

How Sri Lankan Librarians Perceive SDGs

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Abstract

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2015, is working around the world to achieve 17 goals and 169 targets and 232 indicators to end poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and tackle climate change by 2030. It is a universal declaration to the nations of the world and all countries & all stakeholders, acting in collaborative partnership with this plan. Governments and other institutions will be responsible for developing and implementing national plans and strategies to achieve them. As knowledge institutions, libraries are key institutions to help achieve the SDGs. Therefore, the library community in each country stands ready to show how libraries serve as partners to help meet the SDGs and local development needs. Hence, the main objective of this study was to find out the perception of librarians' attainment of the SDGs in Sri Lanka. The study population is comprised of library professionals and information personnel who work in all types of libraries in Sri Lanka, and it includes over 600 active members of the Sri Lanka Library Association. In this study carried out by the Research Division of the National Library and Documentation Services Board, an online survey method was used, and data were collected via an online questionnaire (Google form). The entire population is considered as the sample. Two hundred fifty library and information personnel representing the National Library, public libraries, academic libraries, and other institutional libraries in Sri Lanka responded and the collected data were analyzed using MS Excel. The study finds that awareness of each SDG is quite variable, although 65.6% of library and information personnel were aware of the SDGs as a whole. However, they were not familiar with the content (targets and indicators) and weren't aware of how the library could contribute to achieving SDGs. Among the respondents, 65% of the libraries have not followed or implemented any immediate or long-term plans or relevant programmes for the attainment of the SDGs. This study recommends that the National Library of Sri Lanka and the Sri Lanka Library Association, as the professional associations, raise awareness about the SDGs and educate library professionals about how various programmes can be implemented to help achieve the SDGs. It is also suggested to give opportunities for library staff to attend conferences, workshops, training and related programmes on SDGs; to establish a SDG corner in every library to collect and disseminate information on SDGs; and to allow the library community to engage in such programmes. Also, with the goal of attaining the SDGs by 2030, governments and non-governmental organizations should support libraries in providing efficient library services. The study concludes that librarians must update themselves on SDGs and set indicators related to each relevant target to accomplish the task.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals, Awareness, Perceptions, Librarians, Sri Lanka

Introduction

In 2015, the UN General Assembly approved the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals, 169 targets, and 232 indicators. These 17 goals (No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Good Health & Well-Being, Quality Education, Gender Equality, Clean Water & Sanitation, Affordable & Clean Energy, Decent Work & Economic Growth, Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure, Reduce Inequality, Sustainable Cities & Communities, Responsible Consumption & Consumption, Climate Action, Life below Water, Life on Land, Peace and Justice & Partnership for the Goals) were adopted for the sustained development of nations. The Sustainable Development Programme for 15 years is planned in line with the transition from the Millennium Development Goals. The goal of sustainable development is to bring in new investments in the private and public sectors. This agenda, which has been accepted by all member states of the United Nations, provides a roadmap for UN member states for sustainable development, social inclusion, and equality.

As a result of the aforementioned, citizens will require access to the right information at the right time in order to be informed and combat these challenges where possible. This is due to the fact that knowledge and information are recognized as facilitating the proper development of skills and knowledge for sustainable livelihood (Shafack, 2020). Similarly, IFLA stated that increased access to information and knowledge, underpinned by universal literacy, is essential to sustainable development. Hence, libraries are expected to mitigate these gaps by providing access to the right information. One of the SDG goals is that all libraries should play a significant role in providing access to data, research, and knowledge that supports informed research and public access to information about climate change (IFLA, 2018). Also, libraries around the world are at the forefront of providing information for discovery, innovation, the repository of professional skills, and research for sustainable development. The role of libraries and librarians cannot be overemphasized in the actualization of the attainment of the SDGs as public and educational libraries are the major or only providers of such access (IFLA, 2018).

