

MAIN FEATURES

How Supporting Law Libraries Overseas Promotes Access to Justice and is Good for the Planet

Abstract: The International Law Book Facility (ILBF) ships donated law books to organisations across the globe which require good quality legal publications. Since its inception in 2005 it has delivered over 80,000 books to more than 250 organisations in 56 countries. Here **Katrina Crossley**, the Chief Executive of the ILBF, explains why it is so important and how it works, giving some examples of how the project has eased the way for people training in the law in Africa. The importance of law librarians in all of this is discussed too. Katrina also outlines how ILBF has worked with BIALL in the course of its law librarian training schemes in Sierra Leone and Ghana, and will continue to do so in other countries in Africa as this is expanded.

Keywords: legal information; law libraries; pro bono work; Sierra Leone; International Law Book Facility (ILBF); BIALL

‘Books are synonymous with lawyers’¹ Abiola Ezkiel James, Library Committee Chairperson, Ministry of Justice, Niger State, Nigeria said when 90 boxes of books from the ILBF arrived. This is true the world over, regardless of legal system or geography.

The International Law Book Facility (ILBF) has a simple purpose: to ship donated law books overseas to organisations which need access to good quality and relevant legal materials. The mission is to enhance and support access to justice and the rule of law by sharing legal knowledge.

The idea for the charity came to Lord Thomas of Cwmgiedd, former Lord Chief Justice of England and Wales and ILBF Patron, after meeting judges from Uganda back in 2002 who had decried the state of their library and its ancient materials. Lord Thomas was aware of the quantities of no longer needed but still valuable books across the UK that were effectively going to waste. The ILBF was rapidly born with the help of a group of like-minded lawyers and legal publishers.

As Lord Thomas has said: ‘The establishment of the rule of law is most obvious in underpinning individual liberty and democratic government, but the development of successful modern economies cannot take place without it. No judiciary can accomplish this task without the help of lawyers that have access to good libraries and good libraries themselves.’

Since its inception in 2005, the ILBF has shipped over 80,000 books to more than 250 organisations in 56 countries, helping to develop law libraries across the globe, from the smallest jurisdictions to some of the largest, on five continents.

The number of books shipped to organisations represents the total that would otherwise have ended up in landfill or being pulped; instead, good quality books are recycled and have a very valuable second life. Meanwhile, using sea freight rather than air freight to deliver the books minimises the environmental impact of transport: sea freight uses 95% less carbon than air freight.

You might ask why books are still in demand, and in particular law books from the UK. The answer lies in the relevance and standing of English law in many countries, the perennial issue of unreliable internet access, as well as the cost of online subscriptions, and the continued popularity of printed texts for research, especially for the judiciary and for law students. The cost of new law books for many jurisdictions is prohibitive. Scores of legal systems around the world were founded on the common law, a contentious but factual legacy of the colonial era. Legal resources from the UK are therefore relevant and citable in many jurisdictions. Nasar Danmallam, Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice in Niger State, Nigeria said on receipt of *Halsbury’s Laws* and *Halsbury’s Statutes*, ‘these are very authoritative books in terms of legal commentary on practically every area of law’.²

Legal resources from the UK also offer a point of comparison in other legal systems which are based on a different tradition. When it comes to drafting new legislation or amending existing legislation, legislators will often review how other jurisdictions have tackled complex issues such as financial and banking laws, technology, intellectual property, digital rights and much more.

The ILBF has also been able to support Francophone countries with donations of codes and journals from legal

publishers and law firms in France. The latest development to extend the reach of the ILBF was the first shipment to Bolivia earlier this year; there are plans to support other institutions in Latin America over the coming months. The interconnectedness of lawyers and law firms, and in-house legal teams, means that the ILBF has access to growing world-wide support.

