



HE. Ms. Michelle Bachelet,
UN High Commissioner for Human Rights,
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)
Palais des Nations
CH-1211 GENEVA 10,
Switzerland

Dear High Commissioner,

Please find below a submission from the Zimbabwe Library Association (ZimLA, ZimLA Midlands Branch, PO Box 1521, Gweru, Zimbabwe, www.zimla.org.zw) and the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA, Prins Willem-Alexanderhof 5, 2595 BE, The Hague, The Netherlands, www.ifla.org) for the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review in Zimbabwe.

The Zimbabwe Library Association brings together information professionals from all types and forms of libraries, documentation centres, records centres, archival and information service providers in Zimbabwe. The key goal of the National Association is to foster cooperation among and between Information Practitioners, Academics and other interest persons in the sector to enhance professional development in state-of-the-art and good practices in the LIS profession and offer staff training programmes to equip professionals with new skills to re-tool and to improve existing skills and knowledge.

IFLA is the global organisation for libraries and library associations, founded in 1927, at present with over 1500 members in more than 150 countries. IFLA works to represent the interests of library and information services and their users, and is committed to promoting the principles of universal and equitable access to information and intellectual freedom as drivers of development and well-being.

We are grateful in particular to Shadreck Ndinde, of ZimLA, for his work on this submission.

Overview

1. Communities in Zimbabwe have access to a variety of public libraries, a National Library, and a network of school and academic libraries throughout the country.¹ They work to support formal education and informal learning, equitable access to science and culture; thus striving to help deliver on the socioeconomic rights of their communities codified in Articles 26 and 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This submission draws on libraries' experiences and practices in these fields, to highlight current trends and existing good practices.

Right to education

Recommendations from the previous UPR cycle:

131.128 Continue to focus on the issue of education to ensure inclusive, high-quality, accessible education for all.

131.125 Ensure the allocation of sufficient resources to increase the quality of education, including for improving schools' infrastructure.

131.129 Further develop its education system, including through the improvement of access to education for persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups.

Quality education for all

2. *Trends.* Some of the key priorities for delivering on the right to education in Zimbabwe at the moment include a focus on access for all and equity (e.g. a 2020 law prohibited the exclusion of pregnant students, and those unable to pay tuition fees, from schools noted as an important step forward;² but crucial challenges remain – including in terms of affordability and the rural-urban divides). Infrastructure – from water, sanitation and electricity to the broader learning environment (e.g. furniture and equipment) and wider access to learning materials – are also currently an important priority, particularly for primary and secondary education.^{3,4}
3. *Good practices.* Libraries and other stakeholders around the country are working to help support equitable access to educational, reading and learning materials to schools and their wider communities. More rural and remote areas are a particular focus for this work. Examples here include the initiatives of ZimLA, the National Library and Documentation Service, the Rural Libraries and Resources Development Programme (RLRDP), Zimbabwe Rural Schools Library Trust,⁵ and Book Aid International.
4. RLRDP distributes new books (a mix of reading and educational materials) to rural schools, and supports the establishment of school library facilities. Once set up, the school libraries are open to whole communities - to also offer learning opportunities to adults, out-of-school youth, and others who can benefit from the services. For locations which are hard to reach or inaccessible by car, RLRDP also employs bicycle or donkey-drawn mobile libraries. By 2019, around 300 libraries had been set up, and 15 donkey-drawn mobile libraries had been launched.⁶ A few of the mobile libraries have been equipped with solar panels to provide access to ICTs and audio-visual equipment. Some libraries have integrated facilities to offer access to online learning, which is also useful in light of the increasing provision and availability of digital educational content online (as the digital divide still tends to be more prominent in rural areas).⁷
5. These RLRDP initiatives are also accompanied by training opportunities offered to school teachers – to enable them to support children in making the most out of the available materials and library facilities. Local committees draw up the mobile library visit schedules; and libraries set up flexible library session timetables.⁸ These interventions aim to support reading and literacy, education quality and pass rates, lifelong learning and equitable access to relevant knowledge and information. While the COVID-19 pandemic has slowed these initiatives, the rollout is ongoing.
6. Other initiatives aiming to support such access include the work of Book Aid International – also focusing on book shipments (e.g. with the latest report indicating over 157000 books sent to Zimbabwe in 2020), and setting up library facilities in primary schools.⁹ Another recent initiative by Book Aid International focused on providing books – for reading, learning and reference – to 22 prisons across the country, to support primary- and secondary-level classes offered there.¹⁰
7. Similarly, the National Library and Documentation Service (NLDS) is working to establish and support affiliate libraries in schools and community centers around the country, prioritising rural and remote areas. Also through collaborations with partners like RLRDP, ZIMLA, and Aussie Books for Zimbabwe, this helped distribute reading and learning materials, set up and support over 100 affiliate libraries.
8. **RECOMMENDATION: It is crucial to continue working to ensure equitable and universal access to quality education and learning for all. As part of this, we suggest to continue, build on and expand initiatives that support equitable access to learning and educational materials, particularly**