Thus, libraries should be aware of their people by promoting literacy, offering free access to information, having welcoming spaces at the heart of communities, advancing digital inclusion through access to Information and Communication Technology (ICT), Internet connection and skills, promote innovation, creativity and access to the world's knowledge for current and future generations, providing access to data, research and knowledge that supports informed research and public access to information about climate change, preservation of indigenous knowledge – which includes local decision-making about fundamental aspects of life including hunting, fishing, land use, water management, making internet access available to the community at no or low cost (Bradley, 2016). Therefore, librarians must continue to promote the citizenry's awareness and perception of the SDGs by making important contributions to local, national and international development in order to end poverty, hunger, and insurgency and promote equitable and quality education. The lifelong learning process of the 2030 Agenda must be upheld by relevant stakeholders like librarians and information providers (International Journal of Library and Information Science, 2018). Accordingly, this study intends to look at Sri Lankan librarian's and information professionals' awareness and perception of SDG attainment.

Objectives

The main objective of this paper is to examine Awareness and Perceptions of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) among Libraries in Sri Lanka. This main objective will be addressed by the following four specific objectives:

- to examine the librarians' awareness and perceptions of the attainment of SDGs in Sri Lanka.
- to determine the contribution of Libraries in Sri Lanka to the implementation of the SDGs
- to identify collaborations between libraries and other relevant institutions/organizations in implementing the SDGs
- to identify the challenges/issues that libraries face when implementing & achieving the SDGs

Methodology

This study was carried out by the Research Division of the National Library and Documentation Services Board, Sri Lanka. An online survey method was used, and data were collected via an online questionnaire (Google Form) as the main research instrument. The questionnaire was divided into four sections, including basic information about the library, awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the contribution made by libraries/librarians in the challenges and issues of implementation of the SDGs, and challenges/issues faced by libraries and librarians when achieving the SDGs. Library professionals and information personnel who work in all types of libraries in Sri Lanka (over 600 active members of SLLA) are considered the entire population and the sample. Two hundred fifty library and information personnel representing the National Library, public libraries, academic libraries, and other institutional libraries in Sri Lanka responded to the questionnaire. The collected data were analyzed using MS Excel.

Table 01 : Representation rate of respondents

Type of the library	Representation rate (%)
National Library of Sri Lanka	2.8
University Library	3.2
Public Library	84
Research/Special Library	3.2
Pirivena Library	0.8
Teaching College / National Educational College Library	0.8
Technical College/Colleges of Technology Library	0.8
Government Library – (Ministry, Department, Cooperation, Board, Authority)	2.8
Other Libraries	1.6

Source: Survey Data

Results

Awareness on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Table 02 : Awareness/knowledge on SDGs

Statement	Responses		
	Aware	Not aware	Not sure
Are you aware of the SDG goals introduced by the UN in 2015?	164 (65.6%)	47 (18.8%)	39 (15.6%)
Are you aware of Sustainable Development targets and global indicators along with each goal as given in the Agenda?	128 (51.2%)	86 (34.4%)	36 (14.4%)
Are you aware of the completion year of this SDGs implementation by the UN?	123 (49.2%)	86 (34.4%)	41 (16.4%)
Are you aware of the Sustainable Development Council of Sri Lanka?	102 (40.8%)	111 (44.4%)	37 (14.8%)
Whether you have attended to the conferences & workshops about SDGs.	59 (23.6%)	187 (74.8%)	4 (1.6%)

Source: Survey data

Table 02 shows the level of awareness among librarians and information professionals of the UN 2030 sustainable development agenda. The results in Table 02 showed that, out of a total of 250 respondents, only 164 (65.6%) librarians & information professionals were extremely aware of the SDGs introduced by the UN in 2015, and 47(18.8%) were not aware, while (39) 15.6% did not have a proper idea about such an agenda. Also, it has been mentioned that 128 (51.2%) respondents were aware of Sustainable Development targets and global indicators along with each goal as given in the agenda, and 36 (14.4%) of the total were not aware of these targets and indicators. Table 02 revealed that 123 (49.2%) librarians and information professionals were aware of the completion year of this SDGs implementation by the UN as 2030. However, the majority of respondents 127 (51%) were not aware of this statement. Respondents were asked whether they were aware of the Sustainable Development Council of Sri Lanka. It was clearly noted that over 44% (111) of librarians and information professionals were not aware of the Sustainable Development Council, and 41% (102) of the respondents were aware of this. As given in Table 02, out of a total of 250 respondents, over 75% (187) of the respondents had not attended conferences & workshops about SDGs. However, the lack of knowledge regarding the SDGs was identified as the main reason for the respondents' low awareness, according to the survey results.

