The Role of Indian Academic Libraries in Advancing and Achieving Sustainable Development Goals

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

This study aims at defining the role of academic libraries in supporting the sustainable development goals in the global quest as the United Nations calls for. Academic libraries play important roles in supporting SDGs – particularly Quality Education (Goal 4), Gender Equality (Goal 5), Reducing Inequalities (Goal 10), and Strengthening the Means of Implementation, Partnerships (Goal 17). To this end, this paper seeks to discuss how academic libraries in India can function as a service provider in the achievement of these goals through assimilating their services, collections, and policies into the IDAG. The research explores how these libraries support educational justice, enable the disenfranchised, establish gender parity, and build cooperation through openness and the use of digital tools. However, critical roles notwithstanding, challenges that academic libraries face in India include limited funding sources, digital resource constraints, professional development opportunities, and low levels of networking both nationally and internationally. Additionally, a general lack of understanding of what the libraries can and should do with reference to the promotion of the SDGs limits potential. Besides, the paper also discusses the current research findings regarding the contributions of Indian academic libraries towards sustainable development and adds the strategies for future enhancement for achieving the sustainable development goals by 2030.

Introduction

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals are an exhaustive worldwide roadmap agreed upon by all nations of the UN in 2015 as a global plan to create durable peace and prosperity in the interest of future generations, along with preserving the planet's environment. At the core of this agenda is a list of 17 sustainable development goals focusing on challenges like poverty, inclusive quality education, gender, water, energy, agriculture, innovation, sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production, climate change, life on land, life below water, peace and justice, and strengthened partnerships at the subnational, national, and international levels (Thorpe & Gunton, 2022). As such, participating governments, private sectors, and civil society organizations are

also expected to take on critical roles in achieving these goals; however, academic institutions and libraries can also ensure the community and people's right to knowledge, supporting knowledge dissemination and lifelong learning for sustainable development (Mbagwu et al., 2020).

University libraries have always had a very strong role in the dissemination of education, research, and community information. As key enablers of both print and electronic resources, they play a crucial role in the achievement of several of the SDGs, among them quality education (SDG 4), female emancipation (SDG 5), and reducing poverty, although relative to section, income inequality (SDG 10). However, in the Indian context, where social inequality in access to quality education and information is very conspicuous, academic libraries have a more significant function (Missingham, 2024). The libraries act as a link between international aspirations and domestic problems so that learners, scholars, and society can gain knowledge and means to advance the cause of sustainable development.

This paper aims to discuss how different academic libraries in India have contributed to the realization of the SDGs. By comparing these institutions and analyzing how their services, resources, and policies are linked to development goals, the study points out important spheres of influence and difficulties. It will also magnify the most important goals that are most relevant to the purpose of Indian academic libraries, including goal 4, goal 5, and goal 10, promising a view on how such libraries can enhance their contribution to the achievement of sustainable development (Mashroofa, 2022).

Overview of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) give a universal map on how to tackle some of the most pressing world issues, including poverty, unfairness, lack of access to training, and environmental degradation. Indian academic libraries, as core members of the higher education system, offer significant contributions to achieving several SDGs through offering physical and electronic resources, providing individual and continuing learning, and fostering honest societies. This paper examines how library practices mediate 'local' issues in the context of Indian society, where inequity in access to resources, education, and opportunities is most apparent, and how libraries can support the achievement of overall sustainable development goals.

SDG 4: Quality Education: Quality Education is more relevant for Indian academic libraries that work towards achieving quality education for all. In helping to achieve SDG 4, libraries provide access to a range of academic materials, conduct research, and fulfill the academic needs of learners through appropriate facilities and resources. India still has differences between education in urban and rural areas, and thanks to academic libraries, most of them, even in rural areas, provide students with free access to academic databases, journals, and learning materials available through projects such as the National Digital Library of India (NDLI). With effective promotion of digital skills and increased access to technology and other learning resources, students and researchers find that libraries are critical to the dream of quality education for all.

SDG 5: Gender Equality: Empowering gender equality is the primary aim of SDG 5, and academic libraries have a significant role to play in this Indian context. Most Indian academic libraries consciously contribute towards the implementation of the policy of gender equity in information resources and opportunities for men and women. Through their COA definition and main goals, libraries contribute to a safe environment and the eradication of gender inequalities in education. These include women's empowerment programs, gender archives and research, and digital business skills training for women, which are part of library services in line with SDG 5. Additionally, libraries partner with gender-oriented research offices and projects to advance research on the subject of gender equity.

SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities: One of them is that inequality within and between countries is another key area of sustainable development. SDG 10 creates a focus on economic opportunities and the utilization of resources in ways that do not perpetuate the plight of marginalized sections of individuals. SDG 10 emphasizes equitable access to resources and opportunities for marginalized communities. In India, academic libraries play a part in it by providing education to the underprivileged and excluded groups of society, including economically, socially, and culturally disadvantaged sections, SC/STs, and other similar sections of society. A number of libraries, especially in rural and hard-to-reach places, act as a source of hope to many students and scholars who may not have access to books and other learning materials. They also work towards service delivery for patrons with disabilities through Braille sections and productions, special formats, and devices which are inclusive services that break barriers to information.

SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions: Ultimately, libraries are also helpful in fostering the culture of peaceful, secure societies, of dialogue and plurality, as well as being helpful in the formation of active citizens. The Sustainable Development Goal 16 is about global peace and effective institutions, and libraries fulfill this goal by providing factual information and preserving the ideas of free

access to information. In the light of the Indian scenario, academic libraries play a role in furnishing debate and research ventilations that enhance institutional responsiveness and accountability. Houses of learning also contribute to legal research and information on governance, law, and public policy.

SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals: Cooperation is stated in SDG 17 as being required for various country partnerships in order to meet the goals set in the overarching Goals of Sustainability. Indian academic libraries are gradually expanding their cooperation, both at the national and international levels, to buy materials and to share experiences and ideas. Collaboration with other academic institutions, government and non-governmental organizations, and international organizations contributes to the expanded horizon of libraries. For instance, through access to international research databases, libraries help their users access wider research resources for learning and research that will contribute to the achievement of the international development agenda. Furthermore, Indian libraries are associated with INFLIBNET (Information and Library Network Centre) and other academic library networks that encourage cooperation in the acquisition of resources for development.

Each of these goals intersects with the core mission of academic libraries, which is to facilitate access to information, support learning, promote diversity and inclusion, and build strong institutions.

The Role of Libraries in Supporting SDGs

Globally, librarians have more and more been attributed to their advocacy in supporting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Pursuant to this scope, libraries are in a good place to support many of the SDGs being establishments that encompass every responsibility of enriching people with knowledge. IFLA has especially been coherent and influential in the promotion of libraries into the development agenda, stating that equity of information is critical to the development of education, gender equality, and sustainability, among others.

They are integral in serving as connectors between people and the resources that they need to make their lives better – those sources of knowledge. This makes them core to the accomplishment of the UN-SDGs including Quality Education (SDG-4), Gender Equality (SDG-5), and Reducing Inequality (SDG-10). Open access, digitization, and policy-making: libraries of the world for the 2030 Agenda. Some of the important examples include advocacy of Open Educational Resources (OER), freely

available learning resources provided by libraries (Gupta, 2020). This enhances equity in education and ensures that qualified knowledge is shared among people from all the different classes of society.

In addition, libraries are emerging as major players in closing the digital divide, which is vital in achieving the SDGs. In many places today, especially in third-world countries, libraries offer physical facilities where individuals can browse the Internet, gain content literacy, and undertake e-learning systems. This goes hand in hand with reducing inequality (SDG 10) since it empowers the aforementioned populations with information and the ability to engage in the digital economy and learning. Libraries thereby also promote gender equality (SDG 5), because women and girls, especially in developing countries, find in libraries' physical and virtual premises possibilities for learning, involvement in courses, and other social activities without experiences of discrimination or marginalization.

Moreover, libraries address the social role of promoting togetherness that enables people to address specific needs fundamental to the advancement of their communities. Many workshops, seminars, and training programs are being conducted in many libraries and pursue goals such as Climate Action (SDG 13) and Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8), concentrating on such issues as environmental sustainability, health promotion, and social inclusion. These activities foster informed and active participation of citizens in local governance and affirmative participation in development.

Academic libraries can pick lessons from these global best practices as they introduce differentiated strategies for the Indian context. Opportunities and challenges exist in India's educational and socio-economic context and diversities that have already been explained. For instance, the funding of digital infrastructure is on the rise in the urban areas, and the neglected areas, especially the rural areas, have poor funding; hence, it is a challenge to the academic libraries as they strive to support and promote digital equity. Hence, Indian academic libraries will need to go a long way in their direction to deliver the facilities that would be able to address the needs of both newly emerging metropolitan cities and rural literatures.

Furthermore, the libraries of India may pay much attention to the accumulation and organization of documents to meet the educational requirements of different groups. Strategic partnerships with native societies, governments, and global organizations and institutions could assist academic libraries in India to extend their reach and create far more collaboration possibilities that contribute to sustainable development. For instance, the academic

libraries in India may liaise with NGOs and development organizations with a view to implementing projects that under SDG 17, also known as Partnership for the Goals, to ensure that the libraries are part of the project in achieving the goals (Vijesh P. V. et al., 2024).

