



# Post-Pandemic Perceptions

A look at how governments', communities' and libraries' own perceptions of libraries has evolved since before COVID-19

## IFLA Regional Council, 10 April 2024

A key role of IFLA's Regional Council is to bring together and share the perspectives and voices of libraries in different parts of the world. This enables building an understanding of global common factors and differences. It also has an important part to play in IFLA's advocacy work, which focuses on how to shape perceptions of libraries as a means of securing support and partnerships.

This report brings together these two aspects, exploring how perceptions of libraries – among governments, communities, and libraries themselves – have evolved over the period since the COVID-19 pandemic. It is based on a paper presented and discussed at the Council's March 2024 meeting, which in turn drew together the results of a short questionnaire shared among IFLA's Regional Division Committees. Their answers, converted into text format where necessary, are in annex.

In terms of high-level messages, the report underlines that often the biggest differences are within regions, rather than between them. In every part of the world, it is clear that it is possible for governments to develop a new appreciation of libraries as centres for digital inclusion, education and more. Similarly, in each region, there are communities that discovered a new side to libraries as places not just for reading, but also for learning and connecting.

Finally, the report confirms a point already hinted at in previous IFLA works, that the pandemic saw many librarians make peace with technology, and see themselves not just as digital actors but also as innovators and key partners for development. This report contains a summary, and then longer responses per region, including references to which countries contributed responses.

## Summary

### **How did government perceptions of libraries change over the Pandemic?**

**Asia-Oceania** respondents noted that governments now saw libraries as digital actors, and so were more willing to invest in digital projects. The local

governments appreciated libraries as local hubs. However, there was less funding available to support in-person events. **European** respondents also indicated that the pandemic had led to a realisation among governments that libraries were more than just books, and rather were key parts of the digital inclusion infrastructure. Libraries are also seen as ensuring wellbeing and attainment of wider policy goals. Our **Latin American and Caribbean** respondents highlighted that in some ways there had been little change (the role of libraries continued to be seen as being about providing access to information and culture as a way of supporting communities). There was variation, with some worried about an ongoing negative trend, but others being more positive about libraries being seen as something worth investing in. **Middle East and North Africa (MENA)** respondents noted that while there was a general trend towards stronger recognition of library roles such as different issues around information literacy, old-fashioned perceptions remained persistent. In **North America**, there was a complex picture, with, in parallel, growing recognition of libraries' role in providing services that tackle social challenges (exaggerated by the pandemic) but faced with funding shortfalls and high inflation. Added to this, political steps by populists to attack libraries for their pro-inclusivity approach. The pandemic did highlight the importance of equitable access to digital content<sup>1</sup>. Finally, in **Sub-Saharan Africa**, experiences were also mixed, with educational libraries (and those seen as supporting education) receiving new and strengthened recognition and support.

### **How did community perceptions of libraries change over the Pandemic?**

In **Asia-Oceania**, answers indicated a steady appreciation of libraries, although with a lasting shift towards digital uses, except where this was not possible. Mirroring the responses around government perceptions, **Europeans** also felt that communities saw libraries as having a broader and deeper social role after the pandemic than before. In particular, they noted the support libraries can offer to build communities. Support for digital inclusion grew clearer as communities became much more aware of libraries' digital services. Libraries are now seen as more open, flexible, forward-thinking spaces. Meanwhile in **Latin America and the Caribbean**, the perception of libraries was also seen as having improved, thanks to stronger communication about libraries' work through social media and personal networks. Some people however still remained ignorant of what libraries could do. **MENA** responses highlighted the valuing of libraries not just for reading and literacy, but also as community centres. In **North America**, there are contrasting trends, with an intensification of pre-pandemic tendencies towards being 'anti-woke' (i.e. against progressive

---

<sup>1</sup> On a positive note, the decision by HathiTrust to remove copyright restrictions during lockdown periods to Hathi Trust institutions who owned the copyright material was a game-changer for students and researchers.

voices) increasingly focusing on libraries, but also positive news stories about the positive difference that libraries are making. Finally, in **Sub-Saharan Africa**, libraries also gained from their reputation as sources of trusted information, as well as safe spaces for learning. Although some countries reported drops in physical visits in favour of online access.

