

Practices Pertaining to Sustainable Development Goals in University Libraries of Sri Lanka: An Exploratory Study

S. Krishanthi¹ and R.C.G. Gamage²

Abstract

Sustainable development, embodied in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), is a global obligation. University libraries are crucial in advancing these goals by disseminating knowledge, fostering sustainability, and promoting inclusive practices. This study uses a survey conducted through interviews to explore the practices, strategies, and challenges faced by university libraries in Sri Lanka in aligning with the SDGs. It surveyed SDG practices under five key themes. Sri Lankan university libraries strongly commit to the SDGs through their initiatives in these areas. However, compared to global practices such as seed libraries, zero-waste initiatives recycling projects, sustainable landscaping, rainwater harvesting and financial literacy programs, the scale of their activities remains more localized. Financial constraints, limited resources, and lack of awareness pose common barriers. The study demonstrates that Sri Lankan libraries are good at translating global SDG goals into actionable local initiatives, emphasizing the importance of the context. These libraries provide invaluable insights for other institutions. Future directions include expanding collaborations, enhancing public engagement, and embracing emerging technologies to further the SDG agenda.

Keywords: University libraries, Sri Lanka, Sustainable Development Goals

¹ Assistant Librarian, Trincomalee Campus, Eastern University, Sri Lanka

Email: krishanthys@esn.ac.lk



<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6138-54752>

² Senior Lecturer, National Institute of Library and Information Sciences (NILIS), University of Colombo

Email: ruwan@nilis.cmb.ac.lk



<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7081-8794>



Introduction

Sustainable development, emphasizing holistic growth while ensuring the well-being of our planet and its inhabitants, is a global imperative. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) characterize this notion, offering a roadmap for addressing the planet's most pressing challenges by 2030. Consisting of 17 goals and 169 targets (See Table 1), the SDGs encompass a wide array of issues, from eradicating poverty to fostering sustainable cities. Yet, the realization of these goals depends on the collective efforts of various sectors across the globe.

Table 1

List of SDG Goals

SDG Numbers	Goals
SDG 1	No poverty
SDG 2	Zero hunger
SDG 3	Good health and well-being
SDG 4	Quality education
SDG 5	Gender equality
SDG 6	Clean water and sanitation
SDG 7	Affordable and clean energy
SDG 8	Decent work and economic growth
SDG 9	Industry, innovation and infrastructure
SDG 10	Reduced inequalities
SDG 11	Sustainable cities and communities
SDG 12	Responsible consumption and production
SDG 13	Climate action
SDG 14	Life below water
SDG 15	Life on land
SDG 16	Peace, justice, and strong institutions
SDG 17	Partnerships for the goals

(Source: <https://sdgs.un.org>)

University libraries, respected as hubs of knowledge dissemination and academic exploration, hold a significant position in this journey. Beyond being

mere repositories of information, they are uniquely poised to endorse, inspire, and elaborate sustainable practices. Their influence extends not just to students and faculty but flows out to the larger community through academic discourse, resources, and outreach.

A noteworthy development in Sri Lanka's pursuit of the SDGs is the establishment of the Sustainable Development Council of Sri Lanka (SDCSL). SDCSL plays a pivotal role in coordinating national efforts towards achieving the SDGs. Furthermore, the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the SDCSL and the Sri Lanka Library Association (SLLA) marks a significant step in fostering collaboration and aligning library services with the national sustainable development agenda ([Sri Lanka Library Association, 2022](#)). This partnership underscores the critical role that libraries can play in supporting and advancing the SDGs through strategic initiatives and community engagement.

Despite the universality of SDGs, the manner and extent of their implementation vary significantly across regions and institutions. While global trends provide valuable insights, understanding the unique challenges and strategies of specific regions is crucial for tailored interventions and best practices. In this context, Sri Lanka, a nation with a rich academic tradition, yet struggling with its own challenges, presents a powerful case for study. Particularly, the adoption and integration of SDG by Sri Lankan university libraries remain under-researched, demanding a deeper exploration.

This paper narrows its focus to explain the current practices related to the SDGs adopted by University libraries in Sri Lanka. By offering a comprehensive look into these practices, the study aims to shed light on the innovative steps and contributions of these libraries in the broader context of SDGs. The findings from this research will not only deepen the academic

conversation surrounding SDGs but also emphasize the essential role of university libraries in driving these global goals on a regional scale.

Aims and Objectives

The study aims to explore and reveal how University libraries in Sri Lanka align their practices with the SDGs, emphasizing their innovative strategies and challenges, in advancing these global objectives locally.