The role of law librarians and information specialists in law firms, universities, courts and professional libraries has been vital to the success of the ILBF, especially with the aid of the British and Irish Association of Law Librarians (BIALL). The curation of collections, to make way for new editions, many annual, and to evolve legal information services to meet the digital age, has meant that the ILBF has benefitted from donations of excellent legal materials that are highly sought after by its recipients. The ILBF ships books to judiciaries, universities, law schools, legal professional organisations, prisons and NGOs so the books support every facet of a legal system: from education, to practice, to professional training, to adjudication, to law making.

The purpose might be simple, however the impact of the books spreads through whole communities to help strengthen, widen and deepen access to justice and the rule of law. Some of the direct impacts we have seen are:

- Pass rates at the Law Development Centre in Uganda have improved

- Judiciaries have up to date and comprehensive texts to manage civil and criminal procedure and to inform judgments in Tanzania, Mexico, Papua New Guinea, Turks & Caicos Islands, Zambia and Sierra Leone, to list but a few
- Law Commissions have reviewed and updated legislation in Uganda
- University law departments have been able to provide students with course books for new law courses in Ethiopia, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Botswana and Ghana; and in Sierra Leone, the quality of the law library assisted a university to successfully gain recognition for a new master's programme
- Libraries destroyed in conflict have been replenished
- Bar Associations and human rights organisations in South Africa, Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda have authoritative texts to support and win legal arguments in support of marginalised communities
- State academies can provide their researchers with international law materials that inform decision making and policy, as in Bolivia

JUSTICE DEFENDERS

A great example of the impact of the books is Justice Defenders in Uganda, where the ILBF books line the



Cnaan Nkamuhwa works as a legal trainee and regularly uses books donated by the ILBF



Brendah Akatukunda uses the books for research for paralegal training and for advising clients

shelves of prison libraries and provide invaluable resources for prisoners and prison officers who are studying for their legal diplomas and LLBs with the University of London. Whole communities benefit from the legal education they undertake, especially now that Justice Defenders has just opened its first out of prison legal office in Kenya.

Canaan Nkamuhabwa, a graduate of the University of London under Justice Defenders' Scholarship programme, who now works as a legal trainee attached to one of the prison-based legal aid offices, says: "I use these books as a research source for drafting written submissions for our clients and I wonder how my work would have been without them."

Brendah Akatukunda, one of Justice Defenders' officers, says: "The books have really helped me so much especially when I am doing my research preparing for paralegal training and advising clients".

Jackie Nakko, Assistant Librarian, Luzira Women's Prison, says that the books from the ILBF have never disappointed her clients, both law students and fellow inmates, who are very motivated to learn more about the law: "It's always been great to lean on the books' support."³



Godwil Kenya, final year Law student, and Joseph Ekusai, Justice Defenders' officer, checking out the books donated by ILBF

LAW LIBRARIAN TRAINING

However, with the provision of legal materials comes the challenge of how to assist the recipients to curate the collection and to help the library users to find what they need and to get the most from the new materials on offer. Law librarians at the institutions who receive books from the ILBF are critical to the ILBF's work. It is with this in mind that the ILBF sees the support and training of law librarians at the recipient organisations as a vital development area to enhance the impact of the ILBF.

The ILBF has enjoyed a long association with BIALL and its members and this is something that the two organisations have started to build on to address the challenge of law librarian training. BIALL had already embarked on a training programme in Sierra Leone several years ago which had been a great success. The ILBF was thrilled when Catherine Bowl and Diane Miller, previous Presidents of BIALL, supported the idea of building on that initiative to deliver online training to law librarians in Sierra Leone in 2022. The ILBF has long supported Sierra Leone in partnership with Richard Honey KC and Momo Turay of the UK Sierra Leone Pro Bono Network. With

Momo's logistics assistance in Sierra Leone, a venue was found for 10 law librarians to come together from different institutions, including the judiciary and several universities, all institutions which had received books from the ILBF. A day's programme of training was created with the help of Professor Miriam Conteh-Morgan of the University of Sierra Leone who advised on the areas of interest for the attendees. The final programme was delivered by the expert BIALL team of Tony Simmonds, Sarah Bracey, Tracey Dennis and Rob Hodgson. This was a great success, delivering valuable training and providing a platform for law librarians to network and share experiences.