### **How did libraries' own perceptions of libraries change over the Pandemic?**

**Asia-Oceania** respondents suggested that compared to before the pandemic, librarians felt the need to improve their performance in digital offers and connection with users, as well as starting to think differently about their spaces. **Europeans** felt that the pandemic had forced a reflection among many librarians about their missions, role and potential, leading to greater awareness of their strengths and weaknesses. They increasingly saw themselves as civic and digital actors. In **Latin America and the Caribbean**, the pandemic helped to reinforce sense of social mission among librarians and it also pushed librarians to get out of their comfort zones. In the **MENA**, again, it was felt that there was a stronger focus on communities, not just services, but also stronger reflection about the future as well as of libraries as partners. Meanwhile in **North America**, librarians reported that they felt increasingly under attack, at least in those areas where "anti-woke movements are active. In **Sub-Saharan Africa**, too, librarians were readier to see themselves as innovators and risk-takers. The librarians became more confident in using digital tools, as well positioning themselves as active participants in the education sector and as broader development actors.

## **ANNEX: RESPONSES BY REGION**

### **ASIA-OCEANIA**

**Answers received from:** China, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Philippines

#### **How have governments' perceptions of libraries changed since before the Pandemic?**

The pandemic has forced the governments in the Asia and Oceania region to change their perception of the libraries towards encouraging the use of electronic library systems and online access to information. These governments are more inclined to allocate more budget and resources on digitalisation and digitisation of collection to allow remote access to the library collections.

On the other hand, the training budget in some countries was reduced as there is now a push towards attending hybrid meetings and conferences. Malaysia experienced a drop in physical attendance for conferences, etc. Hybrid meetings and conferences are becoming a norm and staff are expected to attend the online version as it saves on the travelling cost. Philippines' libraries were also more involved in online training as compared to pre-COVID 19 days.

In addition, some local governments are starting to appreciate the role of the libraries. For example, provincial governments in Indonesia are willing to invest more in infrastructure building and internet access for libraries as they saw the local libraries becoming training grounds to impart skills to locals for employment, such as batik making, corpses processing, as well as culture and traditions training on local dances and music etc.

#### **How have communities' perceptions of libraries changed since before the Pandemic?**

The communities' perception of libraries remains, i.e. as the key information provider. The significant switch is from traditional physical visits to online visits. Libraries' loans and visits in this region are almost back to pre-pandemic days. Instead of stepping into physical libraries to look for materials, communities are turning to digital platforms to access and connect to the libraries. For example, the public libraries in Singapore provided free online newspapers for all public during the COVID period and stopped providing print newspapers in all the libraries. The communities have gotten used to the convenience of online newspapers and did not give feedback on the cessation of the print newspapers subscription.

The community also perceives libraries as a training provider. In Myanmar, libraries were involved to provide Zoom training for principals and teachers from rural areas. In Japan, the proliferation of electronic library systems has also

resulted in a more inclusive society as people with disabilities are now able to access the collection remotely. Storytelling and other activities had returned to norm although the number of library visitors had been decreasing. In rural areas where digital access is limited, libraries continued to play the traditional role of providing physical access to books via village libraries or book carts.

### **How have libraries' own perceptions of libraries changed since before the Pandemic?**

There is now a **push for digitisation to allow remote access and other digital initiatives**. One of the common highlights is the change in the information consumption habit. Asia Oceania Libraries noted an accelerated consumption for digital information. In Singapore, digital usage and loans increased tremendously. Digital loans are now on par with physical loans.

Academic libraries and school libraries were also pushed to digitise their content to allow for remote access. Digitization is now taking a lead now and more budget was allocated to purchase scanners and other equipment. Libraries are now able to fast track digital initiatives. It is now easier to justify libraries' involvement in projects e.g. digital transformation, AI, Research Data Management etc. There is also a significant increased demand for document delivery as it now resources on demand. Increasingly, libraries digitised materials for users who are unable to come to libraries physically.

Libraries are **redefining use of library space**. The increase in digital loans brought about an indirect impact on physical space usage. As the community turned to digital resources, there is now an urgent need to review the purpose and relevance of physical library space. Library spaces are now no longer used for books, but they are now community spaces which cannot be connected via Zoom or remotely. In Singapore, a library is also a space for the community to learn new skill sets or even to find jobs. It is also a space to co-create with the community partners to deepen the engagement of the community.

Libraries are **engaging patrons via new media platforms**. The pandemic has forced libraries and librarians to widen the perception and venture beyond the traditional media platforms. New digital platforms provide new avenues to engage the users. For example, the National Library of China worked with new media platforms to launch a series of reading promotional activities such as reading contests. The National Library of Indonesia provided free usage of its zoom account for the public and radio streaming stations managed by librarians. The National Library of Malaysia provided digital access to 13 million digital items. It also launched a TV channel on Youtube to offer various library programmes. In Singapore, libraries were also introduced in social media platforms such as Tik Tok.

