



## The Year Ahead: the SDGs in 2019

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I'm aware that you, here, are hardly novices when it comes to the UN 2030 Agenda.

Almost all of you took part in our regional workshops. Some even ran them! And so you're pretty familiar with the SDGs. What they are, how they work.

Most of you have also explained them to other people, in your own words, as part of your IAP activities.

So we don't need to look at them all again.

But that also means no easy start after the break!

What I want you to take away from the next fifteen minutes or so is an understanding of how the SDGs are being taken forwards.

Which institutions are shaping their future.

What will we face as part of the **regular cycle**.

What is **new**, and requires a special effort.

And most importantly, what does this mean in terms of **opportunities to ensure libraries get the recognition and support they need?**

What's necessary to deliver meaningful access to information for all?

I will try to leave you, therefore, with a five key messages – challenges – to take with you, both into the rest of today's discussions, and your work at home.

I'll make use of this slide – which shows, hopefully in not too much detail, the different structures. For each action point, different bits will be highlighted.

By the end, I hope it will make some sense!

So what will be familiar about 2019?

Quite a lot, fortunately. In addition to defining the SDGs, the 2030 Agenda also set out a process for following their implementation over time.

A key part of this is annual reporting.

Building on data, as well as broader research, the UN Secretary General will publish his own report on progress.

He will not be alone. Many UN agencies will do the same.

Indeed, the logic of the 2030 Agenda has proved powerful within the UN family.

Organisations which, until now, had proved relatively independent have been keen to show how their work is contributing.

The World Intellectual Property Organisation, talking about the impact of copyright, patents and traditional knowledge.

The International Labour Organisation focusing on employment and workers' rights.

UNESCO looking at education, information access and heritage.

The UN Human Settlements Programme (UN Habitat) on cities and communities.

And many of the hundreds of other parts of the UN family will offer expertise in their own areas.

Both in contribution to the UN Secretary-General's report, and in independently published works.

Each one of these reports – or at least the process of preparing them – is an opportunity.

To ensure that the work of libraries is recognised.

To ensure that there are references and recommendations that you, that IFLA, that the library field as a whole can use in your advocacy.

In addition to reports on specific themes, there are reports by region.

The UN's five regional commissions also hold meetings – regional sustainable development fora.

For Europe and North America, for Latin America and the Caribbean, for Africa, for Asia Pacific, and for Western Asia.

These discuss reporting on progress at the regional level, and produce statements.

I'm glad to say that this year, we were represented at every one of these, most of the time by local librarians. Some of you are here today!

We held a side event at the LAC Forum in Santiago, shaped declarations in Europe and Africa. And built up contacts around the world.

This range of reports lies behind my first **key message**.

That **there are many places and means of engaging upstream of next year's High Level Political Forum**.

Either on a geographical or a thematic basis.

These are a good opportunity not only to shape the reports coming out, but also to build networks. To get access to decision-makers who are otherwise hard to meet. And of course to learn!

This is also a job for IFLA's committees. CLM already works with the World Intellectual Property Organisation, the Cultural Heritage Programme Advisory Committee works with UNESCO.

And recently, we have seen excellent engagement from the section on Libraries Serving Persons with Special Needs in the initiative on Monitoring and Evaluating Disability-friendly Development. Libraries will feature in a report due out in December.

The richness of IFLA as an organisation gives us unique strengths. Real possibilities to engage, provide evidence, and shape conclusions, recommendations and reporting.

Where does all this reporting go?

The High-Level Political Forum, or HLPF.

This is a joint committee of the United Nations Economic and Social Council, or ECOSOC, and the General Assembly.

ECOSOC is the UN committee dealing – as the name suggests, with economic and social issues. And as the name might not suggest, environmental issues too. It oversees a number of key UN Commissions, such as on the Status of Women or on Social Development.

And it coordinates work across the UN system on sustainable development.

The HLPF is organised by ECOSOC three years out of four.

The General Assembly, meanwhile, is the body with the broadest mandate of all in terms of subjects covered, and the broadest membership as well.

Sustainable development used to be purely an ECOSOC issue.

However, by giving the General Assembly a role, the UN underlined that sustainable development was an issue for all of government, and relied on engagement at the highest levels.

So the High Level Political Forum takes place annually, usually in July, over eight days.

In the first week, it is primarily senior officials and diplomats who attend while in the second – the high level segment – there are more ministers.

Throughout the meeting, Members hear and discuss reports received, and review overall progress on the SDGs.

In particular, they discuss focus SDGs, and voluntary national reviews from Member States.

This leads to the next **two key messages**.

First of all, four focus SDGs in 2019 are 4, 8, 10 and 16. You will soon know by heart that these are education, employment, inequality and peaceful societies.

These are, obviously enough, key topics for libraries. **We have a great opportunity to highlight what we are doing.**

We need to use this chance to draw attention to the work of libraries, especially on education and employment, wherever they are being discussed.

The challenge is to create the space to do it – many other organisations and actors will be trying to do the same. Building our arguments, building alliances, and building awareness will be a priority.

The issue is slightly different on access to information. We need to be able to explain how we see access to information.

Not just as access to public – governmental – information, such as budgets, statements of interest or briefings. This is of course important. But we should be thinking about public access to information.

Any information that is important, that can change lives. Because in the end, people don't care where information comes from, as long as it makes a difference.

