

# True community: connecting the Millennium Development Goals to public library services in the United States

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## Abstract

U.S. public libraries have the potential to actively participate in realizing the collective vision of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). While public libraries in the United States utilize measurement tools to plan socially responsive services and programs to address poverty and literacy in their communities, these initiatives are not connected to MDG targets and indicators. Similarly, scorecards and quality of life reports compiled by municipalities and nonprofit groups, while they might investigate community social problems are not linked to socially responsive library services or the wider MDGs. This article suggests that by re-imagining data collection methods coupled with active community partnership, U.S. public libraries have a significant role in actualizing the MDGs in terms of working local social conditions by the deadline of 2015.

**Keywords:** capacity building, human rights, public libraries, Millennium Development Goals, measures, planning, partnerships, United States

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## Introduction

Echoing Bharat Mehra and Ramesh Srinivasan's (2007) call for librarians to "extend the role of all libraries to participate more fully in community action and enhance their function as proactive catalysts of social change" (p.123), I advocate in this article that U.S. public libraries can play a significant role in meeting the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the target date of 2015. To accomplish this epic task, it is suggested that demographics, statistics, and measures compiled by public libraries in designing existing, often socially responsive services and programs, should be coupled with community profiles, quality of life indicators, and scorecards relative to the MDGs emphasis on literacy, poverty, education, gender equality, maternal health, environmental sustainability, and human development. This action is not only essential to democracy as

“primarily a mode of associated living” (Dewey, 1926, p.101), but human development “as the process of expanding human freedoms” (Sen, 1999, p. 26).

At present, the problem of linking U.S. public library services to the MDGs – and communities at large– is not due to a dearth of statistics and data; it is lack of integrating what we know, making the necessary linkages, identifying patterns, and acting on new knowledge. To wit, perhaps the most critical element in taking steps towards integrating the philosophy and applied aspects of the MDGs is thinking ecologically, or systems thinking, with the ability to reflect on “relationships more than objects, with process more than structures, with networks more than hierarchies” (Milbrath, 1995, p.105). In following this path, U.S. librarians – the public library - is powerfully situated in furthering human development within community, thus allowing this “aggressive educational force” (Dewey, 1920, p. 185) to join with local agencies and nonprofits to increase the likelihood of meeting the MDGs in U.S. communities nationwide. In this context, “library development is closely related to social development in general and that each facilitates and shapes the other” (Egan, 1955, p. 15).

Following David Harvey’s (1973, p.9) “interaction between the exploration of ‘ideas for idea’s sake’,” I hope to spark a continuing dialogue within the LIS community on the ways the U.S. public library – and libraries in general - may actively participate in actualizing the MDGs by way of their data collection practices and through community alliances. I offer cases from the LIS literature that I find interesting and important in aiding information workers towards the MDGs on a local level and perhaps nationally.<sup>1, 2</sup> This feedback loop mirrors “think globally, act locally” in terms of achieving the MDGs, with the end goal of alleviating inequality for at risk populations.

In my discussion, I bracket intensive discussion of human rights, including “combined capabilities” perspectives (Nussbaum, 2000)<sup>3</sup> and critiques on the universality of human rights. For my purposes, I assume a rights framework as concretized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and other civil society mandates, and see the MDGs with their targets and indicators as a path to fulfilling the rights put forth by the Declaration.

## **MDGs as the Realization of Human Rights**

The Millennium Development Goals are a set of eight goals signed by United Nations member states in 2000 at the United Nations Millennium Summit (United Nations, 2010). Seven of the goals have targets to be met by 2015, with gender equity originally targeted to the year 2005. The MDGs are:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases

7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development

In committing to the MDGs through the *United Nations Millennium Declaration*, the U.N. General Assembly observed:

We recognize that, in addition to our separate responsibilities to our individual societies, we have a collective responsibility to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at the global level. As leaders we have a duty therefore to all the world's people, especially the most vulnerable and, in particular, the children of the world, to whom the future belongs. (United Nations General Assembly, 2000)

Each of the eight MDGs is coupled to a set of 18 targets and 48 technical indicators<sup>4</sup> that provide a concrete means to measure progress of a specific goal (United Nations Millennium Project, 2006). For example, MDG2 targets universal primary education for children globally by 2015 and is bound to indicators that use enrollments in primary education and literacy rates as a basis for meeting this specific goal (**Figure 1**).