Librarians must **develop new competencies**. There is an increased opportunity for library information professionals to expand their network and learn or participate in online events as it involves less or no travelling cost. With the expanded media platforms for engagement, librarians' roles were expanded to include online curators and digital creators.

### **Conclusion**

The pandemic has escalated the shift towards the digital age. As the age of Artificial Intelligence arrived, challenges from misinformation and deep fakes would bring information literacy back to relevancy again. While the traditional role of libraries as an information provider remains, libraries have slowly evolved to be more community inclusive and heightened their responsiveness to sociotechnical changes.

## EUROPE

Answers provided without specifying countries

### **How have governments' perceptions of libraries changed since before the Pandemic?**

- a) Before the pandemic, governments' perceptions of libraries varied widely around the world. While some governments recognized libraries as essential community resources, others viewed them as outdated institutions with little relevance in the digital age. However, since the pandemic, many governments have come to see libraries in a new light. With the sudden shift to remote work and online learning, libraries have played a vital role in providing access to digital resources and supporting communities' educational and informational needs. As a result, many governments have increased funding for libraries and recognized them as crucial partners in promoting digital literacy and bridging the digital divide. This shift in perception has brought renewed attention to the vital role that libraries play in our communities and highlights the importance of continued investment and support for these essential institutions.
- b) Before the pandemic, libraries were primarily repositories of books and information, but now the libraries' crucial role shows as essential community hubs offering a wide range of services beyond traditional book lending. The pandemic accelerated the shift towards digital services and online resources. Governments have increasingly recognized the importance of libraries in providing access to digital technologies, including internet access, computers, and digital literacy training. Governments have increasingly viewed libraries as vital partners in promoting personal development, they also have supported initiatives to transform libraries into vibrant spaces for arts and culture. And on the other hand, libraries have expanded their collections to include diverse cultural materials and resources all in the name of the primal goal of serving our communities.
- c) The pandemic dramatically reshaped governments' perceptions of libraries, emphasising their essential role in supporting communities during times of crisis. As libraries evolve to meet the changing needs of their communities, governments are likely to increasingly recognize and invest in the critical role that libraries play. There are definitely some changes to how libraries are perceived. The pandemic experience makes it evident that libraries need more support to be able to provide information and to be equipped with modern technologies.

### **How have communities' perceptions of libraries changed since before the Pandemic?**

- a) In the wake of the pandemic, there has been a significant shift in the way communities perceive and utilise libraries. Before the pandemic, libraries were primarily seen as a place to borrow books or conduct research. However, in recent times, libraries have become a hub for community engagement and social activities. The pandemic has forced libraries to rethink their services and adopt new technologies to stay relevant to their patrons. Amidst the pandemic, libraries have become more than just a place to borrow books; they have emerged as a source of comfort, support, and essential services for communities in need.
- b) The pandemic has highlighted and reshaped the role of libraries. Many communities have turned to their libraries for assistance, whether it be for technology access, job search resources, or simply a safe and welcoming environment. Libraries have also played a crucial role in bridging the digital divide and ensuring that all community members have access to online resources and services. Libraries have been shown as innovative and adaptable institutions. Communities have. This adaptability has enhanced the reputation of libraries as responsive and forward-thinking organisations that are committed to serving their communities effectively.
- c) The desinformation wave during the pandemic was so overwhelming that for example, our library created a travelling exhibition to promote vaccination and its importance. Another change was that librarians had to defend the right to health and to prevention during the pandemic. The use of Library online resources by readers grew, and the need for digital exhibitions became evident. Also, people not able to stay at home open visited libraries. It is true that libraries were seen for moral support and comfort.

### **How have libraries' own perceptions of libraries changed since before the Pandemic?**

- a) The Pandemic has brought about a significant shift in the way libraries perceive themselves. Libraries have been forced to adapt to new technological advancements, safety protocols, and remote services, which has led to a change in their perception of their own role and value in society. As a result, libraries are now more aware of their strengths and limitations and are better equipped to serve their patrons in the current digital age.
- b) We need to continue to value and support libraries as dynamic and essential community resources. The pandemic has sparked conversations about the future of libraries and the evolving roles they will play in society. Libraries will continue to adapt and evolve to meet the changing needs and expectations of their communities, ensuring that they remain relevant and impactful in the years to come.