for potentially more vulnerable or underserved groups and communities, such as schools in more rural/remote areas.

Persons with Disabilities

9. *Trends.* It is crucial also to highlight the rights to education (as well as other rights, e.g. to culture, to benefit from scientific progress, to information, and others) of people living with disabilities. In 2019, Zimbabwe acceded to the *Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired or Otherwise Print Disabled* – a treaty which removes significant barriers to books and reading materials in accessible formats. While the full scope of how this is implemented in the country is yet to be seen, we encourage the domestic implementation and interpretation of the Treaty in a way that supports as wide as possible access to published materials for people with visual disabilities – as well as to support access for people with other disabilities (e.g. hearing, dyslexia).
10. There are also examples of practical measures taken to broaden access to information, knowledge, and education for people with disabilities – e.g. some schools equipped with resource units to cater to the needs of students with disabilities, training for teachers, as well as library-based initiatives. The Bulawayo Public Library Braille Department, for example, focuses on facilitating access to information for community members with visual disabilities, including measures to support their digital inclusion.¹¹ Overall, ensuring equitable access to education and learning (as well as related rights – including those dependent on digital inclusion) for people with disabilities remains a crucial and urgent task.
11. **RECOMMENDATION: As such, we strongly encourage further implementation of measures to expand access to information, education and learning for people with disabilities – both in terms of an enabling policy environment, and in terms of supporting and implementing practical interventions, including those offering equitable and free access to learning opportunities, e.g. in libraries.**

Right to benefit from scientific progress

12. *Trends.* The COVID-19 pandemic has underlined the urgent need to boost scientific cooperation worldwide, the importance of eliminating barriers to science, and sharing scientific discoveries and advancements. The Open Science movement is working to help deliver on the fundamental rights to benefit from and access to scientific process.¹² Over the past years, stakeholders in Zimbabwe have been working to champion and advance Open Access (OA) to scientific publications in the country.
13. *Good practices.* Electronic Information for Libraries (EIFL) and the Zimbabwe University Libraries Consortium (ZULC) have worked extensively from 2005 to 2019 and beyond to raise awareness and build capacity for Open Access within the country. These initiatives saw 12 more OA repositories created and 4 institutional OA policies adopted in educational/scientific institutions around the country. By 2019, more than 18000 research publications (e.g. dissertations, theses) had been made openly available in 13 repositories, making the country's research outputs more visible, accessible, and open for all. ZULC has been granted a mandate to carry out a country-wide consultation process on OA.¹³
14. Another dimension of open access to information which can be leveraged to support rights, development and wellbeing is Open Data. To raise public awareness about the benefits and uses of access to information, in 2020 ZimLA hosted an Open Data Day event in the Masvingo Province. The event focused on the role of open data in supporting the girl child, and raising awareness on how communities – especially in rural areas – can access and leverage information to champion gender equality.¹⁴

15. **Recommendation.** We welcome the progress made in advancing Open Access and Open Science practices and awareness in Zimbabwe, helping deliver on the fundamental right to access and benefit from scientific progress and participate in open government. We encourage further steps to advance OA, Open Science and Open Data in the country, making Zimbabwean scientific publications more visible and open, and facilitating communities' use and engagement with Open Data in order to build awareness and allow for the enjoyment of rights.