### **Goal 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education**

**Target 3.** Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling

Indicators:

6. Net enrolment ratio in primary education (UNESCO)
7. Proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach grade 5 (UNESCO)[b\\*](#)
8. Literacy rate of 15-24 year-olds (UNESCO)

**Figure 1. Target 3 and indicators (United Nations Millennium Project, 2006)**

Although MDG targets and associated indicators are heralded as a means for benchmarking and assessing progress on human development (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2008, p.1), they are not without critique. For example, the MDG indicators don't illustrate on how deprivations overlap (Alkire, 2010). Moreover,

...the contents of some MDG targets are not consistent with human rights. Goal 2 ignores the requirement of free primary education, essentially reducing it to a strategy. Goal 3 sets women's empowerment as the objective but the related target 3.A is narrowly concerned with education...MDGs are also primarily focused on developing countries, whereas international human rights standards are of comprehensive content and universal application. MDGs have possibly shifted too much focus away from poverty that persists in many developed countries, as well as middleincome States that can more easily meet the MDGs. (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2008, p.4)

The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (2010) notes that while the MDGs represent “a cautious approach to social development,” critical problems “have not been addressed, including the mechanisms required to achieve the goals individually, or the synergies among them; the role of employment; growing levels of inequality; the often contradictory impact of certain macroeconomic policies; and the political and social relations that structure power and exclusion” (p.3). The Right to Education Project (n.d.) is even stronger in their assessment of specific MDGs such as MDG3<sup>5</sup>:

MDG3 fails to include other dimensions of discrimination and inequality: violence against women; gender stereotypes; cultural, religious, traditional beliefs; differences in levels of literacy; political and economic disparities; discriminatory civil, penal and personal status laws on marriage and family relations, etc.

Deficiencies aside, the MDGs celebrate “the expansion of people’s freedoms to live long, healthy and creative lives; to advance other goals they have reason to value; and to engage actively in shaping development equitably and sustainably on a shared planet” (United Nations Development Programme, 2010, p.2).

## Human Rights, the MDGs, and the United States

For American citizens, the MDGs have an uncanny resemblance to Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s *Four Freedoms* and *Second Bill of Rights*, the latter described by Cass Sunstein (2004) as “embodying principles to which the nation is fundamentally committed.” One might compare the underlying philosophy of the MDGs to the Roosevelt’s *Four Freedoms* – freedom of speech and expression, freedom of religion, freedom of want, and freedom of fear – are “not independent. Each one relies upon all the others, each supports the whole, which is liberty, when one is missing, all the others are jeopardized” (United States, Office of War Information, 1942, p. 4).

Predating the MDGs in establishing a set of universal rights specifically focused on economic security, FDR’s *State of the Union* speech January 11, 1944 proposed the “right to earn enough to provide adequate food and clothing and recreation,” rights concerning “adequate medical care and the opportunity to achieve and enjoy good health,” and the “right to a good education.” Much like present-day rightstalk that development equates to freedom, FDR linked *rights with security of person*:

America’s own rightful place in the world depends in large part upon how fully these and similar rights have been carried into practice for our citizens. For unless there is security here at home there cannot be lasting peace in the world. (Roosevelt, 1944)

Recalling not so distant history, former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton sought to remove “any mention of the Millennium Development Goals” from the 2005 World Summit discussions (Lynch, 2005). In 2008, however, the Bush Administration reminded the world community of U.S. aid programs that *could be* construed as supporting the MDGs:

Investing in human capital — people’s health and education — is another essential prerequisite of development success. The United States measures our contribution not by resource volumes but by the number of people it

helps survive and prosper. The United States has extensive programs in education, infectious diseases, famine prevention, and other areas that support the goals of Millennium Declaration. (United States Agency for International Development, 2008, p.6)

The Obama administration renewed the U.S. commitment to the MDGs in its *Policy Directive on Global Development*, recognizing “development is vital to U.S. national security and is a strategic, economic, and moral imperative for the United States” (Office of the Press Secretary, 2010). Surprisingly, support for the MDGs is also stressed in the Administration’s *National Security Strategy* (Office of the President, 2010). In his speech before the Millennium Development Goals Summit at the United Nations,

President Obama (2010) expressed urgency in meeting the MDGs by 2015:

This is the reality we must face -- that if the international community just keeps doing the same things the same way, we may make some modest progress here and there, but we will miss many development goals. That is the truth. With 10 years down and just five years before our development targets come due, we must do better.

Yet from the Bush to Obama administrations, the MDGs have not made their way into U.S. domestic policy. The United States Agency for International Development’s (2010), *Celebrate, Innovate, and Sustain: Toward 2015 and Beyond* contains no references to meeting the MDGs within the confines of the United States. This leads us to ask: *Do the eight Millennium Development Goals apply to socioeconomic conditions within the United States? Or are the MDGs for others?*

## The MDGs: Are They For Others?

In 2005, Child Defense Fund founder Marian Wright Edelman identified the cognitive dissonance in applying the MDGs in the United States, reporting:

After his Administration tried to undermine and weaken the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), he [*sic*, Bush] finally reaffirmed U.S. commitment to eight goals, including reduction of child and maternal mortality and ending extreme global poverty by 2015. We hope the United States will lead the world in assuring their achievement. We also hope we will challenge ourselves to set and honor similar goals in our own nation for our own poor, uninsured and poorly educated children. Beginning now, we must demand that our leaders commit in 2006 and 2008, as a condition of our vote, to an America which by 2010. (p.1)

