

Role of Public Libraries in Promoting Social Sustainability for the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG): An Exploratory Study

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Received: 11 December 2022

Accepted: 31 December 2022

Abstract

Libraries are in an excellent position to promote and encourage sustainability research within their campuses. They often act as a central hub for many faculties, ensuring connections across a variety of academic disciplines. Libraries need peace. They originated in settled, peaceful societies; when peace is broken, libraries are threatened. In recent years we have unfortunately seen this demonstrated all too often. Librarians have long been associated with peace movements and organisations devoted to making peace. We also need to distinguish between “negative” and “positive” peace. Negative peace is the absence of war and direct physical violence. Positive peace refers to a situation where conditions conducive to lasting peace, such as social justice and harmony, are cultivated (Kriesberg, 2000). A further useful distinction is that between a static concept of peace as a state (a condition) and a dynamic concept of peace as a process, or processes. Here we think of the processes of cultivating peace (preventing the emergence of destructive conflicts), making peace (de-escalating and resolving conflicts), and keeping and restoring peace (after conflict has ended). All this leads to the realisation that peace-building is not simply about preventing and ending conflict, but about creating conditions that are conducive to peace. This has important implications for the role of librarians. Here we can distinguish seven roles for librarians: informing, promoting, educating, creating resources, empowering, healing and advocating.

Keywords: Public libraries, Social Sustainability, United Nations Sustainable development goals, & Social Inclusion.

1. Introduction

Information is now regarded as one of the most fundamental rights and requirement for personal and social development, and for citizens’ participation in effective governance (Habermas, 1989 as cited in Britz, 2004). Access to information is a key enabling factor for governments to deliver quality and inclusive services to its people (Ashwill and Norton, 2015). Effective library and information services enhance socioeconomic development by creation of a knowledge society and empowering people, especially marginalised people and those living in poverty to exercise their rights, be economically active, learn new skills, enrich cultural identity and take part in decision making (International Federation for Libraries Association (IFLA), 2013b); and the services are usually supported by the necessary infrastructure, information and communication technology (ICT) and media and

information literacy capabilities that people need to effectively use information and preserve them. Creating awareness on how to reduce all forms of violence and related death rates, Providing information on how to substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all its forms, Provision and dissemination of information that ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making and Provision of information that will ensure public access to information that will help in protecting fundamental freedoms in accordance with national and international legislations. Partnering with Non-Governmental Organization (NGOs) promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are 17 objectives that all 193 UN Member States have agreed to achieve by the year 2030. A new set of goals assures not only the urgency of development, but the fact that this development must be sustainable and boost equality. While taking into account different national realities, development will have to be universally applicable to all countries and cannot leave anyone behind. This paper critically examines the portrayal of public libraries as contributing to social sustainability. Sustainability is widely discussed, not least after the United Nations adopted the resolution “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development” (United Nations, 2015). Whereas the economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development often relate to the climate crises, social sustainability relates to the challenges of increasing social and economic gaps, segregation, and a growing mistrust towards societal institutions, as well as between individuals or groups of people. Libraries are a core piece of our social infrastructure, fostering community engagement and social services, and that means they naturally contribute to the people-focused SDG goals. Now, as we emerge from the global pandemic, libraries are still facing challenges. Funding cuts and reduced private donations are presenting a major obstacle for institutions that are eager to serve their communities and make tangible progress against the SDGs.

2. Review of Literature

The library as a social institution is saddled with the responsibility of knowledge acquisition and management should engage in activities that promote mutual relationship between librarians, publics and other stakeholders. Libraries engagement in corporative activities therefore should be beneficial to all stakeholders. The library is the known and trusted custodian of information resources all over the world with a duty of acquiring, organizing, preserving, storing and making information available to those who need them and through these activities, the library, has always served as a change agent throughout history. Public libraries are crucial to public infrastructure and the health of local communities. As access points to knowledge, and promoters of culture and literacy, libraries play an important role in supporting social development goals. In the digital age, libraries are no longer restrained to circulating books, as user needs evolve within ever-changing socioeconomic and cultural contexts. Public libraries have since transformed into social learning spaces designed for interaction and collaboration.