- c) The changes forced by the pandemic made libraries see their renewed role, to foster technological advancement and to provide civic services and civic education for the prevention. Actually, the impact of the pandemic was some kind of force to rethink the pace of development and to develop digital connections more actively.

**Any other relevant points concerning the overall theme**

This period showed, that libraries are not only place for education, but the social hub for support and right information

## **LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

**Answers provided by:** Chile, Cuba, El Salvador

### **Chile**

#### **How have governments' perceptions of libraries changed since before the Pandemic?**

There were different perceptions across respondents, with some worried about a decline in perceived relevance (or just continued ignorance), or a lack of desire to fund libraries to fulfil their potential, forcing them to seek resources elsewhere. The idea that they are simply book warehouses, or even spaces that can be occupied in emergency situations remains. Nonetheless, some were more positive, believing that governments recognised libraries' work to support families, combat inequality, and to adapt to an online environment. One respondent noted a trend to investing more in bigger regional libraries, rather than networks on the ground.

#### **How have communities' perceptions of libraries changed since before the Pandemic?**

Responses were again mixed, but in general more positive, with indications of growing interest in reading, appreciation of adaptability (and of digital services in particular), and of their value as spaces for socialising and study (not just as storehouses). The fact of having libraries closed made people miss the opportunity to visit – people felt more ownership also. At the same time, there were also those who felt that libraries had become more invisible, and were simply not understood or valued, not least in a digital age.

#### **How have libraries' perceptions of themselves changed since before the Pandemic?**

A number of responses focused more on general trends, rather than those in perceptions, but crucial points focused on perceptions of a greater urgency in taking up digital technologies and a sense of agency in using these. Some suggested growing awareness of libraries' role in promoting citizenship, as a community centre and meeting point, and our need to be flexible and innovative. One person argued that libraries had had to learn to get out of their comfort zone, and be much more attentive to social needs, as well as to work collaboratively.

### **Cuba**

In the Cuban case, especially public and school libraries that are maintained by local, provincial and state governments, the perceptions of these institutions regarding libraries have not changed since before the pandemic. Libraries continue to be information units that provide a service to communities to broaden their general culture, contribute to citizens' learning and improve their quality of life. By virtue of this contribution to communities, governments

continue to subsidise them financially so that they can meet their book needs and increase their collections, maintain their buildings, pay the salaries of library staff, run socio-cultural development programmes and acquire technological resources.

It should be noted that during the pandemic, the libraries carried out various community actions led by their librarians, such as: distributing food to the elderly and vulnerable people who could not leave their homes, sanitising isolation centres with convalescents from Covid 19, activities to promote reading and culture in vaccination centres, and bringing books to people's homes. In addition, the use of social networks facilitated communication and the sending of relevant and timely information to members of the community. All of this enhanced the positive perception of citizens in their communities towards librarians.

Perceptions of libraries have not changed since the pandemic, but have been enriched because libraries are no longer just centres that radiate culture and lifelong learning, but also institutions of solidarity that in difficult situations are able to expand their vocation of service and selfless collaboration, to strengthen the spirit of the people who make up the community.

## **El Salvador**

### **How have governments' perceptions of libraries changed since before the Pandemic?**

In the case of El Salvador it has been for the better, as there has been considerable investment in libraries, especially the donation from China for the National Library of El Salvador-BIENES with \$54,000 in resources, collections, technology, etc., the creation of National Libraries, the National Reading Plan, Cubes, etc.

### **How have communities' perceptions of libraries changed since before the Pandemic?**

It has changed positively to the point that according to an interview I recently conducted with the Vice-Minister of Culture, since its inauguration, 273,000 users have been received.

### **How have libraries' perceptions of themselves changed since before the Pandemic?**

Previously they were little-used spaces, but since the government of the current President of El Salvador. Mr. Nayib Bukele raised the category at the same time with the signing of an agreement where many professionals were hired . There is a sense of being part of a megaproject.

## MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

*Answers supplied by Eiman Al Shamari, Reviewed by Dr Saif Al Jabri, based on regional experiences*

### **How have governments' perceptions of libraries changed since before the Pandemic?**

In recent years, there has been a marked shift in the perception of libraries by governments across the globe. Once viewed only as sites for quiet reading and study, as well as repositories for books, libraries are now recognized as critical community hubs that deliver essential services beyond traditional lending. The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored this vital role, revealing the significance of libraries in supporting digital access and literacy.

