

Libraries and the SDGs - a Powerful Advocacy Opportunity

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Article history: Received: 2 April, 2023; Reviewed: 23 April: Accepted: 15 May, 2023

Abstract

2023 marks the mid-way mark of the ambitious and transformational 2030 Development Agenda. IFLA has strongly advocated for libraries – the role that they can play in supporting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), but that libraries are already doing so much to support the SDGs. At this critical time in the achievement of the Agenda, it is important that all libraries continue to advocate for their work and actively seek collaborators. Whilst Nepal is represented in the IFLA Library Map of the World, there are opportunities to extend the visibility and reach of the work of the libraries of Nepal.

Keywords: *Library Advocacy; Sustainable Development Goals, Library Map of the World*

On 25 September 2015, the 193 countries of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly adopted the 2030 Development Agenda titled *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. With a timeframe of 2030, it is important to note that in 2023 the half-way mark to this ambitious and transformational vision has been reached. This mid-way mark provides an opportunity to reflect on what has been achieved, but also to accelerate the work to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that represent the 2030 Agenda.

The 2030 Development Agenda, and specifically the SDGs, is essentially a call to action. It provides a framework to guide the work of countries, organisations, institutions, communities and individuals in contributing to long-term sustainability. There are opportunities for libraries to articulate and demonstrate their contributions to achieving the SDGs.

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There are 17 SDGs. They are broad and interconnected, with each goal setting targets to track achievement. The SDGs aim to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all. It is important to note, that the 17 goals apply to all countries – both developed and developing.

The Millennium Goals, that preceded the SDGs, focussed on developing countries. In contrast, the SDGs represent goals for *both* developed *and* developing countries. Afterall, the sustainability of our world is dependent upon all countries working together.

The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) recognised the importance of the 2030 Development Agenda. IFLA was actively involved with the creation of the UN 2030 Agenda. It advocated for the inclusion of access to information, safeguarding of cultural heritage, universal literacy, and information communication technologies (ICT) in the framework.

IFLA's position is that access to information is essential in achieving the SDGs, and that libraries are not only key partners for governments, but they are already contributing to progress towards the achievement of the 17 Goals.

Libraries offer diverse information resources that can help individuals and communities make informed decisions on issues related to the SDGs, such as climate change, health, education, and gender equality. By making information accessible to everyone, libraries help bridge the knowledge gap and empower people to act on issues that affect their lives and the world around them.

Promoting education and literacy is essential for achieving many of the SDGs. Libraries offer a range of educational resources, including books, online databases, but also training programs and learning opportunities that can help individuals acquire the knowledge and skills they need to improve their lives and contribute to sustainable development.

Libraries also contribute to social and economic development by fostering community engagement and entrepreneurship. Libraries provide spaces for community members to gather, share ideas, and collaborate on projects that promote the SDGs. Libraries can also support entrepreneurship by offering resources and training programs for small business owners and entrepreneurs.

The SDGs and the 2030 Development Agenda therefore provide a strong advocacy framework for libraries – to demonstrate how libraries are already making a valuable contribution. But, by collaborating and partnering with other organisations, there can be an even stronger contribution and outcome.

Supporting Voluntary National Reviews:

Each country will need to undertake a minimum of two Voluntary National Reviews between 2015 and 2030. In the Reviews, countries will be actively seeking examples of how their country has contributed to the SDGs. This reporting provides the opportunity for libraries to share their achievements and support the work of their nation. It is imperative that library leaders connect with the key players in their jurisdictions to advocate for the work being done by libraries, but also actively explore new opportunities to partner and extend their work.

In 2017, Sher Bahadur Deuba, Prime Minister and Chair of the High-Level SDG Steering Committee, made a commitment to the SDGs. In the government report titled, Nepal's Sustainable Development Goals Status and Roadmap: 2016-2030, he stated "Nepal is committed to pursuing and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030." Since then, Nepal has presented two voluntary national reviews; in 2017 and 2020. As Nepal progresses its pursuit of the SDGs, it is important that libraries within Nepal take the opportunity to profile their work in future reports.

IFLA tools to support libraries:

IFLA has developed two key tools to assist libraries to tell the story of their work to support the SDGs: the Library Map of the World and the Storytelling Manual.

As an online resource the Library Map of the World provides statistics, country-level data and a worldwide comparison of different performance metrics by region. It provides information on all types of libraries within each country and an initial set of performance metrics. Since 2017, there has been strong data available on libraries in Nepal. In fact, the data available on Nepal in the Countries section of the Library Map of the World is some of the strongest for the Asia Oceania region. The Nepalese data includes metrics, policy and legislation, details of professional journals and education opportunities.

An important feature of the Library Map of the World is the SDG stories which demonstrate how libraries are contributing to the SDGs and how they partner in their local communities. These stories are essentially case studies that document achievements, but also provide inspiration. They demonstrate the potential impact that libraries can have on their communities and nations.

The Storytelling Manual is a guide to support librarians and libraries in their advocacy efforts. The Library Map of the World (LMW) team have compiled some tips and useful information to assist in the documenting compelling stories about library activities, projects and programs, and their impact on communities.

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Nepal's library community is playing an active role in promoting the SDGs and creating a more sustainable future for the country. There are, however, currently no stories from Nepal in the Library Map of the World. I encourage all Nepalese library workers to consider submitting a story to the Library Map of the World. The teams at IFLA are willing to assist in documenting the great work being progressed in Nepalese libraries to support the SDGs.

I also encourage the Nepalese library community to actively seek out opportunities to profile the important work being undertaken in libraries so that it can be profiled in future Voluntary National Reviews for Nepal.

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