Once people understand this – and a new version of the DA2I report will help! – we are closer to ensuring libraries are recognised and included.

And secondly, **in those countries which do voluntary national reviews, there is an exciting opportunity for libraries, nationally, to get involved.**

These are the result of another innovation in the 2030 Agenda.

The decision of Member States in 2015 provided that governments could volunteer to report to their peers about progress made in implementing the SDGs.

They are given a lot of freedom to work out how to do this, although the UN Secretariat has produced guidance, which includes a call on Members to engage a range of actors.

This could – should – include libraries. Australia has shown the way here, with three references to libraries in the report submitted.

And I know that others of you are involved in the relevant committees.

A list of the countries which have already volunteered to do reviews next years is available.

France, the Philippines, South Africa, Tunisia, Uruguay. You're all there!

You can already be looking to find out how your reviews are going to run. So you can get involved early, get yourself invited to events and consultations. Use the fact that libraries are seen as constructive, positive players.

Show interest and engagement – your governments may well thank you, and you'll be able to build contacts and knowledge, as well as getting that vital recognition and support.

All of this work feeds into the final declaration of the HLPF. This is usually prepared before the meeting, based on the reports already submitted.

Of course, this just provides a further reason why it's so important to contribute upstream!

So that's what is standard for 2019.

What's new?

There are two key things, but pretty fundamental ones.

First of all, I mentioned earlier that the HLPF is organised by ECOSOC three years out of four.

In the fourth year, it's the General Assembly assembly that takes the lead.

2019 is one of those years. All of the SDGs, at least once, will have been in focus. We will have completed a cycle.

The General Assembly – which agreed the whole 2030 Agenda in 2015 – can of course make changes, both to the substance and the method of the agenda.

How extensive these will be remains unclear. Changes are most likely to happen at the level of targets, rather than the overall goals.

But we may need to defend the importance of access to information, which was not necessarily popular amongst governments first time around.

For political reasons, many are hesitant about promoting transparency.

They worry that the reference to public access to information in 16.10 really means access to public information, as we discussed above.

Of course, for IFLA, government transparency is a good thing. Many in our community are supporting open government efforts.

Our Law Libraries' section has a statement on this, and it's the core of the work of the Government Information and Official Publications Section. IFLA HQ also produced a brief on the subject recently.

But as said before, we're also about wider access, something that governments may find it easier to support.

We therefore need underline what access to information means to us. The fact that it shouldn't matter where the information comes from.

More that people can find it, use it, and create it. Our definition of access to information.

We need to **ensure that the place of access to information is assured within the SDGs.**

Secondly, you'll remember that in order to measure progress against those 169 targets, there are 232 indicators.

This is one of the crucial features of the 2030 Agenda, one of the aspects designed to ensure its impact.

A framework for gauging success.

The Agenda doesn't lack ambition. Not least given that for many of these indicators, there isn't yet an agreed definition, or data collected.

Every year, these are gathered, where possible, and published in a compendium. National administrations are also drawing on this collection in their own efforts to implement the SDGs.

2019 will be no different here.

But in parallel, the UN is looking at how to improve them. This is an ongoing process, aiming to find agreed definitions where none exist. To encourage collection where data isn't being collected. And to propose new indicators where measurements are weak for the moment.

This takes place through an expert advisory group bringing together a UN agencies such as UNESCO and the International Labour Organisation, as well as others such as the World Bank.

The organisations who will, in the end, collect data.

This is also an area where we want more from the 2030 Agenda.

Because getting the right indicators means that we have a better chance of reporting that reflects the importance of libraries' work.

Both at the international and the national level.

The challenge is that now, despite there being nineteen indicators which refer to access to information in as many words, not enough indicators do this.

For example, the indicators on 16.10 focus only on policies for open government information, and attacks on journalists and human rights defenders.

These give too narrow a vision.

And unfortunately, the indicator of preservation of cultural heritage – 11.4 – refers only to spending on archives, museums and world heritage sites.

This is due to the way UNESCO defines its cultural statistics. But these statistics are not collected, and so for now, there is nothing in the UN's reports.

The situation may be easier nationally. Member States can use the UN indicators, but can also develop their own.

Some of you have been involved in this process, for example in Chile. Maybe more.

It's a great opportunity to set precedents.

The review of the indicator framework will take place this year and next, with a final decision in early 2020. New indicators will be proposed, others may be removed.

So our key message here?

And I realise that, because it's about statistics, this may be for the brave, **is to underline to those who matter – national statistics agencies, and of course those in government who understand the importance of access – the need for better measurements in this area.**

There are plenty of potential allies – public health professionals, employment support offices, agricultural information centres.

We need to give information the place it deserves.

So you've received a lot of information. And of course the five key messages, or challenges.

How can we better get libraries on the agenda of relevant regional and thematic organisations?

How can we best use the opportunity of SDGs 4, 8, 10 and 16 being in focus to get others talking about libraries?

How can libraries in VNR countries get to the heart of discussion?

How can we defend the importance of access to information in the upcoming review of the SDGs?

And how can we make the case for indicators that recognise the role of libraries and access to information.

All of these will benefit from your support. In the end, everyone taking decisions at the UN has a home country, comes from somewhere.

They are more likely to listen to libraries here in New York when they have a positive image of libraries at home.

And in turn, IFLA headquarters is here to offer advice and support in doing this.

Are there any questions?