Poverty - the first Millennium Development Goal- is a net of inequities that influence food security, access to education, medical care, housing, and transportation; approximately one in seven, or 14.5 percent of American households are food insecure,<sup>6</sup> the highest number ever recorded in the United States (Coleman-Jensen, Nord, Andrews, and Carlson, 2011, p.v; Food Research and Action Center, 2011). Inside metropolitan statistical areas, the poverty rate and the number of people in poverty were 14.9 percent and 38.3 million in 2010 —up from 13.9 percent and 35.7 million in 2009 (United States Census Bureau, 2011, p.17-18). In one percent of households with children, one or more of the children experienced

The most severe food-insecure condition measured by USDA, very low food security, in which meals were irregular and food intake was below levels considered adequate by caregivers; 3.9 million households with children were food insecure at times during the year in 9.8 percent of households (Coleman-Jensen, Nord, Andrews, and Carlson, 2011, p. vi).

Recent statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau on poverty propels us to entertain the MDGs as global principles, especially for the general welfare of America's children, who have been "swallowed" by poverty (Tavernise, 2011):

- For related children under age 6, the poverty rate between 2009 and 2010 increased to 25.3 percent from 23.8 percent, while the number in poverty increased to 6.3 million from 6.0 million. For related children under age 6 in families with a female householder, 58.2 percent were in poverty, about four times the rate of their counterparts in married-couple families (13.4 percent).

- From 2009 to 2010, the poverty rate for children under age 18 increased to 22.0 percent from 20.7 percent, while the number of children under age 18 in poverty increased to 16.4 million from 15.5 million.

(United States Census Bureau, 2011, p.17-18)

6.1 million Latino children are living in poverty in 2010, more than children of any other racial or ethnic group (Lopez and Velasco, 2011). Child poverty rates in the United States at 21.6% are nearly double the OECD average of 12.4% (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2009). One American child in nine, or 8.1 million children, has an unemployed parent (Institute for Children, Poverty, and Homelessness, 2011).

Significant to public library and community literacy programs, thirty million Americans are ranked as "Below Basic" with no more than the most *simple* and *concrete* literacy skills (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003; Mulbrandon, 2011). Additionally, the rate of children in the United States who lack more than four of eight key educational possessions – a desk to study, a quiet place to work, a computer for schoolwork, educational software, an internet connection, a calculator, a dictionary, and school textbooks – is poor, the 5th worst in the OECD after Japan, Greece, Turkey and Mexico (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2009). These challenges are quite possibly linked to middle school and high school funding, which "saw their budgets reduced in 2010 from 2009 levels. In areas of high poverty, however, the reductions were significantly larger" (American Library Association, 2011, p.23). Moreover, the average educational achievement of 15 year-old children in the United States compares poorly to other OECD countries with the U.S, being the 7th worst; poor average school performance is compounded by large gaps between good and poor school performers with the U.S, the 6th worst country for gaps in the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2009). Henry Giroux (2009) offers a backstory to these alarming numbers:

Too many youth within this degraded economic, political, and cultural geography occupy a "dead zone" in which the spectacle of commodification exists alongside the imposing threat of massive debt, bankruptcy, the prison-industrial complex and the elimination of basic civil liberties. Indeed we have an entire generation of unskilled and

displaced youth who have been expelled from shrinking markets, blue collar jobs, and the limited political power granted to the middle class consumer. Rather than investing in the public good and solving social problems, the state now punishes those who are caught in the downward spiral of its economic policies. Punishment, incarceration, and surveillance represent the new face of governance. (p.22)

In the U.S., infant mortality is the 4th worst in the OECD after Mexico, Turkey and the Slovak Republic; and child mortality is the 5th worst in the OECD, and higher than the OECD average (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2009). The rate of teen births is over three times the OECD average. Amongst the OECD, the rate of births per girls aged 15-19 in the United States is lower only than Mexico (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2009). These numbers suggest violations of the U.N. Conventions on the Rights of the Child, especially Article 27, which guarantees the right to food, clothing, and a safe place to live (United Nations, 1989).<sup>7</sup> But we must question how these social conditions are possible in the United States in the 21st century - indeed why the

richest democracy on earth supported by the most sophisticated science of all-time is barreling towards social, economic, political and environmental disaster, it quickly becomes obvious that the root problem lies not in a single arena, but in an interconnected web of institutional crises and failures. (Goerner, 2007, p. 481)

Lack of institutional and public policy support for meeting the Millennium Development Goals within the United States arises from the deeply flawed perception that *MDGs are for other people*, the “Third World,” developing countries, or Less Developed Countries.<sup>8</sup> This stunning disregard for the social relevance of the MDGs implies the United States has no human development or human rights challenges. This assumption does not hold up under scrutiny when one considers *statistics as people*.