To achieve this, the following objectives were selected.

1. To explore the practices adopted by University libraries in Sri Lanka in alignment with the SDGs.
2. To identify the innovative strategies employed by these libraries in their approach to the SDGs.
3. To compare the SDGs practices in Sri Lankan university libraries with the global practices.
4. To understand the extent to which these libraries have been successful in translating global SDG objectives to a local context.
5. To identify the challenges faced by Sri Lankan University libraries in integrating and promoting SDGs within their operations and services.

Review of Literature

Role of University Libraries in Promoting SDGs

Introduced in September 2015, SDGs have been rapidly integrated into various sectors, including the library environment. Libraries, especially university libraries, have emerged as pivotal players in advocating these goals, given their inherent roles in education, information dissemination, and community engagement ([IFLA, 2022](#)).

University libraries have aligned their services and projects with these goals, as demonstrated by the contributions of the University of Southern Queensland Library ([Aytac, 2019](#); [Thorpe & Gunton, 2019](#)). Their significant role, particularly in open-access information dissemination, is evident from studies conducted in the Asia and Oceania region ([Mamtora & Pandey, 2018](#))

In essence, academic libraries are instrumental in driving community awareness, outreach, and education related to SDGs. Frameworks such as the one by [Pinto & Ochoa \(2017\)](#) help libraries further their contributions to sustainable development, enhancing their value and impact in society.

The researchers previously identified five core themes under which SDGs can be categorized (See Table 2).

Table 2

Core Themes and Their Corresponding SDGs

Themes	SDGs Included
Capacity Building and Partnerships	SDG 4, SDG 8, SDG 17
Access and Inclusion	SDG 1, SDG 2, SDG 3, SDG 4, SDG 5, SDG 10, SDG 11, SDG 16
Environmental Responsibility and Resource Management	SDG 6, SDG 7, SDG 11, SDG 12, SDG 13, SDG 14, SDG 15
Innovation and Collaboration	SDG 4, SDG 8, SDG 9, SDG 11, SDG 17
Ethics and Accountability	SDG 4, SDG 16, SDG 17

(Source: [Krishanthi & Gamage, 2023](#))

These themes show a strategic alignment of SDGs with specific areas of focus, illustrating how capacity building and partnerships, access and inclusion, environmental responsibility, innovation, and ethics are interwoven with a broad range of SDGs, thereby emphasizing the comprehensive approach required to achieve sustainable development goals.

In the context of Sri Lanka, university libraries hold the promise of being catalysts for SDG realization, but the spectrum of adoption varies. [Warnasooriya \(2018\)](#) highlights the limited success in certain libraries' efforts towards SDGs, whereas studies by [Gunasekera & Samarakoon \(2020\)](#) and [Mashroofa \(2022\)](#) indicate successful integration in others. Nonetheless, awareness and effective implementation remain challenges for many libraries ([Gunasekera et al., 2022](#)).

Translating Global Goals into Local Action

The SDGs hold great potential when adapted and implemented locally, a transition that university libraries have been pivotal in facilitating. Globally, these libraries customize resources and programs to make SDGs pertinent at the grassroots. For instance, Australian libraries support health and environmental initiatives ([Gorelik, 2019](#)), Spanish libraries align their services with SDGs ([Gómez-Pérez et al., 2019](#)), US libraries emphasize community outreach ([Bertot et al., 2018](#)), and South African libraries engage with underserved communities ([Manda, 2018](#)).

Challenges and strategies for overcoming them

Implementing SDGs is not devoid of challenges. [Aina & Oyewole \(2021\)](#), Alqahtani (2020), and others highlight issues such as lack of awareness among library staff, financial constraints, inadequate technology, and the need for appropriate indicators.

Several studies, including those by [Abdellatif & Abdullah \(2021\)](#) and [Adeniran & Akinyede \(2019\)](#), propose strategies for better integration of SDGs in library practices. These encompass creating awareness, fostering a culture of innovation, leveraging technology, and promoting partnerships.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach to investigate SDG practices in Sri Lankan university libraries governed by the University Grants Commission (UGC). The study utilized survey research methodology, collecting data through semi-structured in-depth interviews. The research population consisted of Chief Librarians or their nominees from each of the 17 universities. The interviews were conducted from November 2022 to February 2023. The transcribed data from the interviews were then subjected to content analysis.

Based on the themes in Table 2 and the practices identified in [Krishanthi & Gamage \(2023\)](#), a checklist and an interview protocol were developed to guide data collection and to ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant topics during interviews.

