

University libraries and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): a global perspective on practices and contributions

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This research highlights the integral role of university libraries globally in advancing the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), showcasing their strategies, initiatives, and contributions to sustainable development. The specific strategies and contributions of university libraries towards SDGs remain ambiguously documented and understood, necessitating a focused exploration. This research bridges the knowledge gap by detailing university library practices related to SDGs, providing vital insights for academic institutions and policymakers, and emphasizing libraries' pivotal role in driving sustainable development agendas and community awareness. The primary objective was to illuminate the role of university libraries in advancing the SDGs. A qualitative mixed method was used to address the research questions of libraries' SDG integration, and tangible contributions. Data sources comprised academic journals and authorized institutional websites, with 74 pertinent articles analyzed from an initial pool of 103. A limitation was the study's primary dependence on available literature and website content, which might overlook certain unrecorded practices or nuanced SDG initiatives. Findings established that the university libraries globally are actively embedding SDGs into their regular functions, strategic plans, and community outreach, and five core themes define their initiatives: capacity building and partnership, access and inclusion, environmental responsibility, innovation, and ethics. Contrary to initial perceptions, libraries significantly contribute to all SDGs, including sustainable agriculture, water conservation, and biodiversity. Besides regular services, they are proactive in projects, partnerships, and programs tailored to SDGs. They play pivotal roles in knowledge dissemination, research support, and fostering a culture of sustainability. Importantly, these institutions exhibit commitment through strategic alignments, stakeholder collaborations, and broad-reaching community initiatives promoting sustainable development. University libraries globally are pivotal in advancing SDGs through integrated operations and outreach, however, SDG reporting by Sri Lankan Universities is lacking. They should intensify collaborations with stakeholders, update SDG strategies, prioritize underrepresented SDGs, boost awareness programs and share best practices globally to optimize their contributions to sustainable development initiatives. For Sri Lanka, focused research is essential to ascertain SDG implementation within university libraries.

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