It is clear that the majority of MDG signatory countries will not meet the deadline of 2015 – I base this forecast on the failure of gender equity to be substantially reduced by 2005 – due to “insufficient official assistance from donor countries, lack of transparency, and good governance in recipient countries, the continued spread of HIV/AIDS, massive economic inequality in the developing world, widespread environmental degradation, population growth accelerating faster than economic growth, and economic growth being underpinned by unsustainable patterns of production and consumption” (Roberts 2005, p. 51). These stunning statistics and conditions are a call to action; to do otherwise suggests that “we will all be accomplices in creating and maintaining sick societies” (Max-Neef, Elizalde, and Hopenhayn, 1989, p.25). MDGs are beyond state borders, and librarians and information workers can be vigorous participants in their realization.

## **MDGs and U.S. Public Libraries: From Philosophy to Community Action**

There is no clear reason for U.S. public libraries, local governments, and public interest groups to not collaborate on the MDGs in their communities. Realizing the MDGs begins with an inventory of the types of data collected by public libraries and their community partners, then re-imagining how this data can be integrated and applied in the

profiling of social conditions and identification of marginalized populations.<sup>9</sup> These steps are critical in creating a holistic view of a community, and as such, act as a basis for MDG focused services and programs. Glenn E. Holt (2006) makes an important observation in noting:

The wrong library question that many public libraries might ask at this point is “What services should my library offer to the poor?” The right question is more complex: How can my library develop and fit its services into the lives of the poor so they will benefit from what we know how to do? (p.184)

At first glance, it may appear difficult to translate the MDGs into library work; however, the “social mission of the public library” (McCook, 2001) is completely compatible with the philosophy of the MDGs. “Interconnected principles” such as the London Declaration’s emphasis on “the free flow of information, transparency and civic engagement are fundamental to the achievement of the MDGs, as well as the global fight against poverty” (Article 19, 2010) are of prime concern to librarians, and broadly to information workers. Secondly, librarians as technological innovators and educators have a natural role in applying ICT<sup>10</sup>(information and communication technologies) to various types of literacies and inequities such as the Digital Divide as well as having a role in training teachers in ICT core competences (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2011). As the *Civil Society Declaration to the World Summit on the Information Society* noted “technologies can be engaged as fundamental means, rather than becoming ends in themselves, thus recognising that bridging the Digital Divide is only one step on the road to achieving development for all” (World Summit on the Information Society Civil Society Plenary, 2003, p.3). Third, far from the public library as the “people’s university,” research done in the 1968 by Ewald B. Nyquist and most recently by the American Library Association (2011), indicate that college graduates remain “well represented among card holders” as are middle class patrons<sup>11</sup> (p.3). This finding is critical for public libraries in terms of aggressively identifying marginalized populations and creating services and programs. Lastly, librarians and information workers are essential to the remediation of “infoglut,” highly skilled in encouraging the “learning that we all need to undertake in order to transform modern society to a sustainable society” (Milbrath, 1995, p. 109).

This modest proposal – to connect U.S. public library data and services to community initiatives in order to meet the MDGs - has not been previously considered in the Library and Information Science (LIS) literature. However on the international scene, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions’ (IFLA) Committee on Freedom of Access to Information and Freedom of Expression (FAIFE) and researchers outside the United States (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions 2006; Du Plessis, 2008; Njobvu and Koopman, 2008; Oyelude and Oti, 2007) have been instrumental in linking the MDGs to library services and programs.

Further, the LIS measures and assessment literature has not connected the MDGs to library planning or program development. For example, the Urban Library Council’s (2010) *Partners for the Future: Public Libraries and Local Governments Creating Sustainable Communities*, “a statement on the significant role of public libraries in achieving local sustainability,” does not include discussion of the MDGs, even though “21st century literacy skills” and social equity are highlighted. The Institute of Museum and Library Services’ (2010) *Opportunity for All: How the American Public Benefits from Internet Access at U.S. Libraries* calls attention to the significance of libraries to those in poverty, but does



not connect back to the MDGs or to the ways the MDGs are linked to information and communication technologies (ICT):

Forty-four percent of people in households living below the federal poverty line (\$22,000 a year for a family of four) used public library computers and Internet access. Among young adults (14–24 years of age) in households below the federal poverty line, 61 percent used public library computers and Internet for educational purposes. Among seniors 65 and older living in poverty, 54 percent used public library computers for health or wellness needs. (p.2)