Right to work

Recommendation from the previous UPR cycle:

131.98 Continue its efforts to promote sustainable economic and social development and to improve the living standards in the country.

16. *Trends.* At present, the majority of the economically active population in Zimbabwe (as 2020 statistics suggest, over 70%) are working in the informal sector.¹⁵ As elsewhere in the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has strongly impacted their ability to earn a living,¹⁶ also against the backdrop of challenges Zimbabwe faced before the pandemic (e.g. a multi-year drought, etc). This highlights the importance of supporting informal workers, out-of-school youth, and other vulnerable economically active community members.
17. *Good practices.* Drawing on the library sector experiences, it is possible to highlight initiatives which have focused on making available upskilling learning opportunities to support income generation. Among the RLRDP initiatives referenced earlier, there are libraries which have strongly focused on expanding their collections with more business management and income generation information materials for adults and out-of-school youth. RLRDP also saw the launch of income-generating projects, from sewing to carpentry to gardening and beyond – some of which were initiated by communities themselves to earn incomes, with a part of the proceeds going to sustain the libraries.
18. Initiatives aiming to support employability and income generation have also been reported, for example, by the Africa Book Development Organisation. There, community libraries and study circles helped yield impacts in both skills acquisition and higher family incomes in their communities.¹⁷ The NLDS, in the meantime, provides access to materials on such topics as farming, poultry rearing and vocational projects (e.g. through community libraries) - to assist people in setting up small businesses and income-generating projects.
19. **Recommendation.** Based on these existing examples of good practices, we encourage further implementation and cooperation among relevant stakeholders to offer equitable and accessible learning opportunities which facilitate income-generation and employability for all.

References

- ¹¹ <https://librarymap.ifla.org/map/Metric/Number-of-libraries/LibraryType/National-Libraries,Academic-Libraries,Public-Libraries,Community-Libraries,School-Libraries,Other-Libraries/Country/Zimbabwe/Weight/Totals-by-Country>
- ² <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/18/zimbabwe-removes-barriers-education>
- ³ See e.g. <https://cidt.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Longitudinal-Study-into-Dropout-and-Survival-in-Zimbabwean-Schools-Final-Version-17-December-2020.pdf>
- ⁴ <https://www.unicef.org/zimbabwe/education>
- ⁵ <https://zimlibrarytrust.com>
- ⁶ http://www.noll27.se/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Nr2_2019.pdf
- ⁷ E.g. <https://www.unicef.org/zimbabwe/press-releases/zimbabwe-launches-innovative-learning-platform-children-and-teachers>
- ⁸ <http://library.ifla.org/1715/1/139-moyo-en.pdf>
- ⁹ <https://bookaid.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Book-Aid-International-Annual-Report-and-Accounts-2020.pdf>
- ¹⁰ <https://bookaid.org/blog/2019/05/15/improving-prisoner-education/>
- ¹¹ <https://www.chronicle.co.zw/visually-impaired-pupils-to-get-ict-skills/>
- ¹² <https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-who-and-high-commissioner-human-rights-call-open-science/>
- ¹³ <https://www.eifl.net/eifl-in-action/open-access-zimbabwe>
- ¹⁴ <https://blog.okfn.org/2020/05/19/the-importance-of-libraries-and-access-to-information-in-zimbabwe-open-data-day-2020-report/>
- ¹⁵ <https://allafrica.com/stories/202003180317.html>
- ¹⁶ <https://www.oecd.org/employment/covid-19.htm>
- ¹⁷ <http://www.africabookorg.co.zw/our-approaches>