To ensure the privacy and anonymity of the participating institutions, they have been assigned identifiers ranging from 'University 1' to 'University 17' (abbreviated as 'UNI1' to 'UNI17') throughout this paper. The order of these identifiers is random, and does not reflect the sequence in which the interviews were conducted or any other characteristic of the institutions. This anonymized naming convention was maintained to preserve the integrity and ethical considerations of the research.

The relevant practices by the universities in Sri Lanka were mapped to the themes and the corresponding SDGs. Challenges related to SDG implementation in university libraries were also identified through the interview process.

A comparative analysis was conducted to compare the SDG practices identified in Sri Lankan university libraries with those documented in the global review ([Krishanthi & Gamage, 2023](#)). It provided insights into

similarities, differences, and potential areas for improvement. This comprehensive methodology ensured a rigorous and systematic approach to investigating SDG practices in Sri Lankan university libraries, contributing to the existing body of knowledge on sustainable development in higher education institutions.

Results and Discussion

This study explores the strategies of Sri Lankan university libraries in aligning with the SDGs, highlighting their innovative approaches and comparing them with global practices. Moreover, the local adaptation of global SDG objectives and challenges faced in actualizing SDGs are also studied. The analysis categorizes the initiatives of these libraries into routine activities, programs and proactive actions, and promotion and outreach programs. The results highlight the diverse strategies of Sri Lankan university libraries in aligning with SDGs through the five themes.

Implementation of SDGs in Sri Lankan University Libraries Access and Inclusion

Access and inclusion were found to be actively incorporated in the routine activities of Sri Lankan university libraries.

Table 3

SDG Practices on Access and Inclusion Implemented by the University Libraries in Sri Lanka

Library	Routine Activities	Programs and Proactive Actions	Promotion and Outreach Programs
UNI 1	Braille/audio books, Document delivery, Multilingual services & e-resources	Human Library	Donating to school libraries, Employment awareness, Museum with ola manuscripts

UNI 4	Multilingual services, e-resources, Braille collections, special facilities	Information literacy program	Historical document corner
UNI 5	Equitable access, multilingual services, Special facilities for disabled individuals	Seminars and workshops on gender equality	N/A
UNI 6	Remote-access e-resources	Information literacy workshops	N/A
UNI 7	Multilingual services, e-resources, Braille collections	Information literacy workshops	Museum and rare collections
UNI 8	Multilingual services, e-resources, scanning, Braille & audio books collection	Visually impaired student center, Info literacy workshops, Human library	Rare collection and Sri Lankan collections
UNI 9	Remote-access electronic resources, Special facilities & collections for special needs	Information literacy workshops, Cultivation encouragement, Human library	Museum with rare collections, Children's reading rooms at railway stations, Community and farmer libraries
UNI 10	Remote-access e-resources, Disability accessibility	Info. Literacy workshops	N/A
UNI 11	Remote-access e-resources, Disability-special collections	Info. Literacy workshops Human library	N/A
UNI 12	Special equipment and resources for disabilities	Counseling, Info. Literacy workshops,	Learning Commons promoting mental health
UNI 13	E-resources with remote access	Info. literacy workshops	Women empowerment, Audiovisual facilities
UNI 15	Community counseling sessions	Human library	N/A
UNI 16	Special paths & software for disabilities	N/A	N/A
UNI 17	Counseling	Human library	Workshops on reading

The data summarized in Table 3 indicates a strong emphasis on multilingual services, information literacy workshops, and facilities for differently-abled individuals across universities. Their initiatives tackle challenges such as poverty, hunger, health, education, gender equality, reduced inequalities, sustainable cities and communities, and peace, justice,

and strong institutions, thereby addressing issues related to SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 11, and 16.

Table 3 highlights that, many universities engage in routine activities such as providing Braille/audio books, multilingual services, and remote-access e-resources. They also implement proactive programs like human libraries and information literacy workshops.

However, a notable gap exists in promotion and outreach programs, with only a few universities engaging in community-focused initiatives such as museum collections and women's empowerment workshops. This disparity suggests that while universities are proactive in offering inclusive services, there is a need for more robust promotion and outreach efforts to enhance community engagement and awareness.

Comparing these findings with global practices reveals a difference in scope, while adopting the SDGs in the theme of access and inclusion. Globally, libraries adopt a comprehensive approach going beyond routine activities, and actively focusing on areas like health information provision, digital literacy for underserved communities, financial literacy programs, and open access publishing with active incorporation of promoting activities ([Krishanthi & Gamage, 2023](#)).