The LIS literature is rife with discussion of performance and planning tools such output measures and input measures (Dugan, Herson, and Nitecki, 2009), performance measures (Bertot, McClure, & Ryan 2001; Herson and McClure, 1988; De Prospo, Altman, and Beasley, 1973), scorecards (Matthews, 2008), impact assessment, “star libraries” (Lyons and Lance, 2010), statistics (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2010), and a call to evidence based practice (Booth and Brice, 2004). Public libraries utilize these devices to appraise library use, map programs and services, determine “value” (Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2003), and evaluate “organizational effectiveness” (Matthews, 2011). Many of these approaches do not link social conditions to the library, leading this author to suggest that it is time to move from the notion of the library as a “processing system, analogous to a manufacturing organization” (Allred, 1979, p.5). Exceptions to these more mechanical methods are comprehensive community initiatives (McCook, 2000b), community needs assessment (LaFlamme, 2007), the “How Librarians and Libraries Help Outcome Model” (Durrance and Fisher, 2005), libraries as a quality of life attached to genuine progress indicators that “enriches the lives of the state's citizens during times when other measures fall short” (McCook, 2000a), outcomes based evaluation (Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2003; Lance, et al, 2001), the social audit (Underwood and Linley, 1999), the “SWOT” or strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threat matrix (Nelson, 2008), and specific “tools” such as the zip code to identify at risk populations (Holt and Holt, 2010, p.144), community vision “workforms” (Nelson, 2008), social exclusion initiatives (Gehner, 2010; Vancouver Public Library, n.d.), and use of GIS in discovery under-representation of library services in impoverished areas (Jue, 1999; Gehner, 2005). Despite the good intentions of these models, they are not currently linked to the MDGs.

In the same vein, the wider non-LIS research literature hasn't explored the social role of libraries and community partners in collaboration to meet the MDGs on a local level. Although U.S. municipalities and community groups have taken steps to profile their communities and services through quality of life reports and the development of indicators and scorecards, (Community Foundation Serving Boulder County, 2011; Community Indicators Council, 2010; Jacksonville Community Council, 2010; McCook, 2004; Sustainable San Mateo, 2007), these initiatives are not associated to community library services and programs or the MDGs. To illustrate this disconnect, the Jacksonville Community Council *Quality of Life Progress Report* (2010) employs “library circulation per person” as an “arts, recreation, and culture indicator<sup>12</sup> of support for arts and public events with the city of Jacksonville, Florida (p.9). It is important to question this output measure as its use “provide a glimmer as to what the user-centered impacts might be, [but] by themselves they do not reveal the real differences that the library makes in the lives of citizens (Durrance and Fisher, 2005, p.8). Library circulation per person is not a measure of the library's significance in the life of a community, and indicates nothing about the state of literacy, reading comprehension, or GED attainment in Jacksonville,

even though the Jacksonville Public Library (2011a) has an active Center for Adult Learning program that assists citizens with reading skills and literacy. Further, the *Community Snapshot* (2010-11) statistics for third and tenth graders reading at grade level isn't meshed with Jacksonville Public Library's collection development, storytime, or children's programs (Jacksonville Public Library, 2011b).

Whilst Jacksonians may believe that I am too critical, an example from Boulder, Colorado also illustrates the disengagement between the public library and potential community partners. In its 92 page *TRENDS* report, the CommunityFoundationServingBoulderCounty (2011) doesn't mention the Boulder Public Library's (BPL) various "Reading Buddies" services or the BoulderReads! program. BoulderReads!, created in 1986, has established alliances with Boulder County Jail, Boulder Valley Family LiteracyProgram, and Boulder County Housing and Human Services to assist individuals in obtaining their GED and to support adult and family literacy (BoulderReads!a, 2011; BoulderReads!b, 2011). While the Community Foundation Serving Boulder County *TRENDS* report discusses climate change and greenhouse gas emissions (p.92), the report doesn't link to BPL's environmental lecture series and sustainability initiatives, including the fiftieth anniversary weather and climate lecture series celebrating NationalCenter for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) and the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research (UCAR).

This dividing wall, both in the research literature and applied practice, remains puzzling, but could be attributed to the perception that some librarians may not characterize their daily work as community building, even though their work is fundamental to the development of strong community (McCook, 2000b, p.53). For instance, many urban public libraries and schools – especially those located in low income, perhaps slum neighborhoods<sup>13</sup> - are challenged by lack of institutional support, poverty, crime, low literacy rates, and general social malaise. Though the "library profession does not agree on the extent to which librarians should become involved in social issues" (Venturella, p.33), over decades librarians have responded to social problems philosophically (American Library Association, 1939 and 1990; Berman, 1971; International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2002 and 2005; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1949) and practically, via programs and services (Bay Area Reference Service, 1967-1973; Bundy, 1976; Canham-Clyne, 2009; Clark, 1965; Collins, Howard, and Miraflor, 2009; Du Plessis, 2008; Knight, 2010; McCook, 1993, 2000b; Owens, 1976; Peterson, 2000; Santa Cruz Public Library, 2011; Terrile, 2009, Vancouver Public Library, n.d.; Ward, 2007). These activities suggest that librarians on some level recognize that

We always immersed in and shaped by historical, social, economic, political, and cultural structures and constraints, and those structures and constraints usually have domination and oppression, and therefore suffering, built into them. (Bentz and Shapiro, 1998, p.6-7)

Instances such as Agnes M. Griffen (1971) description of the King County Library System involvement with food collection for the "new hungry" and Bill DeJohn's (1971) proposal that "all metropolitan library systems should have a direct liaison with Model City agencies, and to most effectively aid this agency, full-time librarians should be assigned to work with agency personnel and individual people in the Model City area" (p. 302) show concern for the poor and in targeting community services and programs. Further, Mary Lee Bundy and Frederick J. Sielow (1987) note during the 1960s

