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 Eswatini Library and Information Association (ESWALA, PO Box 2309, Mbabane, Eswatini, http://www.eswala.org.sz) 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 Eswatini.

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 freedom of expression as drivers of development and well-being.

The Eswatini Library Association (ESWALA) was formed on April 28, 1984. The aims and objectives of the Association are: to promote the establishment and development of library and information services; to safeguard and promote the professional interests of librarians and other information personnel; to promote and encourage research and publication into matters affecting the profession and to promote the education, training and development of library and information personnel. Membership to ESWALA is open to all types of libraries, archives, museums and any other literacy organisations.

Overview

1. The Kingdom of Eswatini has a network of 15 public libraries spread across the country's four regions, one mobile library, and the National Library stationed in the capital, Mbabane. There are several academic libraries in higher education institutions, as well as school libraries and other libraries serving specific demographic groups. Their collections consist of print, audio-visual and digital materials. Many of these libraries organise activities relevant to their geographical clientele. The National Archives and National Museum also collects artefacts and digital materials of cultural heritage, making them accessible to the public.

2. Libraries in the country operate with an overarching goal of broadening access to knowledge and information, which means their work is related to helping realise the rights codified in Articles 26 and 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (right to education, right to participation in cultural life, enjoyment of Arts and sharing in scientific advancements). This submission draws on the experiences of the Eswatini library sector to note developments and good practices in human rights fields related to their work over the past 5 years.

Right to education

3. *Trends.* A 2018 report commissioned by UNICEF-Swaziland notes the measures and steps implemented to expand access to school education in Eswatini, their impacts, and remaining challenges around the issues of education access and quality.[1] One of the points the report discusses was the importance of improving facilities at existing (i.e. secondary) schools to help achieve the learning goals.

4. *Good practices*. The past years saw continued efforts from stakeholders to set up or help further equip libraries in schools across the country.[2] ESWALA's estimates, and reports of such organisations as the African Library Project, suggest that such initiatives saw impact in several hundred schools and libraries across the country. There are also efforts to continue offering upskilling opportunities for teacher-librarians - focusing, for example, on information literacy skills - to help maximise their contribution to successful educational outcomes.

5. *Recommendations. In light of the benefits school libraries can contribute for student achievement,[3] literacy, and learning outcomes, we recommend sustaining, supporting and expanding work to equip and set up school libraries in the country, as part of broader efforts to further improve quality of education.*

6. *Good practices*. Furthermore, there are initiatives to offer lifelong learning and educational opportunities – which can be of particular value for groups which are not in formal education.[4]

7. For example, the Eswatini Broadcasting and Information Service and the library sector cooperate to set aside a weekly 30-minute radio programme slot for library announcements on educational programmes (for example, information literacy) and available learning and information resources. These often see an increase in library visits and use of spotlighted resources following the programme.

8. *Recommendations. We encourage to continue and expand informal and non-formal skills-building and lifelong learning opportunities, including those delivered through libraries.*

Socioeconomic rights/right to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits

9. *Trends*. Globally, access to the internet and meaningful digital inclusion (spanning access, affordability, skills, access to relevant resources, and other factors enabling effective use of the internet) has the potential to help deliver on a range of human rights – a means to exercise the right to freedom of expression, support the right to health, education, participation in science and culture.[5]

10. In Eswatini, various estimates suggest that between 30% and 47% of the population are internet users.[6] The share of the population using the internet is estimated to have grown since 2015.[7] However, according to A4AI estimates, costs of broadband and data in Eswatini are comparatively high, tending to fall between 3% and 10% of GNI per capita.[8] As such, further measures to support connectivity affordability – and other dimensions of meaningful digital inclusion – can help support a range of socioeconomic rights.

11. *Good practices*. The Library Map of the World suggests that all public libraries (and the National Library) in Eswatini provide internet access for users. ESWALA further explained that nearly all libraries are equipped with WiFi-enabled computer labs where the public can use the internet for free for the first 30 minutes. These are used by the public, for example, to search and apply for jobs online – one example of how such access can help deliver on socioeconomic rights.

12. Furthermore, there are examples of digital inclusion initiatives targeting groups more likely to be impacted by the digital divide. For example, libraries in Eswatini (e.g. the Manzini and Mbabane public libraries) implemented a basic computer and digital skills training program for senior community members. ESWALA estimates suggest that, in 2018 and 2019, 210 participants benefited from this training digital skills training.

13. *Recommendation. Considering the important enabling role that access to information and meaningful digital inclusion can play in helping deliver on a range of socioeconomic rights, we encourage further initiatives to promote meaningful digital inclusion.*

Rights of vulnerable groups

14. *Good practices.* There are further initiatives helping deliver on the rights to education, to culture and enjoyment of scientific advancements through access to information outreach initiatives. The Mobile Library initiative has worked to broaden access to information for rural residents. Since most public libraries are situated in larger towns, the mobile library service works to help meet the information needs of underserved communities - e.g. to agricultural, health, sustainable development information.

15. To ensure better access to information for people living with disabilities, there are libraries and facilities offering access to assistive technologies – such as talking computers and an embosser, as well as materials in Braille.[9] Further measures include training a number of public libraries staff members on Eswatini Sign Language, to help facilitate more equitable access to information services, knowledge and learning opportunities.

16. *Recommendation. We recommend to maintain and further expand good practices that broaden access to information for vulnerable groups.*

Cultural rights

17. *Good practices.* Access to cultural expressions is a fundamental part of people's right to culture. One of the key library services that help deliver on this right is Eswatini is *Swaziana*. This reference library service offers equitable access to cultural information including history, folklore, Eswatini flora, traditions and ceremonies, and Indigenous Knowledge; containing around 1400 information sources and materials in total. In 2019, January to December, more than 3000 people used this service. Furthermore, there are ongoing efforts from the library sector to collect information on and expressions of Indigenous Knowledge.

18. *Recommendation. We encourage further action and measures expanding equitable access to cultural expressions.*

[1] https://www.unicef.org/eswatini/media/356/file/UNICEF-Swaziland-OOSC-Study-2018.pdf

[2] See e.g. https://www.slideshare.net/africanlibraryproject/african-library-project-in-eswatini-swaziland

[3] See e.g. https://natlib.govt.nz/schools/school-libraries/understanding-school-libraries/importance-of-the-school-library-in-learning-the-research

[4] See e.g. https://eswatini.un.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/CCA%20Report%20-%20FINAL%20for%20printing%202022%20July.pdf

[4] See e.g. https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G17/111/81/PDF/G1711181.pdf?OpenElement

[5] https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx, https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2020-eswatini

[6] https://databank.worldbank.org/reports.aspx?source=2&series=IT.NET.USER.ZS

[7] https://a4ai.org/extra/baskets/A4AI/2020/mobile_broadband_pricing_gni

[8] See e.g. https://www.ifla.org/files/assets/hq/topics/libraries-development/documents/library_associations_and_embassies.pdf