Awareness of each Sustainable Development Goal by librarians & information professionals

Table 03 : Awareness of each Sustainable Development Goal by librarians & information professionals

Sustainable Development Goals	Extremely aware	Moderately aware	Somewhat aware	Not aware at all
	(%)			
Goal - 01	14.8	41.6	36	7.6
Goal- 02	22.4	36.8	35.2	5.6
Goal - 03	24.8	36.8	31.2	7.2
Goal - 04	24.8	45.2	24.4	5.6
Goal - 05	24.8	43.2	26.4	5.6
Goal - 06	25.6	40.4	27.2	6.8
Goal - 07	11.6	40.8	33.2	14.4
Goal - 08	13.2	41.2	34.8	10.8
Goal - 09	12	40	34	14
Goal - 10	12	38.4	34.8	14.8
Goal - 11	16.8	32.8	33.2	17.2
Goal - 12	16	35.6	34.8	13.6
Goal - 13	21.2	32	32.8	14.8
Goal - 14	16.4	32	30.4	22.4
Goal - 15	11.6	35.2	34	19.2
Goal - 16	10.8	43.6	30	15.6
Goal - 17	8.4	38.4	30.8	22.4

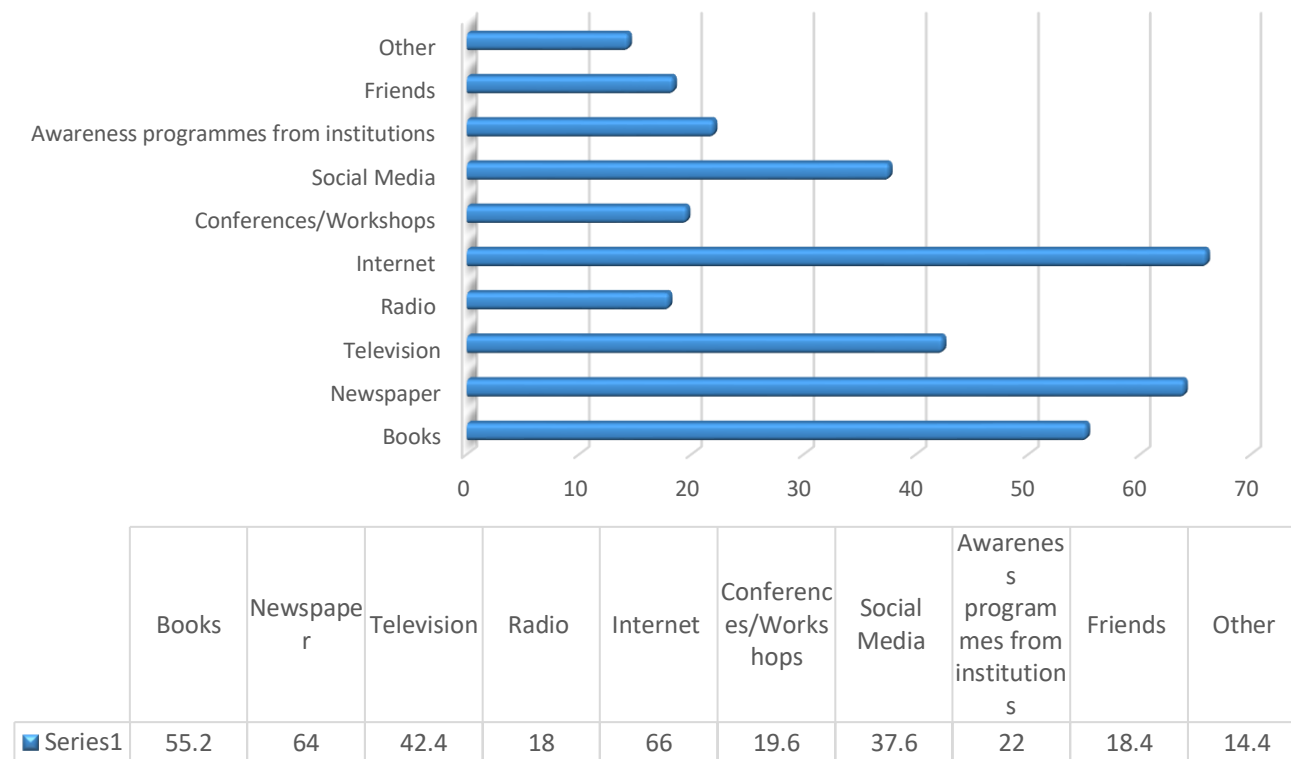
Source : Survey Data

Table 01 illustrates data regarding awareness of each Sustainable Development Goal by librarians & information professionals. The majority of respondents mentioned that 25% of the librarians & information professionals were extremely aware of SDG goal 3 (ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages), goal 4 (ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all), goal 5 (achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls), goal 6 (ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all). It seems that 45.2% of the respondents were moderately aware of goal 4 (ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all), while the response was moderately aware of 44% of goal 16 (promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective). As given in Table 03, it shows that the majority of the respondents were not aware of goal 14 (Gender equality and empowering all women, and girls, and reducing inequality within and among countries) and goal 15 (ensuring healthy living and promoting well-being for all ages).

