International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions

Supporting, Integrating and Delivering: Library Associations and the SDGs

KEY POINTS
- *In addition to strong awareness of the SDGs in general, library associations are generally active in raising awareness amongst their members and supporting them to raise awareness among communities. This makes them potentially highly relevant partners both for the UN and for wider development education actors.*
- *Over half of library associations have integrated the SDGs into their own planning, and over 40% have staff or committees with an explicit focus on the Goals, demonstrating widespread uptake of the 2030 Agenda's call on all stakeholders to make the Goals part of their own work. There is scope to draw on this experience to help more still embrace the Goals as a structure for their planning.*
- *Around half of associations have incorporated the SDGs into their advocacy work. There is scope here too to draw on existing experience to help more associations do this, either explicitly in their messaging, or as a means for identifying and structuring areas of focus.*
- *While around a fifth of associations have already engaged in formal SDG processes like Voluntary National Reviews, or established links with SDG Coordinators, there is more than could be done – both from the side of SDG authorities and libraries.*

Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals have been strongly adopted by library organisations at the global level as a focus for their own advocacy. As a global and comprehensive policy roadmap that recognises the importance of access for information as an enabler of development, the 2030 Agenda already represents an important win for the field, as well as providing a framework for ongoing engagement both with the UN and other stakeholders.

However, the relevance of the SDGs goes beyond advocacy at the international level. As IFLA has underlined regularly in its own work on the issue, the Goals have significant also as a potential area for library awareness-raising in communities, for structuring efforts to identify priorities and plan actions, and as a framework for engaging with other stakeholders, including governments, in new ways.

There have already been valuable efforts to look at how librarians and libraries are active in these areas. However, it is also worthwhile looking at the work of library associations, which can play the following key roles relevant to the achievement of the SDGs:

1) Raising awareness of the SDGs among their members and providing tools for their members to raise awareness within their communities.
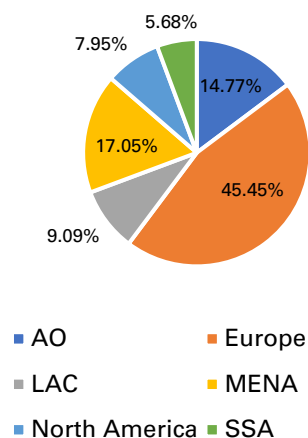
2) Providing a model of integrating the SDGs into their own planning processes and a space for ongoing reflection on and engagement with the SDGs
3) Integrating the SDGs into their advocacy on behalf of the library field as a whole
4) Engaging with SDG-related processes (Voluntary National Reviews, cooperation with SDG Coordinators, SDG Councils where these exist) on behalf of their national library fields.

This survey provides data about this role, complementing the work of IFLA's Management of Library Associations Section and its partners in drawing together examples of good practice from around the world. After a summary of the survey itself, it looks in turn at results around levels of awareness of the SDGs among associations, activities to build awareness more broadly, the integration of the SDGs into broader planning and delivery, and finally the place of the SDGs in association advocacy work. Finally, there is a look across all of the data, and then a conclusion and recommendations.
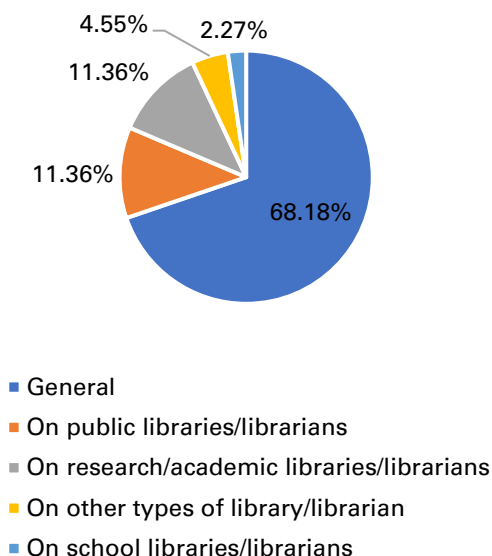
The Survey

The survey was open for a period of six weeks, from 15 April until early June 2023. Overall, we received 88 individual responses, based on direct calls to IFLA's 124 association members, as well as a more open call via IFLA's regional e-mail lists.

Graph 1: Responses by Region

- AO
- Europe
- LAC
- MENA
- North America
- SSA

Graph 2: Responses by Association Type

- General
- On public libraries/librarians
- On research/academic libraries/librarians
- On other types of library/librarian
- On school libraries/librarians

4.55%   2.27%
11.36%
11.36%
68.18%

Breaking the data down by region (Graph 1), almost half of the responses came from Europe, reflecting IFLA's wider membership. The next highest share came from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, and then from the Asia Oceania (AO) region. There were responses from 66 different countries overall.