Capacity Building and Partnership

Capacity building and partnership are crucial aspects of university libraries' efforts to advance the SDGs. The majority of the university libraries in Sri Lanka demonstrated strong engagement in capacity building and partnerships which could promote the SDGs.

Table 4

SDG Practices on Capacity Building and Partnership Implemented at University Libraries in Sri Lanka (N/A - No special practices were reported)

Library	Routine Activities	Programs and Proactive Actions	Promotion and Outreach Programs
UNI 1	Computer literacy for staff, Collaboration with SDG initiatives, Job info, Career guidance	N/A	Distribute info via library networks, SDG information provision, Local history/culture exhibitions
UNI 3	N/A	Workshops for the public library staff and school librarians	N/A
UNI 4	Continuous staff development, Partnering with faculties for information literacy integration	Preservation partnership, Resource acquisition, Personal development workshop	N/A
UNI 5	N/A	Partnerships with National library	N/A
UNI 6	N/A	Collaborate with teacher librarians	N/A
UNI 8	Contribute to the university committee	Collaborate with international libraries, Human library	Collaborative engagement with organizations implementing SDGs.
UNI 9	Continuous training programs for staff and community members	Capacity building collaboration, Bookbinding training	Success story sharing, SDG implementation committee
UNI 10	Career development seminars	Human library	N/A
UNI 11	Career development seminars	Human library and lecture series	N/A
UNI 15	Contributions to the Public Library through community services	Collaboration with Asia Foundation for Digital Library Project	N/A
UNI 16	Collaboration with public libraries through resource sharing	N/A	N/A

As evident in Table 4, the Sri Lankan university libraries forge collaborative partnerships with stakeholders, conduct advocacy and awareness campaigns, foster knowledge sharing and exchange, and provide mentoring and support programs. For example, UNI 1, 4, and 8 have undertaken

proactive actions and outreach initiatives under this theme, such as job and career guidance and partnerships with national libraries.

As these libraries have established a solid foundation for sustainable development aligned with quality education, decent work and economic growth, industry, innovation, and partnerships through the identified practices ([Krishanthi & Gamage, 2023](#)), they address SDGs 4, 8, 9, and 17.

Table 4 shows that many Sri Lankan university libraries engage in routine activities such as career development seminars. They also implement proactive programs like human libraries. However, there is a noticeable gap in promotion and outreach programs, with only a few libraries participating in initiatives such as local history exhibitions and collaborative engagements with organizations implementing SDGs. This indicates a need for increased efforts in promotion and outreach to fully leverage their capacity-building and partnership initiatives.

However, global libraries adopt broader and more innovative approaches. They engage in training for marginalized communities, collaborate with local governments, and advocate for gender equality ([Krishanthi & Gamage, 2023](#)). These global practices could provide a benchmark for Sri Lankan university libraries to expand their initiatives and impact.

Environmental Responsibility and Resource Management

Environmental Responsibility and Resource Management are key aspects of the practices adopted by university libraries in Sri Lanka. As summarized in Table 5, these libraries demonstrate a strong commitment to sustainability through various eco-friendly initiatives. As, they implement practices focusing minimizing their carbon footprint, efforts contribute

directly to the SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15, as they deal with water and sanitation, affordable and clean energy, sustainable cities and communities, responsible consumption and production, climate action, life below water, and life on land.

The practices in Table 5 indicate that while Sri Lankan university libraries demonstrate strong engagement in routine activities such as waste management and energy efficiency, there is a noticeable disparity in their programs and proactive actions and promotion and outreach programs. For instance, libraries like UNI 10 and UNI 11 have proactively implemented green infrastructure and library gardening. However, many others focus primarily on routine eco-friendly practices with limited efforts in promotion and outreach. This gap suggests that there is a need for more comprehensive promotion and outreach initiatives to enhance their impact on environmental responsibility and resource management.

Yet, differences in the scale of practice persist. Sri Lankan libraries prioritize foundational practices, whereas global libraries take a more expansive approach, covering broader aspects of sustainability through environmental initiatives such as seed libraries, green building practices, zero-waste initiatives including recycling projects, and sustainable landscaping including rainwater harvesting systems ([Krishanthi & Gamage, 2023](#)).