According to Abata-Ebire (2018), libraries play an important role in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as it is globally considered a center of research and knowledge generation to empower people and address human challenges. The United Nations 2030 SDGs agenda is an inclusive, integrated framework of 17 goals with a total of 169 targets spanning economic, environmental and social development across the globe (United Nations, 2015). They goals lay out a plan for all countries to actively engage in making the world a better place for people and the planet, and is expected to help member states focus their attention on poverty eradication, climate change, and the development of people. According to Rowley (2006), the vision for library and information services for the 21st century is in the

significant contribution that they can make in an information and knowledge-based society through promoting democracy, inclusiveness, public information, lifelong learning, knowledge creation, innovation, economic growth and business success. Trust, social cohesion, equity and social exclusion are related to the concept of social sustainability (Bramley and Power, 2009, Vallance et al., 2011). In contrast to the Millennium Development Goals, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by all UN Member States in September 2015, present a potentially radical set of long-term solutions to the challenges of violence and injustice. This is most prominently articulated in SDG 16, which commits countries to promote peaceful and inclusive societies, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

3. Social Sustainability

According to ALA, “Many libraries have worked actively to improve and sustain their communities with special projects, new collections and services, and major community initiatives.” It is apparent that public libraries are working towards sustainability. They fulfill the economy role by being good stewards of the public’s money and adding value to the communities they serve proclaimed Biando (2011) in Barnes (2012). Adhering to the concepts of social sustainability, the needs of all users need to be taken into consideration to create a holistic, user centered experience. To facilitate an equitable environment, design needs to account for a wide range of diverse customs, cultural, education and economic backgrounds, as well as demographics and ideas. As social spaces, libraries are a part of the solution to rebuilt trust, equity, and social cohesion among a continually fragmented and segregated world. By designing for community and cultural values, public libraries are capable of becoming renewed socially sustainable third place. Library and information centre in any society provides a unique service that is accessible to everybody. According to Ottong and Edem (2007) citing Aboyade (1987), the provision of information through library and information centers has been shown to be a major factor because of its potential for giving new knowledge, raising consciousness, strengthening links and achieving the integration of disparate social groups. It is an important means of mobilizing people for social, political and economic development. With the Internet, libraries and information centers have become more valuable in the knowledge management process, and they have become crucial partners in learning, nation building, community development as well as conflict resolution. Library as a contributor to social sustainability decided to explore this relationship in a purposeful set of library plans. In Sundsvall, sustainability is connected to social capital which is presented as the most important factor for development and innovations. The social dimension of sustainability is then suggested as a pathway for economic success. Since the notion of community building is closely related to social sustainability, we consider this research to be essential to ideas of the public library as promoter of social sustainability.

Scott (2011) summarizes five areas in which the library contributes to community building, thereby capturing the focus of this research tradition:

1. Libraries serve as a conduit to access information and to learn;
2. Libraries encourage social inclusion and equity;
3. Libraries foster civic engagement;
4. Libraries create a bridge to resources and community involvement;
5. Libraries promote economic vitality within the community (p. 197).

Trust, social cohesion, equity and social exclusion are related to the concept of social sustainability (Bramley and Power, 2009, Vallance et al., 2011). The concept has been recently been put to the fore in Agenda 2030. However, social aspects of sustainable

development are highlighted already in the preceding UN report “Our Common Future” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987), also known as the Brundtland report. This report emphasises three aspects of sustainable development; economic growth, environmental protection and social equity. Furthermore, the definition of sustainable development in the report is still influential: ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Even if the concept of social sustainability, or social dimensions of sustainability, has been widely used for more than twenty years, its meaning is disputed (Vallance et al., 2011, Littig and Griessler, 2005). In the context of libraries, social sustainability is both used to discuss the sustainability of the institution (see e.g. Michnik, 2015), and with reference to libraries’ potential to contribute to the communities in which they are located (see e.g. Lankes, 2016).

3.1. Equity & Social Cohesion

Social cohesion is a multi-dimensional concept (Babajanian 2013, 13; UNDP 2020). It connotes strong social relationships, shared values, feelings of identity and the sense of belonging to a certain community, at times measured by the level of trust among society (Berger-Schmitt 2000; UNDP 2020). It has been characterized as ‘the glue that holds society together’ (Loewe et al. 2019, 3). ‘Social cohesion refers to both, the vertical and the horizontal relations among members of society as characterized by a set of attitudes and norms that includes trust, an inclusive identity, and cooperation for the common good’ (Loewe et al. 2019, 7). Gender equity is a fundamental component of social cohesion for any society. “Gender” refers to socially constructed roles and systems that are assigned to men and women. Gender roles and barriers are continually evolving, and are influenced by local faith, culture, and social norms. Social norms heavily dictate gender-based opportunities and limitations in access to resources such as employment, health care, and safety.

3.2. Social Inclusion

Social inclusion is a process which ensures that those at risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunity and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social, political and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living that is considered normal in society in which they live. It ensures that they have greater participation in decision making which affects their lives and access to their fundamental rights (Commission for European Communities, 2003).

4. Public libraries in Promoting Social Sustainability, and Social harmony, through United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)

Another important outcome can be realized through excellent mapping, implementing cultural programmes, engaging in teamwork, and conducting community outreach services by volunteering. Public libraries take responsibility for community outreach programmes dealing with various matters such as implementing green environment drive, social activities, and entrepreneurial information services.



