'IFLA, sustainability and impact assessment'

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to talk briefly about IFLA's experiences with funders' evaluation requirements and the difficulties of finding an evaluation methodology that is appropriate for the type of international activities IFLA engages in.

Design/methodology/approach – This review is based on IFLA's decision to increase the emphasis on evaluating the impact of its activities, especially through the use of impact assessment. The method was used as a trial in 2009 to evaluate FAIFE's activities.

Findings – This paper discusses the need for success stories and best practice in IFLA's advocacy work, and suggests that impact assessment offers a way to show the real value of library work to key partners and stakeholders.

Originality/value – The paper presents an overview of current thinking and progress in IFLA.

As an international organisation dedicated to improving access to information through libraries, IFLA has a number of core activities in place to achieve this goal. The Action for Development through Libraries Programme (ALP), and the Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE) Committee are two such activities that have in recent years benefited from substantial funding from the Swedish International Development and Co-operation Agency (Sida). Through Sida's funding IFLA has been able to undertake training and education activities for librarians in all areas of librarianship – from cataloguing to internet access in libraries. Sida's funding for IFLA ended in December 2009. What do libraries and library organisations do when the money for activities runs out? How do they best persuade funders, potential funders and other stakeholders that the activities they carry out offer value for money, and have an impact beyond the numbers of people trained? How can libraries show exactly how important they are to their users and wider society? This paper talks briefly about IFLA's experiences with funders' evaluation requirements and the difficulties of finding an evaluation methodology that is appropriate for the type of international activities IFLA engages in. It discusses the need for success stories and best practice in IFLA's advocacy work, and suggests that impact assessment offers a way to show the real value of library work to key partners and stakeholders.

About the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA)

IFLA is the global voice of the library profession, with more than 1,600 members in 150 countries. IFLA represents the interests of more than 700,000 information workers worldwide, and has regional offices and language centres across the globe representing diverse cultural and library practices (IFLA, n.d.).

IFLA works to advocate for free access to information, to demonstrate the value of libraries, and to promote high standards in the profession. Training programmes are one of many ways that IFLA carries out this work. IFLA committees, such as the Committee on Copyright and Other Legal Matters (CLM) develop policy, which is implemented by the Action for Development through Libraries Programme (ALP) and the Committee on Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE) via workshops, training programmes, and guidelines.

IFLA currently provides training to librarians in a wide range of areas. These include policy-based workshops on IFLA manifestos, including the Internet Manifesto (IFLA/FAIFE, 2002), Manifesto on Transparency, Good Governance and Freedom from Corruption (IFLA/FAIFE, 2008a), and the IFLA/UNESCO Public Library Manifesto (IFLA/UNESCO, 1994). Another important training programme is Access to Information on HIV/AIDS through Libraries (IFLA/FAIFE, 2008b). IFLA uses a variety of training models, one model comprises a team of core trainers who provide cascade, or train-the-trainer, delivery in countries around the world that have

expressed a need for a particular training programme. IFLA's trainers are located worldwide and work on behalf of IFLA to deliver training to colleagues in their region.

IFLA has a large and diverse array of activities beyond these training programmes, from individual workshops in-country to setting standards for the whole profession. This gives IFLA an advantage in reaching library and information workers across the world. However, this can also make administering, reporting on, and evaluating its activities challenging.

Activities, funding and impact assessment

ALP and FAIFE received grant funding from the Swedish International Development and Co-operation Agency (Sida) from 2004-2009 to provide training in areas including professional development and human rights. Reporting on these activities has tended to be quantitative, which does not necessarily reflect the outcomes of the training after the programme. In 2008 IFLA Headquarters gained more capacity with the creation of the role of Senior Policy Advisor Role and an advocacy unit. As a result, IFLA decided to increase the emphasis on evaluating the impact of its activities. IFLA is now actively investigating the use of impact assessment. The method was used as a trial in 2009 to evaluate FAIFE's activities.

Impact assessment is a process that aims to identify the consequences of an action (Markless & Streatfield, 2008). Actions can take many forms, but in IFLA's case this may include training programmes, new services, or the introduction of a new policy. For IFLA, Impact assessment offers the means to:

- Evaluate our diverse activities using methods that work in different situations, countries and cultures.
- Show value to funders, potential funders and other stakeholders.
- Complement some of the work of IFLA's strategic partners, some of whom are already using this methodology. For example, the Global Libraries programme of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation uses impact assessment to measure their programmes.
- Show the importance of libraries to users and society: moving beyond statistics about door count and circulation to success stories and case studies that vividly illustrates IFLA's work.
- Demonstrate sustainability: libraries are worth funding. Impact evidence provides the basis for better advocacy for libraries.