Table 5

SDG Practices on Environmental Responsibility and Resource Management at Sri Lankan University Libraries

Library	Routine Activities	Programs and Proactive Actions	Promotion and Outreach Programs
UNI 1	Library well-being, Reduced paper usage, Natural ventilation & lighting, Waste reduction & management, Energy-efficient practices	Cultivating crops	N/A
UNI 2	Waste management, Reduced paper usage, Energy efficiency	N/A	N/A
UNI 3	Energy-efficient practices, Reduced paper usage, Waste management, Natural ventilation & lighting maintenance	Library gardening	N/A
UNI 4	Natural ventilation & lighting maintenance	N/A	N/A
UNI 5	E-collection transition, Waste management	N/A	N/A
UNI 6	Polythene-free, Waste reduction & management, Energy-efficient practices, Smoking-free environment, Environmental assessments, Energy-efficient practices, Waste reduction & management	Green infrastructure and building design	N/A
UNI 7	Waste reduction & management, Water quality checking, Natural ventilation & lighting maintenance, Energy-efficient practices	Digitization of collections	N/A
UNI 8	Reduced paper usage, Waste reduction & management, Energy-efficient practices	Solar system installation, Library gardening, Green infrastructure & building design	N/A
UNI 9	Reduced paper usage, Waste reduction & management, Energy-efficient practices	Digitization, Green building design, Library gardening	N/A
UNI 10	Reduced paper usage, Waste reduction & management, Energy efficiency	Digitization of collections	School outreach: Marine life & water
UNI 11	Waste reduction, Paper usage reduction	Digitization, Green building design	N/A
UNI 12	Waste reduction, Paper reduction, Ventilation & lighting maintenance	Digitization, Green building design	Workshops with NARA: Life below water
UNI 13			
UNI 14			
UNI 15			
UNI 16			
UNI 17			

Innovation and Collaboration

In the realm of innovation and collaboration, academic libraries in Sri Lanka actively embrace technological advancements and digital initiatives to enhance their services. They engage in collaborative projects with other institutions, utilize data-driven decision-making, and foster cross-disciplinary collaborations. As they are dealing with quality education, decent work and economic growth, industry, innovation and infrastructure, sustainable cities and communities, and partnerships for the goals through the practices mentioned in the Table 6, they adopt SDGs 4, 8, 9, 11, and 17.

Table 6

SDG Practices on Innovation and Collaboration Implemented in University Libraries, Sri Lanka

Practice	Numbers of libraries adopted
Monitoring technological advancements and trends	12
Assessing user needs and preferences	16
Collaborative collection development and resource sharing	14
Integration of emerging technologies	3
Data-driven decision making	14
Promoting cross-disciplinary collaboration	12
Providing training on innovative technologies	13
Participating in consortia or partnerships	8
Cultivating a culture of innovation	8

Despite these efforts, there is a notable variance in the implementation of these practices as shown in Table 6. Many libraries excel in routine activities such as monitoring technological trends and assessing user needs, with 12 and 16 libraries respectively adopting these practices. However, engagement in proactive actions like integrating emerging technologies and promoting cross-disciplinary collaboration is less common, with only 3 and

12 libraries involved, respectively. Similarly, while eight libraries (UNI 1, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 12) organize research symposiums and six libraries (UNI 1, 8, 9, 11, 15 and 17) implement Human Libraries and webinars, these practices are not widespread. This indicates a need for broader and more systematic implementation of innovative practices and collaborative outreach to fully realize their potential in advancing SDGs.

While the practices identified under the theme innovation and collaboration reflect active efforts, global libraries seem to extend beyond these by promoting open access research, hosting events on global issues, establishing innovation hubs and maker spaces and integrating emerging technologies such as virtual and augmented reality for immersive learning environments ([Krishanthi & Gamage, 2023](#)).

Ethics and Accountability

University libraries in Sri Lanka prioritize ethics and accountability as fundamental principles guiding their actions. All 17 university libraries integrate ethics and accountability into their routine activities. However, none engage in specific programs or proactive actions or promotion and outreach. Ethical considerations are upheld in collection development and reporting, ensuring transparency and accountability. Libraries actively seek feedbacks and document library committee activities to maintain transparency. Additionally, user needs evaluation processes are implemented. These practices align with SDGs 4, 16, and 17, which focus on quality education, peace, justice, and strong institutions, and partnerships for the goals.

Comparing these practices with global standards reveals some noteworthy differences. Globally, libraries adopt a broader approach by integrating SDGs into library policies and conducting awareness programs.

They conduct workshops and discussions on social justice issues, emphasizing diversity, equity, and inclusion. ([Krishanthi & Gamage, 2023](#)).