Fig. 1: The Global Goals for Sustainable Development

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) are:

Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere; Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable; 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; Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all; Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all; Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation; Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries; Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable; Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns; Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts; Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development; Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss For Sustainable Development; Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels; and Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development.

The presence of libraries in different environment and the target they serve is a clear indication that libraries have significant roles to play in supporting sustainable development goals. As long as access to information is paramount to achieving any types of goal, then librarians are key partners. It is interesting to note that libraries and librarians play very significant roles beyond what is documented about them. This could inform the IFLA Statement on Libraries and Development. The IFLA Statement on Libraries and Development (2013) stated that libraries contribute to the delivery of Sustainable Development in the following ways:

- Libraries provide opportunity for all;
- Libraries empower people for their own self-development;

- Libraries offer access to the world's knowledge actors and targets are also diversified.

Libraries can support SDGs through the following activities

Sustainable Development Goal Implications and Social Sustainability

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include Goal #16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, which directly correlates with Social Sustainability and Community resilience during a disaster. Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. According to Bawack (2018), libraries and librarians can significantly contribute towards the attainment of SDGs in libraries in the following ways:

1. Providing a conducive environment for access to relevant and user-friendly information on development issues.
2. Establishing a strong library programme.
3. Selecting resources that are pertinent to the development indicators entrenched in the SDG document.
4. Partnering with other agencies in promoting changes required for SDG in all spheres.
5. Establishing branch libraries or information centers rooted in local communities.
6. Motivating and building the professional capacity of LIS professionals.
7. Improvement of government - library partnership and synergies among others.
8. Engaging in LIS stakeholders for regular trainings, so that they can professionally fulfil their mandate and official roles.

As libraries over the years have been instrumental to community and national development, the roles of libraries in achieving the goals becomes fundamental. Over time, libraries are known acknowledged as knowledge institutions, as they are providers of conducive public spaces, which are required for learning as well as information purposes (Leal 2011).

This SDG is evaluated based on many different indicators, including the number of people fleeing war, persecution, and conflict; statehood; and birth certificates. COVID-19 puts SDG #16 priorities at risk through the amplification of social cohesion issues within all countries regardless of low-, middle- or high-income status. Evidence from the literature included in this scoping review regarding SDG#16 includes the above-mentioned opportunities to understand and evaluate social cohesion and community resilience, predominantly through stakeholder engagement that centers on marginalized groups and facilitates self-organization of grassroots initiatives, particularly led by people identifying as women. The UNDP has identified two main dimensions of social cohesion: **first, reducing disparities, inequalities and social exclusion; and second, strengthening social relations, interactions and ties.** Public libraries help contribute to peaceful and inclusive societies by providing safe, inclusive and open civic spaces.

Social Primary Indicators

Cohesion Trust, norms, networks, coordinated action to achieve common objectives, interethnic relationship, social inclusion, institution and governance, individual's susceptibility to the interpersonal influence of other members, participation in group activities, cooperativeness, contributions to the welfare to the groups, person's intention to remain in the group, identification with the group and interpersonal ties.

Table 1

Features	Comments
Establishments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Established out of community need ✓ Requires full cooperation from community
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Participative administration through committee formation from different sections of the community. ✓ This participation ensures relevant services
Finance	Funds provided through donation or asset sharing
Aims and Objectives	Proactive service towards the community information need Empowerment of all sections of the community of specifically disadvantaged groups. Making all relevant resources available to the community members.
Users	Community library should determine the membership nature – open to all Restricted to the members of the locality.
Information provision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mainly two types of information need to be collected. • The information indigenous to the community or the knowledge produced by the community, which should be known by other members of the locality and outsiders also. • Livelihood information including survival information and citizen action. • information required for the well-being of the community members.
Services	Active interaction between community library volunteers and the members of the community. Provision of correct type of information product to the correct need of clients. The services are not limited in the provision of information products; it covers the referral service also, that is referring the client to the correct type of expert of his demand. Not only the direct information product-related services, volunteers should make the community members informed about the library resources and their use (back up services). To make the users self-reliant and self-sufficient in using the library products

Mostert (1998) had identified some characteristics of community libraries covering almost all aspects. From the above table, it becomes clear that every aspect of community library is intermingled with the members of the community.

5. Implementation of Social Inclusion Concept in Library

The concept of social inclusion comes from a term called social exclusion. Power & Wilson (2000) conducted that this is about the inability of some society, in form of group or individual, to keep themselves in the society. Furthermore, it can be seen in terms of age, gender, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or economic status and others so as to prevent them from participating fully in society (Charity Commission, 2011; Mahdi, 2020; Noor, 2019). In the implementation of social inclusion concept in library, the approach of library services to improve quality of life and well-being needs to be carried out (Utami & Prasetyo, 2019). That means in the future, library can be the solution to the problems that face by the society. From the previous explanation, there are 3 things that can be considered in building a library to be based on social inclusion (Maftuhin, 2017; Utami & Prasetyo, 2019). These three things are (1) community empowerment activities that lead to participation in the whole society, (2) promoted the rights for accessing the library for whole

society, and (3) pay attention to accessibility of the library in terms of information and facility, especially those who are potentially unable to access libraries such as people who live far away and diffable.

