institutions.

Proposed actions:

- Establish agreements and sponsorships with mobile phone and Internet companies in Central America such as TIGO Y CLARO (the largest cell telephone companies, cable TV and Internet service providers in Central America) to provide connectivity services to school and public libraries in the countries.
- Identify key actors in environmental management and urbanization, mayors, foundations, non-profit organizations, universities and national, regional and international organizations, as collaborators and project supporters and providers of technical support for the realization of projects.
- Sign agreements with government entities and key actors to provide financial and technical support.
- Identify documents, legislation, manuals, and research on the environment, pollution, and clean energy to be accessed through the FECEAB portal.
- Analyse the extent of environmental education in elementary and secondary education programs.

- Propose workshops and conferences to promote the rational use of paper and plastics in schools and cities.
- Propose contingency plans, natural disaster responses, and other causes for libraries and archives.
- Plan and develop workshops on the rational use of paper and plastic for school, public librarians with support from key actors and volunteers

Transparency Portal/Digital Platform

The Federation will create a digital platform, with the purpose of having the documents, processes, progress and results of the actions, projects and programs that it develops, in the fulfilment of the actions, and indicators of the proposed SDGs.

The portal aims to be an observatory of the actions of the libraries of the region. It will also be a means of disclosure, and will serve as an observation tool in Central America.

The transparency portal/digital platform will serve as an instrument for seeking support for regional projects. The responsibility for updating the portal will be administered in a rotating manner among the member associations, every year.

IV. Challenges

Since the creation of the Federation of Library Associations of Central America, we have been convinced that together we are stronger and more listened to. Libraries and librarians are able to contribute to changing society, together with key actors as strategic allies. The participation of local and regional authorities leads to qualitative changes of greater impact (UNESCO, 1998).

Currently, international policies, development plans of local governments and IFLA guidelines offer significant opportunities for the library to strengthen their capacities and realize their social responsibilities within the community.

The challenges for librarians are great. Librarians must have deep knowledge of international and national policies, as well as the documents, agreements, and international commitments assumed and signed by our governmental authorities. This knowledge and experience guide the generation of proposals and projects and the ability to carry out actions. It is important to properly disclose the actions and positive results that are achieved and it is very important to evaluate actions, measure impacts, and prepare plans for improvement. And it is essential to work in an organized manner and with human warmth and values.

Now is the time to move toward promoting free access to information, which represents the provision of information for knowledge management; to promote inclusion and social cohesion, through more diverse and multicultural spaces; to contribute to the formation of lifelong learning, and recognize that the library is the school of the community.

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