Trends of adaptation of themes in Sri Lankan university libraries

Researchers analyzed the overall adaptation of SDG practices by university libraries in Sri Lanka under the five themes in cumulative tables (Tables 7 and 8).

Table 7 indicates that most Sri Lankan university libraries have integrated SDG practices into their routine activities, with a strong presence in environmental responsibility and innovation. However, there are notable variations in the adoption of access and inclusion, and capacity building, suggesting areas for further development and consistency across all libraries.

Table 8 reveals that Sri Lankan university libraries have limited engagement in promotion and outreach activities related to the SDGs, with few libraries demonstrating practices in access and inclusion, and even fewer in environmental responsibility.

Table 7

SDG Practices on Routine Activities and Programs and Proactive Actions Related to the Five Themes

Library	Access and Inclusion	Capacity Building and Partnership	Environmental Responsibility and Resource Management	Innovation and Collaboration	Ethics and Accountability
UNI 1	√	√	√	√	√
UNI 2	×	×	√	√	√
UNI 3	×	√	√	√	√
UNI 4	√	√	√	√	√
UNI 5	√	√	√	√	√
UNI 6	√	√	√	√	√
UNI 7	√	×	√	√	√
UNI 8	√	√	√	√	√
UNI 9	√	√	√	√	√
UNI 10	√	√	√	√	√
UNI 11	√	√	√	√	√
UNI 12	√	×	√	√	√
UNI 13	√	×	√	√	√
UNI 14	×	×	√	√	√
UNI 15	√	√	√	√	√
UNI 16	√	√	√	√	√
UNI 17	√	×	√	√	√

(√ denotes the presence of the practices and, × denotes the absence)

Table 8

SDG Practices on Promotion and Outreach Activities Related to the Five Themes

Library	Access and Inclusion	Capacity Building and Partnership	Environmental Responsibility and Resource Management	Innovation and Collaboration	Ethics and Accountability
UNI 1	√	√	×	×	×
UNI 2	×	×	×	×	×
UNI 3	×	×	×	×	×
UNI 4	√	×	×	×	×

UNI 5	×	×	×	×	×
UNI 6	×	×	×	×	×
UNI 7	√	×	×	×	×
UNI 8	√	√	×	×	×
UNI 9	√	√	×	×	×
UNI 10	×	×	×	×	×
UNI 11	×	×	×	×	×
UNI 12	√	×	√	×	×
UNI 13	√	×	×	×	×
UNI 14	×	×	×	×	×
UNI 15	×	×	×	×	×
UNI 16	×	×	×	×	×
UNI 17	√	×	√	×	×

(√ denotes the presence of the practices and, × denotes the absence)

Access and Inclusion

The data indicates that most Sri Lankan university libraries have incorporated access and inclusion into their routine activities. Specifically, 13 out of 17 libraries consistently implemented inclusive practices such as multilingual services, Braille collections, and remote-access e-resources.

However, only 7 libraries have extended these efforts to promotion and outreach programs. This disparity highlights the need for more robust community engagement initiatives to enhance accessibility and inclusion.

Capacity Building and Partnership

Regarding routine activities, a strong emphasis on capacity building and partnership is evident in 10 libraries which engage in continuous staff development, career guidance, and collaborations with other institutions.

Despite these efforts, only 3 libraries actively participated in promotion and outreach programs related to capacity building and partnership, such as distributing information via library networks and sharing success

stories. This suggests an area for improvement in extending the impact of these initiatives beyond the immediate library environment.

Environmental Responsibility and Resource Management

All 17 libraries have adopted routine eco-friendly practices, such as waste reduction, energy efficiency, and natural ventilation and lighting. Proactive actions are more limited, with specific initiatives like digitization and green building designs being implemented by only a few libraries.

Promotion and outreach efforts related to environmental responsibility are notably lacking, with only 2 libraries engaged in community-focused environmental initiatives. This gap indicates a potential area for expansion to better align with global environmental sustainability practices.

Innovation and Collaboration

Twelve libraries have incorporated routine activities related to innovation and collaboration, such as monitoring technological advancements and assessing user needs.

However, proactive actions like integrating emerging technologies such as implementing AI-powered chatbots to assist users, advanced data analysis such as employing data analytics to understand user behavior and preferences are less common, with only 3 libraries adopting such practices.

However, promotion and outreach activities related to innovation and collaboration are practiced by none of the libraries. This underscores the need for more systematic and widespread implementation of innovative practices to advance SDGs effectively.

Ethics and Accountability

All 17 libraries have embedded ethics and accountability into their routine activities, focusing on transparent reporting and stakeholder feedback mechanisms.