Librarians took advantage of federal monies to start or participate in poverty programs out of public libraries, which, if not that different in design from traditional service, still got into the community and in so doing responded to communities as never before. Outreach programs in urban libraries across the country (New Haven; Brooklyn; Montclair, New Jersey; Cleveland; and Venice, California, to name a few) produced a corps of library poverty workers who manifestly differed from the librarians' traditional stereotype. (p.6)

On the policy side, the partition between libraries, local governments, and nonprofits might be due to other another kind of perception of librarians:

Libraries do not feature in high level declarations such as the Millennium Development Goals. Libraries are not visible and relevant enough to the politicians and diplomats who craft such statements. Librarians themselves have to make and demonstrate the connections between these goals and the contributions that libraries can make to achieve them. (Lor, 2008, p. 52)

Whatever the etiology, it remains that MDGs have not been woven into the fabric of library assessment and program-service planning, even though existing library programs and services reflect the strong philosophical roots of the MDGs, and directly play into strategies that improve community conditions.

## Meeting the MDGs: Linking Existing Data Across Community

I propose two models that are of potential use to librarians and information workers to begin their work on the MDGs. First, IMLS outcomes based evaluation and a hybrid model based on Ellen Forsyth (2005), Sandra Nelson's (2008), and the U.N.'s own work on the MDGs that could be merged with IMLS outcome based evaluation. These models take for granted partnership with agency partners, local governments, nonprofits, and the stakeholders themselves.

With a bit of polish, outcomes based evaluation has the ability to support MDGs and targets through "investigation of attitudes, status, and life conditions" (Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2003).<sup>14</sup> Outcomes-based evaluation is required by IMLS under the Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) of 1996 as part of its grantmaking to public and other types of libraries that receive LSTA funds (Lance, et al, 2001). This is significant for igniting interest in the MDGs as public libraries have a practical means to begin work on the MDGs in a structured, formal manner. Going beyond the mechanistic domain of "materials circulated," MDG1's targets and indicators mesh with library program-services outcomes (**Figure 2.**):

<p>Wally goes to a reading program and learns childhood reading is important</p> <p>Wants to read to his son</p>	<p>Target 3: Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.</p> <p>Indicators</p> <p>6. Net enrolment ratio in primary education</p>
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<p>Uses a literacy program</p> <p>Advances 2 literacy levels</p> <p>Gets his GED</p> <p>What kinds of outcomes are each of these?</p> <p>(Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2003)</p>	<p>(UNESCO)</p> <p>7. Proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach grade 5 (UNESCO)</p> <p>8. Literacy rate of 15-24 year-olds (UNESCO)</p> <p>(United Nations Millennium Project, 2006)</p>
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**Figure 2. IMLS commonalities with MDG targets and indicators**

Of the eight MDGs, it is perhaps less difficult for librarians and information workers to latch onto education, MDG2, which “has a special importance as both a fundamental right and as the fundamental enabling right, which helps people to secure and enjoy other basic rights. Securing education for all is critical to the achievement of all the MDGs (Archer 2005, p.28). This sentiment is similar to one voiced by the Office of War Information on the subject of literacy, framed as a “prerequisite of free speech.” Literacy and its relationship with self-determination and civic participation is a long held value within librarianship:

Denied education, denied information, suppressed or enslaved, people grow sluggish; their opinions are hardly worth the high privilege of release...there is no freedom, either, unless facts are within reach, unless information is made available. (United States, Office of War Information, 1942. p.6-7)

Following the theme of MDG2, Sandra Nelson and Ellen Forsyth’s work merged with the IMLS outcomes based evaluation and United Nations’ targets and indicators is also a concrete means for libraries to begin work on the MDGs. Nelson (2008, p.184-185) outlines teen, adult, and family literacy services in communities through the SWOT approach. Linking Nelson to Forsyth’s (2005) pioneering work on community-based planning to achieve the MDGs, gives libraries one potential tool to meet these “crucial goals” (p.15). Forsyth, in her *Summary of library roles and the Millennium Development Goals*, Table 1 (p.32) connects “community roles” and the MDGs; for example, literacy training is linked to MDG 2, 3, 6, 7, and 8.<sup>15</sup> This supports the notion of mutual dependency among MDGs; that is, “achieving MDGs 1–6 will support delivery of MDG7 (environmental sustainability), and vice versa. Incomplete achievement of any of the MDGs is likely to hamper progress on achieving the others” (Mainka, McNeely, and Jackson, 2008, p. 51). Using another example, gender equality and women’s empowerment supports universal primary education (MDG2), child health-mortality (MDG4), improves maternal health (MDG5), reduces the likelihood of contracting HIV/AIDS (MDG6) and even promotes environmental sustainability (MDG7) in some areas of the world.