There are many different types of library association that exist. We asked respondents to indicate what type of association theirs was in terms of the type of library or librarian that they primarily served.

This shows that over 2/3 of respondents came from general associations, serving all (or a wide variety) of library types. Of the rest, just under 1/8 of respondents came from each of public and academic/research library associations, and smaller numbers still from school and other library associations.

We also asked respondents to indicate to how many people they had direct access, for example through their membership and mailing lists. In total, the respondents had access to just over 3 million people.
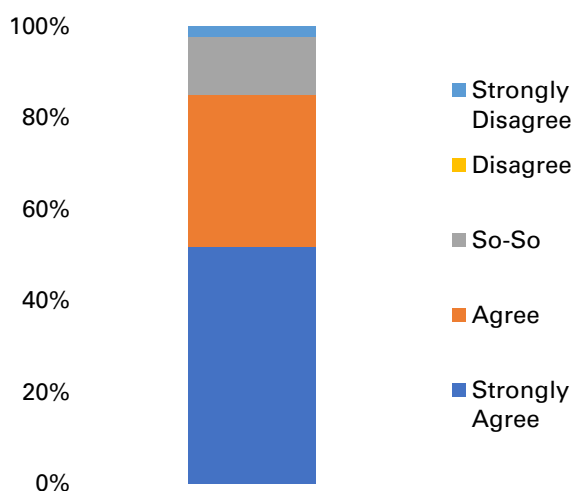
Most questions took the form of a statement, with respondents asked to set out how far they agreed with it, although some final questions were yes/no. The survey also asked for information about the inclusion of libraries in national sustainable development strategies – data from this will be shared separately.

Awareness of the SDGs among Library Associations

Clearly, the first step towards engaging with the SDGs in any capacity is an awareness of them and what they are. We therefore asked respondents to say how far they agreed with the statement: '*In my association, we are well aware of the Sustainable Development Goals*'.

The results (Graph 3) show that around half of all respondents indicated that they strongly agreed. Around 5/6 of all respondents said they either agreed or strongly agreed, showing a high level of self-reported awareness. Of course, it is
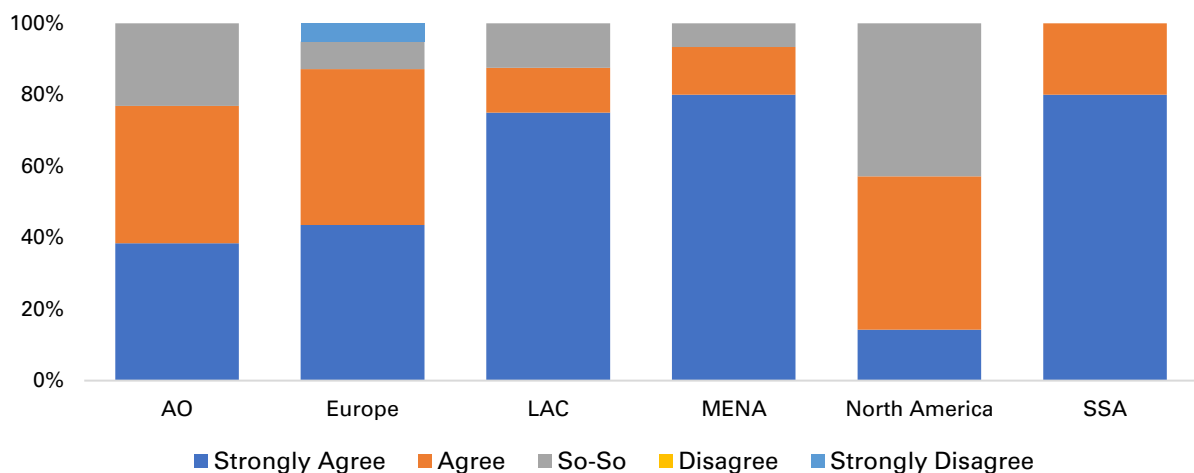
Graph 3: Awareness of the SDGs

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- So-So
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

likely that those with pre-existing awareness were more likely to answer the survey in the first place, but this nonetheless demonstrates some success in efforts to build knowledge of the SDGs.

Looking at the numbers per region (Graph 4), it shows that respondents in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) were the most likely to say that they strongly agreed with the statement, while those in other regions had lower scores for 'strongly agree'. Nonetheless, over 75% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed in Asia-Oceania (AO) and Europe, and well over half did so in North America. It was only in Europe that there were respondents who disagreed in any way with the statement.