However, there is a noticeable absence of promotion and outreach programs under this theme, indicating that while ethical standards are upheld internally, there is a need for external advocacy and awareness initiatives to strengthen accountability and ethical practices within the broader community.

The trends reveal that while Sri Lankan university libraries are proactive in integrating SDG practices into their routine activities, there is a significant gap in the implementation of programs and proactive actions, as well as promotion and outreach programs. To bridge this gap, libraries could benefit from adopting more comprehensive and innovative approaches, similar to global practices.

Thus, comparing these findings with global practices reveals that libraries worldwide tend to adopt more expansive and proactive approaches, emphasizing outreach and community engagement. Adopting similar strategies could provide Sri Lankan university libraries with a pathway to amplify their contributions to sustainable development.

Translating Global Goals into Local Action

Global objectives such as SDGs, provide a universal framework. However, their real impact is felt when adapted and actualized at the grassroots. Sri Lankan university libraries exemplify this localization.

Under the theme Access and Inclusion, national efforts, exemplified by institutions like UNI 1 and 8, strategically prioritize services such as Braille books and multi-lingual resources. These initiatives underscore a commitment

to localized strategies, ensuring inclusive education and equitable information access.

Concerning Capacity Building and Partnership, UNI 1, seamlessly integrates local job information sessions and collaborations with SDG movements. This signifies a translation of global capacity-building goals into actionable and context-specific programs.

In terms of Environmental Responsibility, libraries, particularly UNI 1 and 8, actively embrace eco-initiatives, showcasing tangible actions at the community level. This reflects a concerted effort to transform global sustainability goals into localized and community-focused environmental actions.

Within the domain of Innovation and Collaboration, practices like webinars and the Human Library concept, observed in libraries like UNI 1 and 9, underscore the translation of global innovation goals into localized collaborative efforts. These initiatives highlight a dynamic approach to harnessing global ideas in a local context.

Regarding Ethics and Accountability, local libraries emphasize transparent reporting, and actively seek user feedback. This mirrors the global emphasis on transparency and accountability, showcasing a commitment to ethical practices at the local level.

Hence, while Sri Lankan university libraries have made commendable progress in aligning with global objectives, there exists an opportunity to bridge the gap between global aspirations and local actions. Drawing insights from international practices and tailoring them to Sri Lanka's unique context can enhance the impact and effectiveness of these initiatives.

The Challenges and Barriers in Adopting SDG Practices

The challenges and barriers encountered in the implementation of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by university libraries were analyzed through semi-structured in-depth interviews as presented in Table 9. These challenges collectively emphasize the need for structured support and resources to amplify the libraries' potential and impact.

These difficulties encompass a range of challenges including lack of awareness & understanding, limited resources & funding, institutional culture & priorities, and collaboration & networking challenges. Addressing these difficulties is crucial for overcoming the barriers to effective implementation of SDGs by university libraries.

Table 9

Challenges Faced by Sri Lankan University Libraries in adopting SDGs

Challenge	Universities Affected
Financial constraints	UNI 1, UNI 2, UNI 3, UNI 4, UNI 5
Absence of library-focused strategies	UNI 2, UNI 4, UNI 10
Human resource limitations	UNI 1, UNI 6, UNI 7, UNI 9
Space constraints	UNI 8, UNI 9, UNI 13
Training needs	UNI 8, UNI 9, UNI 13
Institutional culture	UNI 8, UNI 9, UNI 13
Lack of collaboration/networking	UNI 12, UNI 15, UNI 17
Lack of awareness/understanding	UNI 13, UNI 14

In comparing challenges of Sri Lankan university libraries with global trends in SDG implementation, notable similarities arise. Globally and in Sri Lanka, there's a distinct lack of SDG awareness among library staff, mirroring global findings ([Abdellatif & Abdullah, 2021](#); [Adeniran & Akinyede, 2019](#)). Financial constraints, emphasized worldwide ([Alqahtani, 2020](#); [Alzahrani & Alshehri, 2021](#)), also hamper Sri Lankan libraries. Influences of institutional

cultures is a shared barrier ([Aina & Oyewole, 2021](#)), emphasizing the need for organizational cohesion. Furthermore, the challenge of promoting collaborations that is deemed vital for SDGs ([Al-Saggaf & Rahman, 2019](#); [Aina & Oyewole, 2021](#)), resonates in Sri Lanka. These parallels underscore the universal nature of SDG implementation barriers, which for a coordinated global response.