Sources used by the respondents in getting information on SDGs

The survey asked respondents to rate their familiarity with the following information sources: the internet, newspapers, books, television, social media, friends, and other sources for obtaining information on SDG.

Figure 01 : Sources uses by the respondents in obtaining information on SDG



Source : Survey Data

Figure 01 indicated that the majority of the respondents got information on SDG by using the internet, and they have a wide familiarity with and use internet-based sources. It accounts for 66% of the total number of respondents. Librarians and information professionals show a substantially higher amount of usage of newspapers (64%) for getting information about SDG. When analyzing the information sources from which respondents get information on SDGs, it is evident that a considerable number of respondents get information on SDG from books (55%), television (42%), and social media (38%).

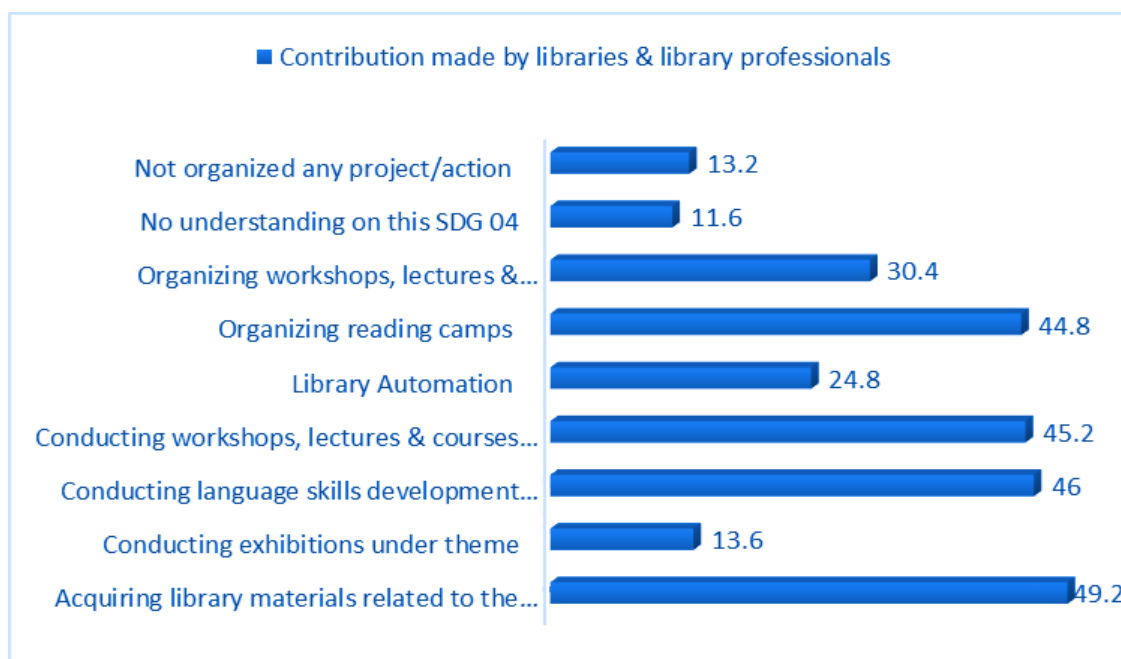
Contribution by the libraries & librarians to SDGs

Various policies, measures, and programmes have been implemented by libraries/librarians & information professionals to achieve Sustainable Development Goals. Accordingly, it is examined that the contributions made by the libraries/librarians & information professionals of Sri Lanka to achieve the SDGs in the last five years.