Feedback from the attendees was overwhelmingly positive, with comments such as: "[the training] is very timely because it helps me to learn new things and how I can implement them in my library"; "The sessions were very informative, the interaction was great"; "Understanding from my own point, I learned a lot in the area of copyright which is very important in helping students with their research work, for them to be on the right track in their research".

The chance to network was also very much appreciated, one comment being: "It is really nice for us



Attendees at the Sierra Leone training day



Law librarian training in Ghana (screenshot)

librarians coming together to learn more from each other and I am looking forward to getting more of these sessions in the future.” All participants actually expressed this desire for similar sessions in the future: “I would like to have more of this kind of training session. And on the areas of topics, I would like it to be on: librarianship in general and on the use of online resources”.

The success of the session in Sierra Leone in 2022 motivated the ILBF and Julie Christmas, then President Elect of BIALL and now President, to organise a similar session for law librarians in Ghana in April 2023. Joe Antah, Librarian at the University of Ghana, organised the participants in Ghana who came from a variety of institutions. The content of the training again covered key topics from cataloguing and classification, to collection management, subject guides, copyright / equality / disability, and online resources, delivered by the same expert team.

The two training events proved to be enormously popular with the participants. While it is always difficult to quantify impacts from a training intervention, the level of enthusiasm for and positive feedback about the training is, it is hoped, a good indicator of the difference it will make to the curation and promotion of the books donated by the ILBF. Providing law librarians with the opportunity to network with each other and to develop their own regional contacts and local expertise also reaps benefits for professional development.

For the future, the ILBF plans to deliver further training sessions to overseas law librarians with the help

of BIALL members. There is huge interest, for example, in Uganda, Kenya and Nigeria amongst the legal librarian community for training to support donations of books and the general management and curation of the law libraries. To that end, BIALL is seeking volunteers from amongst its members to deliver the training early in 2024 – the training materials have already been created and delivering the training online has proved to be impactful and effective. If readers of this article are interested in finding out more, please get in touch with BIALL’s President Elect Claire Mazer presidentelect@biall.org.uk or Katrina Crossley katrinacrossley@ilbf.org.uk, Chief Executive of the ILBF, we would love to hear from you.

BOOKS TO SPARE?

If you manage a law library with print resources that are no longer needed, the ILBF is always pleased to hear from you. The ILBF works with many institutions and law firms who donate books. If there is interest in participating further in the work of the ILBF, then donors of books are provided with packing materials and address labels to pack up the books themselves so they can be collected by the ILBF’s shipper directly and shipped off to the recipient – an even greener and more practical solution which gets valuable books to where they are needed most, quickly and efficiently. Please get in touch with Katrina Crossley, Chief Executive of the ILBF, if you would like to discuss this katrinacrossley@ilbf.org.uk.

The ILBF is hugely grateful for the support it receives from across the legal community. The mission is as critical as ever as challenges multiply and the funding of resources for libraries is under extreme

pressure in many parts of the world. To adapt the words of Andrew Carnegie, who built over two thousand libraries across the world, books bring in the light.

Endnotes

¹ ILBF 15th Anniversary Film <www.youtube.com/watch?v=fsgmqBjZ6JM>

² Ibid.

³ <<https://ilbf.org.uk/2023/07/justice-defenders/>>

Biography

Katrina Crossley trained as a barrister. As a lawyer and legal publisher, Katrina created and directed legal products in all formats, and led transformational programmes to drive the evolution from print to online. Having worked closely with authors and in-house writers, Katrina appreciates the value of expert legal writing and how vital it is for the development of a fair, accessible and robust legal system. Katrina has had career-long involvement with corporate responsibility including the rule of law and access to justice. Katrina is currently the Chief Executive of the International Law Book Facility (ILBF).