The role of libraries in facilitating SDGs varies at the global level: information access and the digital divide, continuing education, and local development. These bibliometric data can be instructive for Indian academic libraries while translating best practices from other countries to best suit the environment in India and support the key role of sustainable development.

Academic Libraries and Their Alignment with SDGs

Promoting Quality Education (SDG 4) and Academic Libraries

The single largest way that academic libraries can support the achievement of the SDGs is the contribution they make to the goal of inclusive and equitable quality education. Academic libraries in India have emerged as a significant component of the learning structures in higher learning institutions since they offer various learning resources. They are very central in assisting both the faculty and the students in research and the extension of knowledge, which are important in quality education.

Initiatives include the use of information communication technology for the digitization of collections, open-source journals, and electronic resources such as JSTOR, Science Direct, and INFLIBNET, etc. In this way, libraries contribute to the Centre's lifelong learning activities by presenting lectures and training sessions in information and research skills and in using information communication technology. Furthermore, they serve as research help desks for citation management, methodological and bibliometric training, and to provide access to peer-reviewed journals to encourage innovation and help students and faculty deposit their work in open-source databases.

1. **Bridging the Digital Divide and Reducing Inequalities (SDG 10) and Academic Libraries**

   Scientists noted that academic libraries are at the center of initiatives aimed at minimizing inequalities by providing users with a digital identity and connecting them to electronic databases when the internet may be unavailable. Thanks to a commitment to offer equal opportunities in the usage of IT tools, these libraries ensure that African students coming from low-income families will not be completely locked out of the new digital world. This is especially fundamental in closing the gap between digital haves and have-nots that are normally observed in developed and developing countries, as well as in urban and rural populations, and between the rich and the poor.

   With this vision, numerous academic libraries in India have digital literacy initiatives in place, aiding learners and personnel in appreciating related knowledge regarding the use of digital resources in generating and sharing information. All these efforts are, time and again, very crucial, especially for developing technologies in rural settings. Moreover, the influx of the availability of online libraries, including the National Digital Library of India (NDLI), has enabled students across the nation to access academic materials online. This is a major way through which NDLI's vision to offer a single point solution for accessing e-content from various sources helps reduce inequality in access to knowledge and is, therefore, a major step toward the goal of inclusive education.

2. **Supporting Gender Equality (SDG 5) and Academic Libraries**

   The improvement of gender equality is an important part of both the global and national policy agenda, and academic libraries play many roles in it. This is because they offer information resources that cover the area of gender studies and literature and research on feminism as well as women. This not only creates textual discussions on gender issues but also ensures that these texts are available to all the students. Also, many academic library services in India have started improving the library environment in terms of facilities for both male and female students, and they have also started providing women-only areas for reading and organizing various programs and events highlighting gender issues, women's rights, and the like.

   Moreover, there are research findings that concern the fact that libraries can support women who are working in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. They can develop and launch specific programs that will encourage women to pursue STEM and offer them all the necessary information and facilities to excel in career areas that have long been labeled as male-dominated. Thus, academic libraries concurrently participate in the process of eliminating discrimination based on gender in education and professional growth on the route to creating a liberal society.

3. **Strengthening Institutions and Promoting Peace and Justice (SDG 16) and Academic Libraries**

   Access to information affords libraries as institutions the critical role of performing a peacemaking

function within society through the provision of accurate and impartial information. Libraries enable sound decision-making in a time when fake news and falsehoods can go viral and provide copyrighted and peer-reviewed material. They provide information on governance, public policy, and law and promote research in areas deemed relevant to the development of effective institutions. Furthermore, they enable citizens to borrow government documents, law journals, and research papers on justice and peacebuilding, thereby enhancing governance and citizenship functions.

Additionally, academic libraries also engage in social functions by providing venues for seminars and public talks or conferences pertinent to issues of social justice, governance, and peace concerning SDG 16. By encouraging discussion, they promote the production of an enlightened populace who will support justice and institutional change. In this regard, this role of initiating and hosting open and constructive discussions, as well as inviting ideas, enhances the emergence of strong, just, and peaceful institutions.

4. **Fostering Global Partnerships (SDG 17) and Academic Libraries**

Collaboration for achieving the SDGs is critical at the national and international levels, and the role of academic libraries in India has shifted from isolationism to multi-partnered resource-sharing research alliances and open access to research articles. Indian academic libraries have membership in and interact with international organizations such as IFLA and national and regional consortia like the SAARC library consortium. These networks enable libraries to discuss, coordinate, and possibly combine efforts in implementing projects in service of the common goal: the twenty-first-century SDGs, stimulating exchange and cooperation on a world stage.