Libraries have adapted to the digital age, providing virtual services, digital resources, and opportunities for lifelong learning. The pandemic has highlighted the importance of libraries in bridging the digital divide, leading to greater support and funding for digital infrastructure and resources. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, libraries have proven to be essential public services that support lifelong learning, digital inclusion, and community resilience. Governments worldwide have shifted their focus to all types of libraries, including central, public, and national ones, recognizing their role in promoting information literacy and ensuring access to trustworthy sources of information.

In contrast, some countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region have yet to recognize the critical role of libraries as community hubs and drivers of digital access, literacy, and lifelong learning. Despite the pandemic's impact, the governments in these regions have not changed their perception of libraries as mere repositories of books and quiet places for reading and study.

In conclusion, the pandemic has emphasised the importance of libraries as essential public services that provide critical support to communities. Libraries have adapted to the digital age, providing virtual services, digital resources, and opportunities for lifelong learning. Governments worldwide have recognized this and increased their support and funding for digital infrastructure and resources. However, in some regions such as MENA, there is still much work to be done to recognize the vital role of libraries in supporting community resilience and bridging the digital divide.

### **How have communities' perceptions of libraries changed since before the Pandemic?**

The perception of libraries by communities has undergone significant changes since the onset of the pandemic. While libraries have always been highly esteemed for their educational and cultural contributions, the pandemic period has expanded this perception, highlighting their role as essential community

support systems. Libraries have evolved into critical access points for public health information, virtual education, and social services, thereby strengthening the bond between the library and the community, who now see them as indispensable resources for support and connection during times of crisis.

The increased reliance on libraries for a wide range of services has elevated their status within communities, fostering a deeper appreciation for their adaptability and commitment to serving public needs. The communities' perception of libraries has been overwhelmingly positive and encouraging, as they recognize the crucial role that libraries play in promoting literacy and a love of reading in communities. Moreover, having a public library in a community improves the quality of life by providing free access to knowledge.

However, it is essential for libraries to promote their role and services to the community to ensure that people are aware of the valuable resources they offer. By doing so, libraries can continue to enhance their significance within communities and fulfil their crucial role as community support systems.

### **How have libraries' own perceptions of libraries changed since before the Pandemic?**

The self-perception of libraries has undergone a significant transformation since the onset of the pandemic. Faced with unprecedented challenges, libraries have reassessed their roles within communities. As a result, they have embraced innovation and flexibility to cater to evolving needs.

This period of rapid adaptation has led libraries to view themselves as agile community centres, with the capacity to provide a broad spectrum of services. These services range from digital lending and online programming to social support services. Libraries have recognized the significance of digital services and the need to expand their role in promoting digital literacy and access. This self-reflection has prompted libraries to prioritise inclusivity, access, and community engagement.

Libraries now acknowledge their role in disseminating knowledge and providing access to it. They have become the appropriate place for learning, recreation, study, and community service. However, librarians still need extensive training in acquiring communication skills and professional training programs.

In conclusion, the impact of the pandemic has prompted libraries to reevaluate their roles and adapt to meet the changing needs of their communities. This has resulted in a shift in perception towards more agile and versatile community centres, prioritising inclusivity, access, and community engagement. As such, libraries have become critical components of the social

fabric, providing essential services and resources for individuals and communities.

### **Other relevant points**

The COVID-19 pandemic has spurred conversations about the future of libraries and their evolving role in our communities. Libraries have demonstrated resilience and innovation in adapting to the challenges of the pandemic. As a result, there is a growing recognition of the need for sustainable funding and policies that support their expanded services and digital transformation.

Librarians have been able to think creatively and innovate solutions for their operations that have saved time and resources in libraries, such as the automation of many tasks. This difficult time has also fostered greater collaboration between libraries, government agencies, and community organisations, highlighting the potential for libraries to become leaders in community development and digital innovation. It underscores the importance of working together towards these shared goals.

It is evident that libraries have been supporting all levels of government for years by providing access to government resources, information, and education on-site. Governments should recognize the vital role that libraries play in community engagement, sustainability, and economic development, and work to support them in return.

## NORTH AMERICA

**Answers provided by:** Canada, United States

To address the question posed, our NARD working group feels that the pandemic has not changed government's, communities, and libraries' perception of libraries but the pandemic has exaggerated the response and exposed severe cracks in the social fabric of both countries.