6. Discussion

This research has shown that a number of users accessed the public library primarily to use the Internet in order to access electronic or digital information. Some of the reasons may be due to the lack of access at home, workplace or other public places in the community. To understand this phenomenon, more research is needed on the socio-economic effects on library internet use. The results indicate that library managers should focus attention on improving not only the quality of library staff and materials, but also internet access at the library in order to stimulate more diverse public library use. This may have implications for the choice of neighbourhoods or communities of living. For example, low-income groups and students may choose to live in close proximity to public libraries with the intention to get access to the Internet. Second, the analysis suggests that changing perception of, and responses to public library use offer a fertile ground for further studies by social scientists. This study contributes to the conceptual development of the community development literature in terms of the security, comfort and trust that public libraries offer as spaces of well-being in the community. In one way, interventions by library regulators and staff to bring sanity into the library's environment can be argued as efforts to provide sustainable, healthy, vibrant and peaceful communities. This result corroborates with Spacey et al.'s assertion that public libraries are public institutions providing education and social services, and therefore have corporate responsibilities to protect their users (Spacey et al., 2017). Public libraries act as a form of individual and community empowerment (Caidi, 2006), providing lifelong learning through library activities and programs. Participants consider the public library as a place to acquire a number of new skills that shape their learning experiences and job opportunities.

The review of the literature proves with the previous findings that public libraries have an active role to play in diminishing information poverty. The analysis suggests that promoting social sustainability is the prerequisite of sustainable development. Besides, rural community library can promote sustainable development. A few studies have also been consulted with an aim to link between information poverty and sustainable development. In addition, there is a wide range of studies that reported the needs of alleviating information poverty for sustainable development (Lyon Declaration on Access to Information and Development, 2014; UN, 2015 Sustainable Development Goals; Development and Access to Information Report, 2017; Scheeder, 2018; Vargas and Lee, 2018).

All these studies, however, conclusively stated that the successful implementation of sustainable development largely depends on an efficient information service to all parts of the society or community. Public library can serve very well for this purpose. Sustainable development is a multidimensional process and its all dimensions are relevant to each other. Addressing the development challenges needs to address all types of rights- social, political, economical, cultural, civil and informational. The investigation disclosed in this literature review identify the need for further research into others dimension of sustainable development addressing by community library. Though the studies reviewed in this paper identified few areas of development addressed by community library, overall, they paid less attention to address sustainable rural development challenges through community library.

7. Conclusion

Information is a key enabler of achieving social sustainability in sustainable development goal. Sustainable development is impossible without alleviating of information poverty and effective alleviation of information poverty is about impossible without community library. Rural community libraries play very vital role in reducing social exclusion around the world. Rural community library is truly the hub of the rural and disadvantaged community for providing necessary information and knowledge that could enable them to promote sustainable development. Public libraries act as a form of individual and community empowerment (Caidi, 2006) providing lifelong learning through library activities and programs. Participants consider the public library as a place to acquire a number of new skills that shape their learning experiences and job opportunities. Acquisition of new skills and new friendship in the library space is a vibrant resource for developing the adult learner's capacity for social development in the community and the world at large. The public library provides informal learning spaces for the acquisition of knowledge and the development of social capital through interactions. It has been suggested that specific place characteristics can influence the amount of social capital within a locality (Gattrell et al., 2000). Social capital can be derived from 'bonding', supportive, ties between people of a community, while bridging capital connects individuals to dissimilar groups and additional resources (Granovetter, 1973; Putnam, 2000); carrying different implications for equality and well-being in the community. The library's social qualities were discussed. Public libraries were places where people felt comfortable to mingle, aspect of the public space, which participants recounted as serene, enjoyable and relatively free. Public libraries emerged as sites for social development in the community. By so doing, many adults would have access to life chances and make themselves and their communities vibrant and sustainable. When the represented problem is targeting individuals and the solution is framed in terms of stability and values that shall be disseminated, social inclusion is given a predefined and fixed meaning that the library informs the users of. The consequence is hierarchical: the library and its staff are positioned as possessing knowledge that the library users need to fulfil their roles as socially sustainable citizens. When the represented problem to a higher degree includes the social context and the solution is framed as a continually evolving process, the meaning of social sustainability is fluid and open to subaltern perspectives, which we now will explore. This enables us to investigate potential internal conflicts of inclusion and exclusion, accessibility and inaccessibility.

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