Although Forsyth and Nelson (nor IMLS) offer us no direction on *how* the MDGs can be measured and met locally by libraries and their community partners, as a unit, their combined work meshed with the United Nations’ various research on the MDGs anticipates an additional model for librarians to utilize in their communities (**Figure 3**):

Forsyth	Nelson	Nelson-Forsyth-UN-IMLS Hybrid
Literacy training	Early literacy (children from birth to five years, parents, caregivers, & service providers) and Teen, adult & family literacy (teens & adults)	MDG2 Achieve universal primary education
<p>Links to MDG 2, 3, 6, 7, 8</p> <p>2. Achieve universal primary education</p> <p>3. Promote gender equality and empower women</p> <p>6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases</p> <p>7. Ensure environmental sustainability</p> <p>8. Develop a global partnership for development</p>	<p>Use existing library program and census data as a starting point.</p> <p>Related factors: Types of measures (p.34); use of targets via past program numbers and census data (p. 98); Objectives always include both a measure and a target.(p.99)</p> <p>Task 3: Identify community needs (p.35); Know Your Community: Community Resources and Services. (p.180)</p>	<p>Target: Ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling</p> <p>Indicators</p> <p>6. Net enrolment ratio in primary education (UNESCO)</p> <p>7. Proportion of pupils starting grade 1 who reach grade 5 (UNESCO)</p> <p>8. Literacy rate of 15-24year-olds (UNESCO)</p> <p>- Add Nelson here: Early literacy (children from birth to five years, parents, caregivers, &amp; service providers) and Teen, adult &amp; family literacy (teens &amp; adults)</p> <p>- IMLS tools on outcomes based evaluation will assist libraries in identifying objectives (measure &amp; targets)</p>
<p>LIS professionals should “work with communities and health, environment and planning staff as participants in community-based planning, it may be possible to achieve these goals” (p.22)</p>	<p>Potential partners:</p> <p>Early lit:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Community colleges that offer preschool training</li> <li>- Daycare providers</li> <li>- Headstart officials</li> <li>- Hospitals</li> <li>- New parent groups</li> <li>- Pediatricians</li> <li>- Social service agencies</li> </ul> <p>Teen/adult/family literacy partners</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Supplement Nelson’s “existing library program and census data as a starting point” with tools such as GIS, zip codes, and/or the social exclusion initiative (Gehner, 2010; Vancouver Public Library, n.d.)</li> <li>- Use Nelson’s potential (community) partners approach</li> <li>- Identify at risk populations</li> <li>- Use Forsyth’s “Links to MDG 2, 3, 6, 7, 8”</li> <li>- Potential use of participatory action research for future, ongoing dialogue with community partners &amp; stakeholders (Mehra, and Srinivasan, 2007) and Nelson’s perception of users (p.182-184)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adult education dept, school district</li> <li>- Churches/ mosques, and synagogues</li> <li>- Community colleges</li> <li>- Literacy council</li> <li>- Literacy Volunteers of America</li> <li>- Private literacy providers</li> </ul>	
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**Figure 3. Linking Forsyth, Nelson, IMLS, & the UN to Meet MDG2**

## Last Thoughts on a Complex Subject

Through re-imagining data collection methods and community partnerships, librarians and information workers have an incredible opportunity to work with allies in realizing the Millennium Development Goals. Through partnership, it may be possible to attain

*Human Scale Development*, geared to meeting human needs (Max-Neef, Elizalde and Hopenhayn, 1989, p.17). In this article, I proposed two models that librarians and information workers might consider as starting points in working towards the MDGs. While several of the MDGs may be more straightforward than others to target and a community to attain, each new model of partnership and library outreach, whether it be the traditional, “global library” with its claims of neutrality (Durrani and Smallwood, 2006), idea store (Tower Hamlets Foundation, 2011), library outpost (Hill, 2008), onsite library center (Teasley and Walker-Moses, 1998), sidewalk service (Nyquist, 1968), storefront library (Boston Street Lab, 2011) and street library (Cretinon and Egner, 1998), have the potential to set in motion the MDGs. Fashioning *civic librarianship*, which “places emphasis on the impact that library services have on individuals and society as well as reaffirms traditional professional values by using new strategies that address the needs of society” (McCabe 2001, p. 77, 144), and a *progressive librarianship* “that favors a new balance between the needs of the individual and of the community through a combination of individual and collective rights” (Birdsall, 2006, p.57) only requires men and women of goodwill (Roberts, 2005, p. 51).

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## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> At present, the United States does not compile a MDG country report. According to the United Nations Non-Governmental Liaison Service (n.d.), the Millennium Development Goals Report (MDGR) is “a tool for awareness raising, advocacy, alliance building, and renewal of political

commitments at the country level, as well as to build national capacity for monitoring and reporting on goals and targets.” Each signatory country to the Millennium Declaration – including the United States - is expected to produce an MDGR. The Netherlands, Sweden, and India for example have produced annual report. To date the United States has failed to do so.

<sup>2</sup> Country reports are available at the MDG Monitor Web site, available at: <http://www.mdgmonitor.org/index.cfm>.