Impact Assessment will enable IFLA to set indicators and benchmarks more closely tailored to programme objectives, to capture the difference that training makes to the librarians who participate and ultimately, library users. Impact assessment provides a framework to ensure that the goals of a programme are met, and more broadly to answer the question "does this programme make a difference?" The technique will also be used to develop a method for evaluating training

that can be carried out by trainers in-country to find out what happened after the training has ended – did it change the skills or knowledge of the librarians who were trained? This gives IFLA the ability to distribute the work of collecting impact data to regions around the world and to ensure that measurement is designed with the needs of different countries in mind.

It also provides a mechanism for improved reporting on progress to funders, programme participants and other stakeholders. The technique will be used to enhance IFLA's reporting to Sida in 2009, in addition to the measures that are currently collected. Data collected in 2009 will give IFLA the ability to measure progress across the whole year. Although this is a relatively short timeframe, it will help to evaluate how well the new assessment techniques have worked.

When designing and collecting measures of impact, it is important to collect data from all points of view, and not just data that supports a positive outcome. Understanding how programmes can be improved, and in some instances, knowing what went wrong, is essential to improving programmes in the future. Yet, designing impact measures can be difficult. Analysing whether a change was the result of your action alone is not easy to determine (Poll and Payne, 2006). Any number of other factors may have contributed to a librarian's knowledge and skills as a result of training, such as seeking advice from colleagues or reading about new services. For this reason, it is important to design impact measures that are instead representative of change, what Streatfield and Markless call "surrogates" (Markless and Streatfield, 2008). Only with this comprehensive approach to collecting and reporting on impact can the technique be used as a tool for advocacy.

IFLA and impact assessment

IFLA used impact assessment in 2009 as a trial to evaluate FAIFE's activities. An example of this is cascade training delivered in Peru, Russia and the Philippines. Impact indicators are identified at the start of the project, followed by four impact phases;

- *Phase 1:* IFLA trains core trainers in programme material and collecting evidence for impact assessment
- *Phase 2:* Core trainers return to their regions to train colleagues, and collect stories for evidence
- *Phase 3:* Stories gathered during training are analyzed
- *Phase 4:* IFLA evaluates evidence against indicators to measure impact.

All projects using the technique in the trial in 2009 are currently at stage 2. IFLA will evaluate its experience of using impact assessment, and if it is a positive one will strongly consider using the method in appropriate projects in the future.

In the future, impact assessment may be used by IFLA to demonstrate success in implementing its projects and to obtain additional funding for projects. Funders want to see that organisations have the capacity to successfully carry our programmes and ensure their sustainability. More broadly, funders want to know, "are libraries good value to invest in?" (Poll and Payne, 2006). Impact assessment can provide a strong body of evidence for funders that can be illustrated with success stories and case studies. In turn, the evidence that IFLA generates with impact assessment can be used to support IFLA's advocacy goals of freedom, equity and inclusion. IFLA has introduced an Advocacy Framework to guide a strategic approach to training and activities (IFLA Headquarters, 2009), impact assessment is one of the ways that this new approach will be measured.

Evidence, funding and sustainability

Funders are increasingly interested in evaluating the sustainability of programmes, to ensure that they will be able to continue past the period of initial funding and to maintain quality control. Preparing sustainability plans at the start of funding is a useful way to consider the long-term costs of running programmes, how they will be evaluated, and if and when they should. Some funding organisations such as The Global Libraries programme of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation are already using impact assessment. It is important for libraries to become familiar with, and to use, funders' assessment methods to satisfy grant conditions and to assist with securing future funding. Demonstrating the success and sustainability of a project is essential to the long-term funding of libraries.

Impact assessment has the potential to provide richer information about the success of IFLA's projects than goes beyond attendance figures. It is hoped that it will be able to provide a more detailed picture of how IFLA's work brings positive change to library staff and their communities by using stories and narratives. In turn, it will assist in advocating for libraries, by being able to build on evidence, case studies, and success stories to more clearly describe the difference libraries make.

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