

Libraries for Sustainable Development: Vision and Action

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Abstract

Libraries are not just spaces; these are places for advocacy—the stirrers of intellectual conversations and thoughtful engagement. Increased access to information and knowledge across society, assisted by the availability of information and communications technologies (ICTs), supports sustainable development and improves people’s lives. This paper provides an overview on the role of libraries in promoting the United Nations 2030 Agenda. It also provides a brief introduction on how libraries can drive progress across the 17 sustainable development goals. Although public libraries are at the forefront of this endeavor, sustainable development is a global concern that involves even academic libraries.

Background

In September 2015, the heads of state and government and high representatives decided on new global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—a historic decision on a comprehensive, far-reaching, and people-centered set of universal and transformative goals and targets, for the full implementation by 2030. This agenda is a plan of action for people, planet, and prosperity.

The UN 2030 Agenda is an inclusive, integrated framework of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) spanning economic, environmental and social development (Figure 1).

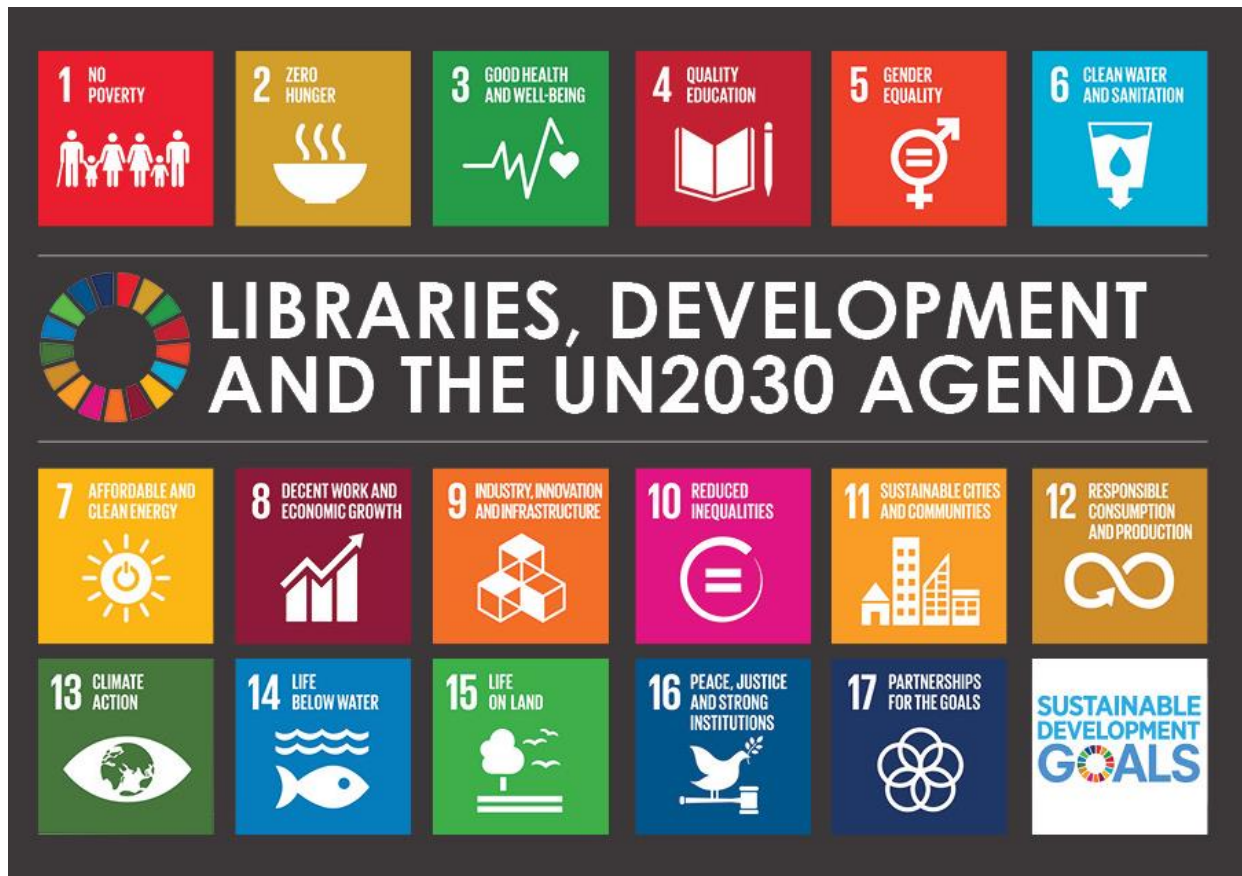


Fig 1. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Academic Libraries in the UN 2030 Agenda

The International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) believes that increasing access to information and knowledge across society, assisted by emerging technology, supports sustainable development and improves people’s lives. Libraries in the digital age play a key role in connecting people, information and technology. Thus, the inclusion of libraries is essential in meeting the global UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Beyond the stacks of books and codes in computers, the library is a space for conversations, an avenue for actions to be honed. One of the changes occurring is the use of space to support the library’s activities (Turner, Welsch and

Reynold, 2013) and facilitate learning where people come together to share materials and learn new skills. This is the concept that introduced “learning spaces”. The terms “learning spaces”, “learning commons”, and “information commons” have often been used interchangeably within the arena of library and information management discourse. The variations of the term “information commons,” information hub, information village, information arcade, knowledge navigation center, cybrary, information gallery, electronic information center, research commons, technology commons, knowledge commons, and academic commons acknowledges that libraries have developed over time, both semantically and physically.

Although public libraries are expected to address the SDGs, the university research and academic libraries also support these goals by promoting digital, media and information literacy and skills. Academic libraries provide resources; translate complex data into publicly accessible information, closing gaps in access to information. Through open access in scholarly communication and through collaboration libraries are advancing digital inclusion. Every academic library serves as the heart of the research and academic community.

At present, IFLA’s initiatives are within four main activities:

1. Raise awareness of the UN Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
2. Change the mindset to achieve the vision of libraries as critical community assets
3. Campaign for Libraries in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
4. Develop evidence to demonstrate how access to information (A2I) and libraries contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined in the United Nations 2030 Development Agenda

IFLA (2016) reported that more than a million parliamentary, national, university, research, school, and special libraries that ensure information and the skills to use are available to everyone, making them critical institutions for all in the digital age. Activities include providing ICT infrastructure, helping people develop the capacity to use information effectively, and preserving information to ensure ongoing access for future generations. Libraries provide an established, trusted network of local institutions that can reach out effectively to all parts of the population.

Fifty countries has made an agreement with IFLA to work towards getting libraries included in their respective National Development Plans (Knowledge Hub, 2017) but Kazakhstan is not a part of it. Nothing has been done in Central or the least nothing has been reported.

Looking Ahead

The fulfilment of these goals makes libraries more responsive to the needs in the changing times. This advocacy requires retooling of leadership and communication skills for librarians as well as deeper cognizance of the policies, advocacies and lobbying. Leaders in library and information services should see this global agenda to be approached in the local context (Kim & Alenzuela, 2016). Institutionalization of advocacies, that is, creating laws and implementing guidelines that are binding to strengthen the support for SDGs and other library advocacies begins with learning how to do it. Strategies and key message that access to information is an essential tool in national development and global concerns is stronger when discussed in the academia where future leaders are honed. The global vision of a sustainable society begins with actions.

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