Graph 4: Library Association Awareness of the SDGs (by region)

These figures may be a reflection of the relative visible domestic priority given to the SDGs, which still risk being seen, by some, as mainly applicable to developing countries, or the prominence of the UN in general.
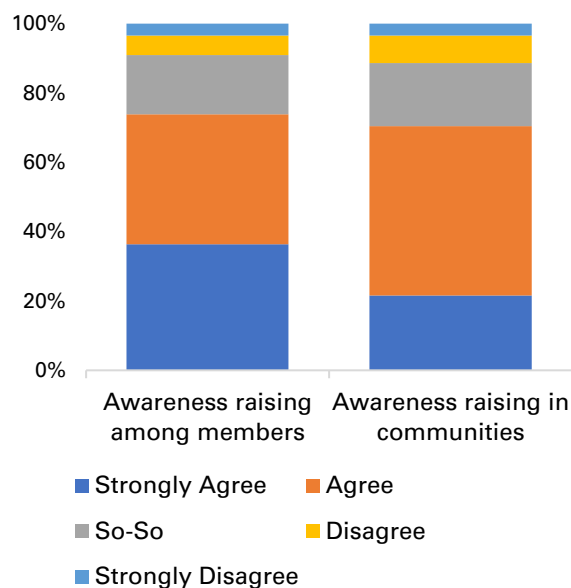
Raising Awareness of the SDGs with Others

Libraries – especially those open to wider communities (public and community libraires in local areas, academic libraries within universities) can act as powerful shop windows, making it possible to expose people to new ideas and themes. Many libraries have looked to draw on this potential around the SDGs, for example through displays or SDG Book Clubs.

Graph 5 presents the data for levels of agreement with the following statements:'

- *In my association, we actively raise awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals amongst our members.*
- *In my association, we actively help our members to raise awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals in their communities.*
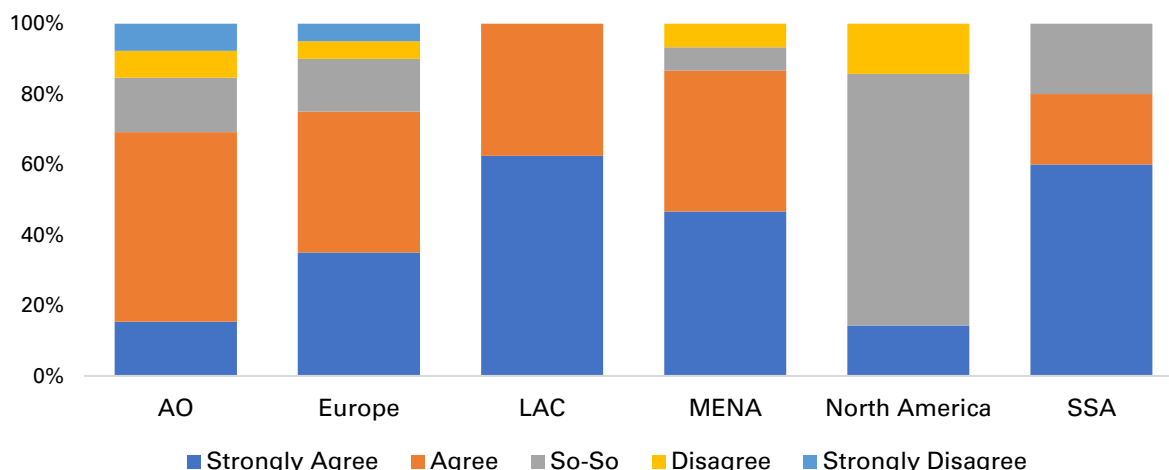
Graph 5: SDG Awareness-Raising

The picture here is again positive (Graph 5), but it is immediately clear that levels of agreement are lower than for the previous statement concerning awareness in general.