The initiatives on open access are very vital in the specific approach towards SDG 17 since open access fosters the flow of knowledge across borders. Most of the academic organizations in India have opened repositories that provide free access to research work to scholars and users domestically as well as internationally. This commitment to open access publishing not only raises the profile of research from India; it also promotes knowledge democracy for everyone in the world. Thus, Indian academic libraries contribute significantly to developing partnerships for sustainable development goals by engaging in such international cooperation and supporting open access policies.

5. **Challenges Faced by Indian Academic Libraries in Achieving SDGs**

Despite their potential to contribute to the SDGs, Indian academic libraries face several challenges that limit their effectiveness.

Resource Constraints: Unfortunately, many Indian academic libraries, particularly those in rural areas or those that are constituents of small universities and colleges, are constrained by inadequate funds and resources. This impacts their scope of collecting, introducing new technologies in their repositories, as well as providing services that relate to the SDGs. Lack of staff and poor provision of degreed librarians' continuous professional development also limit their ability to deliver services.

Digital Infrastructure Gaps: The case also shows that many academic libraries are on their way to digitization, but there are still those that may lack appropriate technology and infrastructure. This is a digital divide situation and is more seriously perceived in rural areas since many libraries may not be connected to stable internet or digital materials to support SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities).

Lack of Awareness and Advocacy: One of the major obstacles is a lack of knowledge of the role of libraries in advancing the SDGs. It was found that library professionals and policymakers have paid insufficient attention to the task of integrating the SDG objectives into the planning of library service delivery. Surprisingly, most of the academic libraries reviewed in this study lacked well-defined strategic plans that pointedly address sustainable development.

Fragmented Collaboration: Despite rising trends in networked collaborations, academic library collaboration in India is poor and fragmented, though some libraries have developed successful collaborations with national and international organizations. Further improvement in cooperation and policy and advocacy frameworks calls for enhanced coordination between libraries, educational institutions, and the government.

6. **Recommendations for Enhancing the Role of Indian Academic Libraries in Achieving SDGs**

To enhance the role of Indian academic libraries in supporting the SDGs, the following recommendations are proposed:

Increase Funding and Resource Allocation: The government and academic institutions should allocate more resources to libraries to ensure they can provide essential services that align with the SDGs. This includes investments in digital infrastructure, staff training,

and the expansion of library collections, particularly those that support research in sustainability and development.

Promote Digital Inclusion: Libraries need to focus on bridging the digital divide by improving access to technology, especially in rural and underserved areas. This could include the development of mobile libraries with digital resources, public-private partnerships to enhance internet access, and the promotion of open access digital platforms.

Strengthen Advocacy for Library Contributions to SDGs: Library associations and academic institutions should engage in more robust advocacy efforts to raise awareness of the role libraries play in advancing the SDGs. This could involve the development of public campaigns, strategic plans, and institutional policies that explicitly link library services to the achievement of sustainable development goals.

Expand National and Global Collaborations: Libraries should actively seek to form partnerships with international and national organizations, NGOs, and academic institutions. These collaborations can facilitate knowledge sharing, resource pooling, and the development of joint initiatives aimed at achieving the SDGs.

Integrate SDGs into Library Curricula and Training: Library and information science programs should incorporate the SDGs into their curricula, educating future librarians about their role in advancing sustainable development. Ongoing professional development programs for current library staff should also include training on how to implement and advocate for SDG-aligned practices.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that Indian academic libraries are well placed to make significant positive impacts with reference to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Because these libraries serve as information resource centers, they can contribute significantly to the achievement of SDG 4, quality and inclusive education, for the improvement of the quality of education for excluded groups, and SDG 10 and SDG 5 by providing various educational materials for groups of people in need. In addition, through investment in research, continuing education, and enhanced understanding of, and engagement with, information technologies, they enable people to become active, literate world citizens to enhance the quality of life in global society. All the same, there are a number of factors that have to be discussed so that this potential can be fully realized. Fixed income is hard to come by, and infrastructure and other support facilities lack the modernity they need to increase service delivery. The absence of digital infrastructure, especially in rural areas, limits the use of online learning platforms, hence widening the digital divide. Third, policymakers and scholars appear to be unaware of the essential part that libraries can play in the achievement of the SDGs. These barriers can be surmounted if Indian academic libraries adopt new qualitative approaches like strategic collaborations with governmental and non-governmental organizations, IM/IT applications in libraries, and policy change advocacies. That way, they can enhance the impact of their efforts in the area of sustainable development as the centers of community support, social justice, and knowledge in the 21st century.

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