Librarians and information professionals are conducting activities and providing services that are undertaken by public, school, academic, and special libraries to achieve the SDGs. This survey revealed that most of the libraries were acquiring library materials and aware of related parties about the relevant theme, conducting exhibitions under the theme, conducting workshops, lectures, and discussions under each goal, services for elderly people with disabilities, maintaining a special library collection about the topic, language skills development activities & programmes, digitalization of the library, provide free and reliable access to water and sanitation, smart and certified electronic equipment that uses less energy (computer, printers, bulbs & other technical equipment) reader's access to information and communication technologies (ICTs) and etc.

Dent and Yannotta (2005) note that libraries have a real benefit to users in terms of developing capabilities through providing access to reading materials and literacy programmes, enhancing the academic performance of students, and promoting non-formal educational activities. According to that respondents were asked about their contribution to ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Table 04 : Contribution made by libraries on SDG 04



Source : Survey data

Figure 02 illustrates data regarding the contribution made by librarians and information professionals to SDG 04. Accordingly, it is clear that the majority of the respondents acquired library materials related to goal 04. Its account is 49% of the total. Also, 46% of the respondents mention that they conducted language skills development activities and programmes to ensure SDG 04. According to the figure, it is clear that librarians and information professionals conducted workshops, lectures, & courses on writing, listening & information literacy, which accounted for 45% of the total number of respondents. Librarians and information professionals organized reading camps (45%), organized workshops, lectures & discussions on computer & information literacy (30%), automated the library (25%), and conducted educational exhibitions to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Challenges/issues faced by the librarians & library professionals in implementing & achieving the SDGs

It was revealed in this study that lack of funds, low levels of interest on the part of librarians, a lack of human capacity, and inadequate facilities in the library were some of the major issues limiting the effective contribution of librarians and information professionals in implementing and achieving the SDGs. The major challenge was the lack of equipment/infrastructure, such as computers, printers, and other essential equipment that is used for ICT. The study revealed that many librarians & information professionals were aware of the 2030 sustainable development agenda but lacked any in-depth knowledge of it and lack of awareness due to not keeping themselves up-to-date. Closely related to the above, it is believed by respondents that inadequate funds to attend conferences and workshops organized on the SDGs and its related themes, poor formation and implementation of government policy that will promote transparency and accountability in the attainment of the SDGs, and poor practical knowledge of the library staff on how the SDGs can be implemented and achieved.

Conclusion

The study concluded that librarians and information professionals were moderately aware of the Sustainable Development Goals. Despite their awareness, they need to understand and learn more about its relevance and strategies to adopt in order to make the library conducive to the achievement of the SDGs. It is therefore hoped that librarians and information professionals will learn or gain enough knowledge that can showcase the role the library can play in the next 11 years, as the SDGs' time frame is 2030. Libraries do not currently have any strategic plans to keep library users at a level of current developmental trends. To educate the public, strategic information access initiatives must be used, including information repackaging, awareness campaigns, human resource development, mobile libraries, outreach services, and capacity building.

Recommendations

Arising from the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made.

- Librarians need to know and learn more about its relevance and strategies to adopt in order to make the library more effective in achieving the SDGs.
- Create more awareness programmes by the National Library of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka Library Association and Sustainable Development Council Sri Lanka.
- Follow up with librarians and information professionals in order to make them ready to achieve the SDGs through library activities by 2030.
- Include libraries in National Development plans; policy reforms are needed.
- Library management should create an avenue where librarians can enlighten their users on how important SDGS are and their part in the attainment of SDGs.
- Libraries should partner with the private sector as well as government institutions and ministries in implementing the SDGs.

- LIS professionals should ensure that they attend conferences and workshops related to the SDGs to increase their knowledge of the SDGs.
- Should create an avenue where librarians can motivate their users/readers on how important SDGs are and their responsibility as responsible citizens for achieving SDGs.
- Establish a SDG corner in every library to collect and disseminate information on SDGs.
- Adequate budgetary allocations should be provided to public libraries to enhance their effective library and information services.
- Conduct more research on implementing and achieving the SDGs in libraries.

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