Data and the Sustainable Development Goals

An IFLA Briefing

- **The SDG data framework is a key part of the 2030 Agenda, making it possible to track progress against the SDGs over time and hold governments accountable.**
- **The indicators were chosen through a process led by the UN's Committee on Statistics and the Inter-Agency Advisory Group on the SDGs. They continue to work to find agreement on methodologies and urge collection where needed.**
- **Data relevant to library activities is mixed – in too many cases it does not focus sufficiently on the outcomes that libraries help achieve. The upcoming review of the data framework offers and opportunity to improve this.**

When the United Nations Member States agreed the 2030 Agenda, they recognised that without specific targets and a framework for measuring progress, the Sustainable Development Goals would be meaningless. As a result, connected to the 17 headline goals, there are 169 targets that will allow us to know how further we have got towards their achievement. For example, under SDG 4 (Quality Education), there are 'targets' such as 4.2: 'By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development'.

To measure this, each target has associated indicators. Related to the example above (SDG 4.2), or example, 4.2.1 is 'proportion of children under 5 years of age who are developmentally on track', and 4.2.2 is 'participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age)'. These indicators are often broken down by gender or other factors, to ensure it is possible to highlight situations where groups risk being left behind (*a full list is available here*).

> **Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**
>
> Article 48 – *Quality, accessible, timely and reliable disaggregated data will be needed to help with the measurement of progress and to ensure that no one is left behind. Such data is key to decision-making […].*

Given the huge number of potential measures which could be used, UN Member States had to make tough choices about which indicators were most appropriate. This task was left to the International Expert Advisory Group on the SDGs (IAEG-SDG), which reports to the Committee on Statistics. Both are made up of a sub-set of countries, with balance ensured between regions.

Out of the thousands of possibilities, 232 were selected, with between 1 and 4 indicators per SDG target (*a full list is available here)*. Nonetheless, these vary in quality from those which are well-recognised and widely collected to areas where more work is still needed even to define them. The IAEG-SDG has therefore established a system of 'Tiers', with Tier 1 representing clearly defined indicators with much available data, Tier 2 those which are defined, but do not have data, and Tier 3 those which require further definition.

The need to upgrade indicators from Tiers 2 and 3 to 1 to ensure that the SDG indicators provide an effective tool for monitoring progress is a key part of the work of the Committee. In its meetings (twice a year), the IAEG-SDG discusses questions around methodology used to collect data, and about whether individual indicators should be reclassified. The IAEG is also preparing for a full review of the SDG indicators, with a view to final agreement in 2020.

Use of the Indicators

The indicators are explicitly designed to be used in following up and reviewing the SDGs. The UN Statistics Division produces a report every year summarising progress on the indicators available at the global level – see the 2017 edition here. This is a key input to the High Level Political Forum, underlining where there are countries, themes or groups which are falling behind.

In parallel, UN regions and Member States are expected to develop their own indicators, complementing what is available already. These may help provide further detail or depth on subjects which are relevant to a particular region or country. For example, these could include data for different groups within society, data from different sources, or new themes connected with national priorities.

Choices as to these indicators are left up to governments (in the case of Member States) and UN regional commissions (for Asia-Pacific, Europe and North America, Western Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Africa). While engagement is variable, there are welcome examples of countries which have sought to think about how best to record and measure sustainable development.

Finally, there have been extensive efforts by civil society organisations to develop their own 'shadow' indicators, in order to fill in gaps in the UN's own work. These often draw from less official sources (i.e. not national statistics offices or UN agencies) but can provide much more insight into what is really happening.

Examples such as the Transparency, Accountability and Partnership (TAP) Network's indicators are powerful. IFLA's Development and Access to Information (DA2I) report, developed in partnership with the Technology and Social Change Group at the University of Washington, also draw on official statistics that are not (yet) used for the SDGs in order to address more complex questions such as access to information.

Why Do Indicators Matter for Libraries?

A reasonable share of the SDG targets refers to the importance of information, and in doing so underline the importance of the services libraries provide. Our institutions help ensure that adults have access to non-formal learning (indicator 4.3.1), and children increase literacy levels (indicator 4.6.1). A fuller list is at the end of this brief.

These are important points to raise in advocacy, as library work helps countries score better. In those countries undertaking voluntary national reviews, or in SDGs which are thematic focuses in a given year, these arguments can be particularly strong. Where you can provide specific data about what libraries are doing – and achieving – this is likely to be welcome.

However, inevitably, the indicator chosen for a goal will influence the actions governments take to achieve it. For example, the indicator for increased access to information and communications technology, and universal and affordable access to the Internet (target 9.c) is 'proportion of the population covered by a mobile network' (9.c.1). This does not cover public access (or necessary guarantee that access is affordable, especially for those who cannot buy a smartphone). *More examples are included in the inset box.*

In these cases, the choice of indicator risks neglecting the contribution that libraries make. If Member States only focus on the current indicators, they may not give libraries the support or recognition they deserve. It is therefore important to make the case for better indicators for libraries, first nationally and regionally, and in due course globally.