The pandemic has highlighted and exaggerated the escalating **homelessness, mental health, addiction and toxic drug supply crisis** across Canadian and American cities and towns of all sizes. Libraries serve everyone and as a result libraries are pivoting to adapt to the social impact. Libraries are partnering with other social services (social workers, nurses, security guards, etc.) but the **impact on staffing and budgets is real.**

### Canada

- Canada is not as polarised as the USA politically; however, it is moving in a similar direction as the USA in certain regions. The western provinces and some rural areas of Canada are more conservative. There is an "anti-woke" movement and pushback against gender identity issues which is gaining strength. Certain communities are pushing for book banning and restricted services.
- In general, Canadian regional and federal governments continue to be supportive but **inflation** is a major issue. Cuts to library budgets in both public and academic libraries post pandemic is affecting all libraries.
- Canadian Libraries are valued. Our large urban public libraries have experienced [new building projects and strong media coverage](#). [Librarianship.ca](#) provides a daily summary of Canadian library news. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) did a great national podcast on the work underway in the Edmonton Public Library to support library users in crisis:
  - [Books, internet and naloxone: In-house nurse supports people in crisis at Edmonton library | CBC Radio](#). Please note that our North American Regional Division Committee member, Pilar Martinez is the CEO of the Edmonton Public Library.

### USA

- Extremely bifurcated and polarised political landscape across the USA. States such as Texas, Florida, West Virginia, Oklahoma, Arkansas and other "red states" have taken legislative action against libraries. Jim Neal reports that public and school librarians, teachers and museum staff in



[West Virginia are being criminalised](#). A bill that could lead to librarians facing jail times heads to the full House for vote.

- Book banning, censorship, freedom of speech restrictions, funding cuts, aggressive reaction to library leadership, increased activism by library boards and community groups to restrict services such as Drag Queen Story Hours was in place prior to the pandemic and continued throughout the pandemic.
- The current ALA president, Emily Drabinsky, in her role for one year faces extreme reaction to her tweet. Many states are pushing for ALA to be defunded. The following news coverage highlights the polarisation of news coverage: [NBC News coverage](#) [Fox News response](#):

## **SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA**

Answers provided by: Benin, Botswana, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Namibia, Niger, Rwanda

### **How have governments' perceptions of libraries changed since before the Pandemic?**

In Benin, there has been positive change with pre-COVID flagship projects revived, and support for libraries as centres of excellence. Similarly in Ghana, there was recognition of libraries as vital community hubs for education and skills development, with support for the development of services beyond library walls.

Meanwhile in Lesotho and Botswana, change was focused on libraries in higher education, where there was an embrace for blended learning and online resource provision and teaching, with libraries seen as having a key role here. Similarly in Niger, in contrast with other library types, there was also a boost in the image of libraries considered as educational centres doing better than others.

Elsewhere, change was less marked, such as in Namibia and Rwanda. Kenya had seen some devolution of powers and transformation of community libraries into public libraries.

### **How have communities' perceptions of libraries changed since before the Pandemic?**

In Namibia, there were more positive perceptions of libraries, which were increasingly seen as trusted, and valued for internet access provision. Similarly in Ghana, there was growing appreciation for libraries as crucial centres for digital literacy and online education and recognition of libraries as essential for combating misinformation and providing accurate information. Kenyans also tended to acknowledge more strongly the role of libraries as sources of relevant and authentic information, as well as seeing them as safe spaces for learning and empowerment for all.

Elsewhere, changes in user habits were recorded, with Botswanans now preferring online resources and services, something that was also noted in Ghana and Benin, where physical visits seemed to have declined. Finally, both Rwanda and Lesotho reported no real change in perceptions of libraries.

### **How have libraries' own perceptions of libraries changed since before the Pandemic?**

Common points across many answers were a greater readiness among libraries to see themselves as innovators, and so try new things, including taking risks, notably in Benin and Ghana, while Namibia was now seeing more investment in librarian skills development. In particular, there was also a new level of comfort

in using technology (with libraries seeing themselves therefore as less just about books), with Botswana, Ghana, Lesotho and Namibia for example noting a growing ability to support online learning, and Kenya highlighting a willingness (after some resistance!) to embrace eServices.

More broadly, Rwanda noted that librarians were more conscious about their role in the development of the country, and that indeed this has supported an effort to build a national library association and library education infrastructure. Similarly in Ghana, libraries better understood their importance in education, information access and community development, leading to more advocacy. Interestingly, Namibia recorded that librarians had taken hope from the hope placed in them by communities, and so were more confident than before. Niger too noted a more progressive mindset among libraries than before.

### **Other relevant points**

Ghana underlined growing sophistication among libraries post-COVID not just in using technology but also in advocating and getting involved in other public initiatives, such as around health.