<sup>3</sup> Martha Nussbaum’s capabilities approach is used by McCook and Phenix (2011) in linking the MDGs to library practice. The ten capabilities range from life, play, and power over one’s environment (Nussbaum, 2007). It is interesting to note that in proposing an alternative economics, Manfred Max-Neef, Antonio Elizalde and Martin Hopenhayn (1989, 1991) developed a hierarchy of needs based on psychologist Abraham Maslow’s work. Needs range from subsistence to understanding, participation, and freedom.

<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this article, indicators are described as “quantitative and measurable, yet they may also be employed to reflect processes and qualitative interpretations... Indicators can be used to describe and compare situations that exist; they may therefore be used as early warning-instruments, but they can also be used as a means to identify change” (Andersen and Feldt, 2006, p. 7). Examples of social indicators for countries such as the U.S. are found at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2011) and the European Commission Joint Research Centre (2010) Web sites. *The Condition of Education, 2011* has a detailed list of education indicators 2003-2011 at the U.S. Department of Education’s Web site, <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/>; the Right to Education Project (2008b) has compiled a database of “rights-based indicators” derived from human rights law.

<sup>5</sup> Gender based salary inequity exists in the U.S.; as the U.S. Department of Labor and Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010) report, “in 2009 women who were full-time wage and salary workers had median weekly earnings of \$657, or about 80 percent of the \$819 median for their male counterparts. After a gradual rise in the 1980s and 1990s, the women's-to-men's earnings ratio peaked at 81 percent in 2005 and 2006.” Statistics indicate that education plays a central role in decreasing the salary gap (Catalyst, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Elizabeth Williamson (2006) identified the semantic shift from “hunger” to the more “scientific” terms “low food security” in USDA research into hunger.

<sup>7</sup> The Dakar Framework for Action is supported by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Dakar recognises that “*all children, young people and adults have the human right to benefit from an education that will meet their basic learning needs in the best and fullest sense of the term, an education that includes learning to know, to do, to live together and to be. It is an education geared to tapping each individual’s talents and potential and developing learners’ personalities, so that they can improve their lives and transform their societies.*” And that education is the key to sustainable development, peace and stability within and among countries” (Right to Education Project, 2008a).

<sup>8</sup> Less Developed Countries or LDCs are defined by the UN Economic and Social Council's Committee for Development Policy and are based on three criteria: "per capita gross national income (GNI), human assets and economic vulnerability to external shocks. The latter two are measured by two indices of structural impediments, namely the human assets index and the economic vulnerability index" (United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, n.d.).

<sup>9</sup> The ALA Task Force Member Survey on Policy 61, "Library services for the poor and homeless," discovered that many librarians did not know their libraries’ official policy on

identifying poor people, and categorized “the poor” as “people who use the public computers, people unaffiliated with the university, community members who use the library as a public space, and those who are seen as a nuisance and “high maintenance” (Gieskes, 2009). Harnessing local data collection with the development of MDG targets and indicators would offer a means to identify “the poor.”

<sup>10</sup> ICT refers to “forms of technology that are used to transmit, store, create, share or exchange information. This broad definition of ICT includes such technologies as: radio, television, video, DVD, telephone (both fixed line and mobile phones), satellite systems, computer and network hardware and software; as well as the equipment and services associated with these technologies, such as videoconferencing and electronic mail (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> In the UK, MP John Redwood is quoted as saying “some defenders of every public library imply that they are for a different clientele. They conjure images of children from homes living on low incomes developing a passion for reading serious books borrowed from the local library. The library is seen as a force for self improvement and the pursuit of knowledge. I fear that in many cases this is no longer true, if it ever was.” See *The Guardian*, April 11, 2011, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2011/apr/11/libraries-john-redwood-middle-classes>

<sup>12</sup> The report defines an indicator as “a set of data or information that provides insight into the trends in a community over time. Together, the collection of community indicators tells the story about where a community is in relation to its vision and the direction in which the community is heading” (Jacksonville Community Council. n.d.).

<sup>13</sup> UN-HABITAT defines a slum household as a group of individuals living under the same roof in an urban area who lack one or more of the following: Durable housing of a permanent nature that protects against extreme climate conditions, Sufficient living space which means not more than three people sharing the same room, Easy access to safe water in sufficient amounts at an affordable price, Access to adequate sanitation in the form of a private or public toilet shared by a reasonable number of people, and security of tenure that prevents forced evictions. See Slums: Overcrowding or “the hidden homeless,” [http://www.unhabitat.org/documents/media\\_centre/sowcr2006/SOWCR%205.pdf](http://www.unhabitat.org/documents/media_centre/sowcr2006/SOWCR%205.pdf)

<sup>14</sup>Forty-five U.S. public libraries participated in the *Counting on Results* project in 2001. The “goals of the CoR project—developing and testing new tools for outcome-based evaluation of public libraries” (Lance, et al, 2001).

<sup>15</sup> One might argue that *all the literacies* (information, research, technological) are important in meeting the MDGs.

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