Key challenges in the current SDG indicators

SDG 9.c: the current indicator only focuses on mobile network coverage. This does not cover real access, or affordability. It will be important to include both affordable home/mobile access, and public access, in any meaningful future measure.

SDG 11.4: the current indicator, based on UNESCO statistics, looks only at spending on museums, archives and monuments, and does not include libraries. This must be corrected.

SDG 16.10: the current indicator focuses only looks at the existence of freedom of information laws (i.e. the right to demand to see budgets, reports, or correspondence). A proper measure of access – as libraries understand it – would look more broadly at how information is empowering individuals.

IFLA therefore suggests making the case for the following indicators in national and regional SDG monitoring. In the particular cases of SDG 9.c, 11.4 and 16.10, we will also be pursuing changes to indicators at the global level.

Suggested Actions

1) Find out if your government is working on SDG indicators. Who is responsible? You may want to look either at the body coordinating work on the SDGs in general, or the national statistics office.
2) If there are already national indicators, check if they reflect the work of libraries. If they do, write to the national SDG coordinator and head of the statistical office to congratulate them on this.
3) If the national indicators do not reflect the work on libraries, find out when they are next due for review. Let the responsible agency know about your interest.
4) If there are no indicators yet, use Library Map of the World statistics, other information you may have, and the examples below to call for national-level indicators that reflect the contribution of libraries.
5) If you can organise a meeting, tell them about the work you are doing, and make the link between what libraries are doing and the achievement of the SDG targets. Try to emphasise the examples below.
6) Don't forget to keep us informed! Contact us at: DA2I@ifla.org

ANNEX: SDG Targets and Improved Library Indicators

SDG	Library-Friendly Indicators
1.4. By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to **basic services**, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, **appropriate new technology** and financial services.	Share of the population with a library card (including by gender, income group, if possible) Number of libraries/centres providing support on digital literacy?
2.3 By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, **knowledge**, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment	Number of agricultural libraries per farmer Number of farmers accessing agricultural information sources
2.c. Adopt measures to ensure the proper functioning of food commodity markets and their derivatives and facilitate timely **access to market information**, including on food reserves, in order to help limit extreme food price volatility.	Number of farmers connecting to the Internet, both through home, mobile and public connections.
3.4 By 2030, reduce by one third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through **prevention** and treatment and promote mental health and well-being.	Share of population with access to verified public health information on demand
3.7. Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, **information** and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programs.	Share of population with access to verified public health information on demand
3.d Strengthen the capacity of all countries, in particular developing countries, for **early warning, risk reduction and management of national and global health risks**	Existence of disaster information systems, notably concerning health.
4.4 By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant **skills**, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship	Number of children and adults benefitting from digital training programmes in formal and informal settings.
4.6 By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve **literacy and numeracy**	Number of children able to take part in after-school reading activities

5.b Enhance the **use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology**, to promote the empowerment of women	Number of children and adults (by gender) benefitting from digital training programmes in formal and informal settings.
8.2 Achieve higher levels of economic productivity through diversification, technological upgrading and **innovation**, including through a focus on high-value added and labour-intensive sectors	Share of open access publications within a country
8.3 Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, **decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation**, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services	Number of adults benefitting from job-support programmes in the community, compared to total unemployed
9.5 Enhance **scientific research**, upgrade the technological capabilities of industrial sectors in all countries, in particular developing countries, including, by 2030, encouraging innovation and substantially increasing the number of research and development workers per 1 million people and public and private research and development spending	Library holdings within a country Share of open access publications within a country
9.c Significantly increase **access to information and communications technology** and strive to provide **universal and affordable access to the Internet** in least developed countries by 2020	Libraries offering public (free) Internet access, including both WiFi and through library terminals
11.4 Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's **cultural** and natural **heritage**	Spending on libraries, in particular library preservation programmes
11.b By 2020, substantially increase the number of cities and human settlements adopting and implementing integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation and adaptation to climate change, **resilience to disasters**, and develop and implement, in line with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, holistic disaster risk management at all levels	Existence of disaster information networks
13.3 Improve education, **awareness-raising** and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning	Number of libraries offering publications and information about climate change issues
16.10 Ensure public **access to information** and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements	Number of libraries per head Share of population reporting that they have the information

	they need to learn, earn and take decisions.
17.6 Enhance North-South, South-South and triangular regional and international cooperation on and **access to science, technology and innovation** and enhance knowledge-sharing on mutually agreed terms, including through improved coordination among existing mechanisms, in particular at the United Nations level, and through a global technology facilitation mechanism	Share of open access publications in total academic publications.
17.8 Fully operationalize the technology bank and science, technology and innovation capacity-building mechanism for least developed countries by 2017 and **enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology**	Share of population having undertaken digital skills and literacy training