



**Interview with Michiel Kolman
SDG Book Club**

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KENNEALLY: In 2030, the Earth is expected to be home to 8.5 billion inhabitants, a population rise of more than 1 billion from 2019. According to World Bank figures, more than a billion people have lifted themselves out of extreme poverty over the past 25 years, and the global poverty rate is now lower than it has ever been in recorded history.

Welcome to Copyright Clearance Center's podcast series. I'm Christopher Kenneally for Beyond the Book. The United Nations General Assembly in 2015 set a collection of Sustainable Development Goals, known as SDGs, for the year 2030 that begin with no poverty and include gender equality, clean water and sanitation, and affordable and clean energy.

Quality education is one other goal, one that the International Publishers Association is supporting with creation of a global children's book club. Michiel Kolman, IPA presidential envoy for diversity and inclusion in the publishing industry, joins me on the line from Amsterdam with the details. Welcome back to Beyond the Book, Michiel.

KOLMAN: It's great to be back, Chris.

KENNEALLY: We're looking forward to chatting with you about this interesting development announced in April. It's a partnership that the IPA has established with the United Nations. You're creating what's known as the SDG Book Club – SDG, as we said, is for Sustainable Development Goals. Tell us about details.

KOLMAN: Yes, I'm very happy to do so. The IPA – the International Publishers Association – and the UN has had a pretty good relationship for many, many years. So we came together, thought, what could we do together? And the best thing we thought of was a book club around the SDGs for children – so for kids around the age of six to 12. You can imagine you're a young boy in Peru, and you can read in your own language – in Spanish, for instance – about clean water and sanitation. Or you're a young girl in China, and you can read in Chinese about gender equality. So that's what we'd like to achieve.



And the book club will be – every month, we announce books around one specific SDG. There are 17. So we started in April, and we will finish next year in September of 2020, which is actually the fifth anniversary of the SDGs. The launch took place at Bologna Children’s Book Fair, and there we announced the selected books in English, in Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian, and Spanish – so the UN languages. And it was around SDG number one, no poverty.

It was, of course, an initiative by the UN and the IPA, but in the meantime, we had many more partners who had joined us in this initiative. For instance, there is IBBY, the International Board on Books for Young People. We’re happy to have IFLA there as well, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions. And then the Bologna Children’s Book Fair itself was also represented. And on the booksellers side is the European and International Booksellers Federation. So all the key players in the value chain in our industry are represented, because when they heard about the initiative, they thought, yes, this is something we would be very happy to join.

KENNEALLY: Publishers, booksellers, and authors, all those listening to our podcast, if they would like to become involved or to support the program, what are the kinds of things they can do?

KOLMAN: Absolutely. So what we see already with the launch of the first books on SDG number one about no poverty – we love local activities. So when people want to start their own book club locally, do that with the local bookstore or the library close by. In that sense, it will really come alive.

We also call on the publishers to make the books available so that we can send them to our selection committee. We work with a longlist, and out of the longlist, we select a shortlist, which will always be published on a monthly basis. And we need, of course, the books for our selection committee.

What I did not anticipate, but I find really an interesting concept – so the feedback on the launch is that people come to us and said, well, I’m an author. I would like to publish something around the SDGs. Are there any publishers that can help me? So if publishers would embrace this, develop in house their own editorial approach to the SDGs, and also support authors in publishing more around the SDGs, that will be great.

KENNEALLY: You mentioned these are books that are published in the UN’s official languages. But of course, the world is full of languages, many hundreds of those. Are other non-covered countries, non-covered languages, becoming involved as well?



KOLMAN: Absolutely. I already asked my fellow Dutch publishers to consider this. So we would like to launch an SDG book club in Dutch with books which are written for kids here in the Netherlands. I have had some discussions also with the Norwegians, and I think they're definitely going to embrace it and hope to have their book club in Norwegian up and running before the IPA Congress next year in Lillehammer. So from other main languages, like Turkish, for instance, I also heard some stories that they are considering doing the similar book club approach, but then, of course, in Turkish, with Turkish children's books. So I'm very happy that people are embracing this.

And you're quite right. The six UN languages, they reach hundreds of millions, but not everybody. And as a child, you want to read books, of course, in your mother tongue.

KENNEALLY: What does it mean to publishers and to publisher organizations like the IPA to be partnering with the United Nations and other international organizations?

KOLMAN: I think it's a beautiful way where publishers can show that they are engaged in what I would call the big issues that affect the planet. You could see the SDGs as a bit like a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people on the planet, and I think publishers have to play a role in that as well.

So when I launched this concept, I was actually at the SDG Leaders Summit last year in September at the UN in New York, just at the eve of the General Assembly. And when I talked about this concept to the other SDG leaders, they really liked it, because it's quite concrete. You have actual books in your hands for children around the SDGs. And I think that's a beautiful contribution that the publishers can make.

KENNEALLY: And we mentioned that when it comes to that first SDG, to achieve a world without poverty by 2030, there's been a tremendous amount of progress already made toward that goal. Yet there are those who still live making less than a dollar a day. How is this project, do you think, going to help move the needle further so that we can perhaps achieve a world without poverty by 2030?

KOLMAN: Yeah, I think here we're investing in the next generation. If you want to achieve true sustainability also around issues like poverty, you can only do that if you have the support of the young, the support of the next generation. So this awareness of key issues through children's books I think is a very powerful way to achieve that.



KENNEALLY: Finally, you are in this very special role. You're the former president of the IPA and now presidential envoy for diversity and inclusion. How is that special role fitting with this particular project?

KOLMAN: I think the IPA is a very special trade organization, because it's also an NGO and it has a human rights mandate. Of course, people know us very much around the freedom to publish. It's one of the key pillars of the IPA, and we definitely will fight for freedom to publish on a global scale. But I feel this is also a perfect fit with the IPA with its human rights mandate. So supporting SDGs or fighting for diversity and inclusion within the publishing industry, but also, for instance, in the kind of books that we publish, I think we can contribute a lot to those global goals, so to say. And I'm very happy that I personally can contribute a bit to that, as well.

KENNEALLY: Well, we are very happy to have you join us today on Beyond the Book, Michiel Kolman, to tell us about the SDG Book Club, a partnership between the IPA and the UN. We will link to more information about the book club on our own website. In the meantime, we are very happy you could join us today, Michiel Kolman, presidential envoy for diversity and inclusion at the IPA.

KOLMAN: Thank you, Chris. Great to be here.

KENNEALLY: Beyond the Book is produced by Copyright Clearance Center. Our co-producer and recording engineer is Jeremy Brieske of Burst Marketing. Subscribe to the program wherever you go for podcasts and follow us on Twitter and Facebook. The complete Beyond the Book podcast archive is available at beyondthebook.com. I'm Christopher Kenneally. Thanks for listening and join us again soon on CCC's Beyond the Book.

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