Conclusion

The call for sustainable development, epitomized by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), requires concerted global efforts. The role of university libraries in this cause cannot be overstated. As knowledge hubs and academic nerve centers, these libraries possess the potential to disseminate, endorse, and amplify sustainable practices, thus advancing the global SDG agenda.

This exploratory study has explored deep into understanding the practices, strategies, and challenges associated with SDGs in Sri Lankan university libraries. The exploration highlights their foundational commitment to the SDGs. University libraries in Sri Lanka have fervently embraced the SDGs, transitioning from traditional knowledge repositories to dynamic hubs of sustainable development.

These libraries underscore capacity building and partnerships, aligning with key SDGs like 4, 8, 9, and 17. They're not just centers of learning but catalysts for collaborative growth. A pronounced focus on community anchors their initiatives, emphasizing access and inclusion. Their efforts address several SDGs, notably 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 11, and 16, reflecting their role in equitable information dissemination and empowerment.

Environmental conservation is integral to their ethos. With green practices, they champion SDGs 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14, and 15, emphasizing their commitment to sustainability. Their innovative spirit shines through in technology adoption and fostering collaborations, aiding the advancement of SDGs 4, 8, 9, 11, and 17. Moreover, their dedication to ethics and transparency resonates with SDGs 4, 16, and 17, marking them as principled and accountable pillars of knowledge in the community.

Trends in the adaptation of SDG themes by Sri Lankan university libraries shows a noticeable gap between routine activities and proactive promotion and outreach efforts. The promotion and outreach activities should be addressed to enhance the libraries' overall impact on sustainable development.

Building upon our exploration of university libraries in Sri Lanka, some inspiring perspectives emerge when compared with global best practices. While many foundational principles are similar, Sri Lankan libraries showcase distinctive adaptations tailored to their unique regional requirements. These localized strategies, while consistent with global SDG trends, underscore the pivotal role of context in effectively achieving sustainable objectives. This balance between local adaptations and global standards sets Sri Lankan libraries apart in their pursuit of sustainability.

To strengthen the alignment of Sri Lankan university libraries with global SDG practices, a comprehensive roadmap is proposed. This involves expanding services and programs by developing health information provision, digital literacy for underserved communities, and financial literacy programs to enhance access and inclusion. Strengthening partnerships is crucial, with a focus on extensive training for marginalized communities, collaboration with local governments, and advocacy for gender equality. Adopting innovative

environmental practices, such as implementing seed libraries, zero-waste initiatives, and sustainable landscaping projects, will enhance environmental responsibility and resource management. Furthermore, enhancing digital and collaborative initiatives by promoting open access research, hosting events on global issues, and leveraging data-driven decision-making can foster innovation and collaboration. Lastly, integrating broader ethical practices by incorporating SDGs into library policies, conducting social justice workshops, and supporting open access publishing will enhance ethics and accountability. This strategic roadmap aims to bridge the gap between local actions and global aspirations, driving Sri Lankan university libraries towards more comprehensive and impactful contributions to the SDGs.

However, the implementation of SDG practices is not without challenges. Key barriers identified include financial constraints, absence of library-focused strategies, human resource limitations, space constraints, and training needs. Additionally, institutional culture and a lack of collaboration and awareness further complicate the adoption of SDG practices. Addressing these challenges is essential for overcoming barriers and enhancing the libraries' effectiveness in contributing to the SDGs.

Based on the balance between local adaptations and global standards, it's clear that Sri Lankan university libraries play a transformative role in the broader SDG narrative. They have not only internalized the global SDG framework but have also skillfully converted it into actionable local initiatives. Such a fusion of global goals with tailored local solutions, championed by these libraries, sets a compelling precedent for institutions around the world.

In wrapping up our insights, Sri Lankan university libraries stand as a shining example of how academic institutions can dynamically contribute to achieving the SDGs. As the global community advances towards the 2030

SDG benchmark, the approach of the Sri Lankan university libraries progress with invaluable insights and inspiration.

Implications and Future Directions

While Sri Lankan university libraries have shown a commendable commitment to the SDGs, there is ample scope for deeper integration and broader outreach. Future strategies could focus on more extensive collaborations, increased public engagement, and leveraging emerging technologies to further the SDG agenda.

Limitations

The findings, although helpful, are based on self-reported practices, which could introduce potential biases. The study qualitatively identified the practices providing binary cumulative information, while these were not quantitatively weighted according to their impact. Further research is needed to gauge the direct impact and correlations of the Sri Lankan university library initiatives related to SDGs.

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