Concerning whether associations raise awareness among their own members, over 36% of respondents strongly agreed, and over 37% agreed, meaning that just under 75% in total are nonetheless involved in helping members to understand the SDGs and their potential.
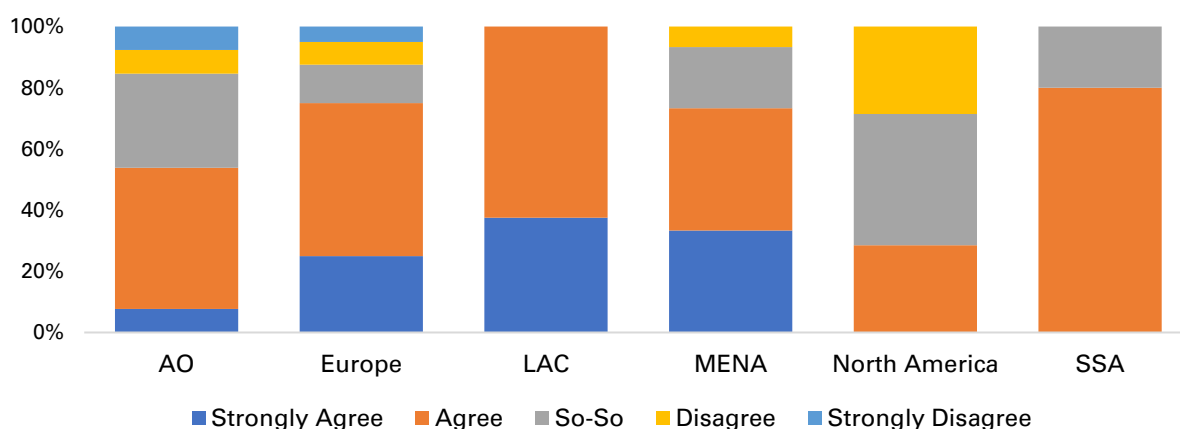
The figures are a little lower – but still high – when it comes to supporting members to raise awareness in communities, with just under 22% strongly agreeing, and just below 50% agreeing, meaning that 7 out of 10 associations are involved in this type of activity.

Graph 6: Promoting Awareness among Members (by region)

Looking at levels of agreement with the statement '*In my association, we actively raise awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals amongst our members*' at a regional level (Graph 6), the highest scores again come from the LAC, MENA and SSA regions. Indeed, all LAC respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement, while 80% or more did so in MENA and SSA. The corresponding figures for Europe and Asia-Oceania were 75% and just under 70%. It was only in North America where a minority of respondents were engaged in awareness raising.

Graph 7: Supporting Awareness Raising in Communities (by region)

As for association support for awareness raising in communities, LAC and MENA had the highest number of respondents strongly agreeing, at 37.5% and 33.3% doing so respectively. In every region except North America, however, over half of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

The responses here underline that for the most part, library associations have embraced their own potential to be amplifiers for the UN 2030 Agenda in their communities, and to support their members, in turn, to build consciousness of the Agenda and its Goals among the people they serve.
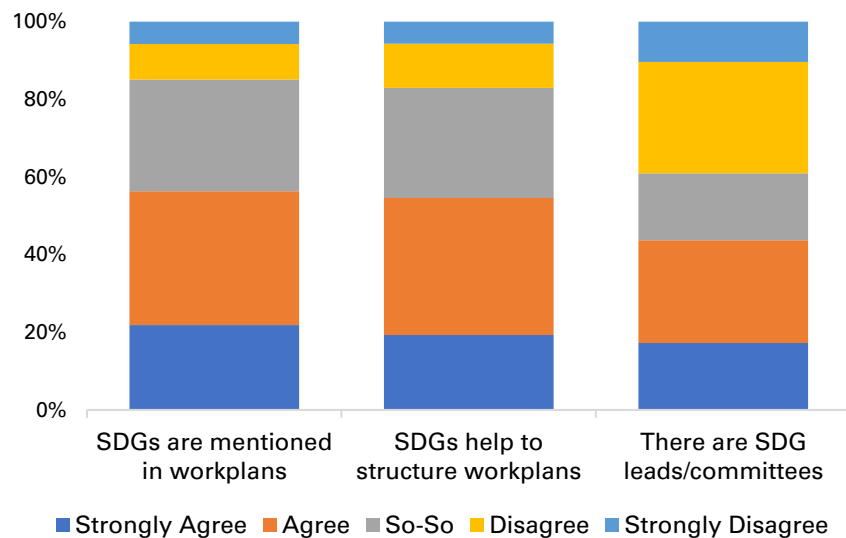
The SDGs in Association Workplans and Implementation

The next questions focused on how far Associations have taken the SDGs as an opportunity to structure their own work planning and delivery. We asked respondents to indicate how far they agreed with the following statements:

- *In my association, we refer to the Sustainable Development Goals in our Strategy/Workplan a lot.*
- *In my association, we have used the Sustainable Development Goals extensively to develop our Strategy/Workplan*
- *In my association, we have an active committee and/or staff who explicitly look at issues around the Sustainable Development Goals*

The responses at the global level are provided in Graph 8, with those for the first two statements relatively similar. Around 20% of respondents strongly agree with the statement, both as concerns references to, and use of the SDGs in their Strategies, and over half either agree or strongly agree with the statement. Fewer than 1 in 5 disagree or strongly disagree.
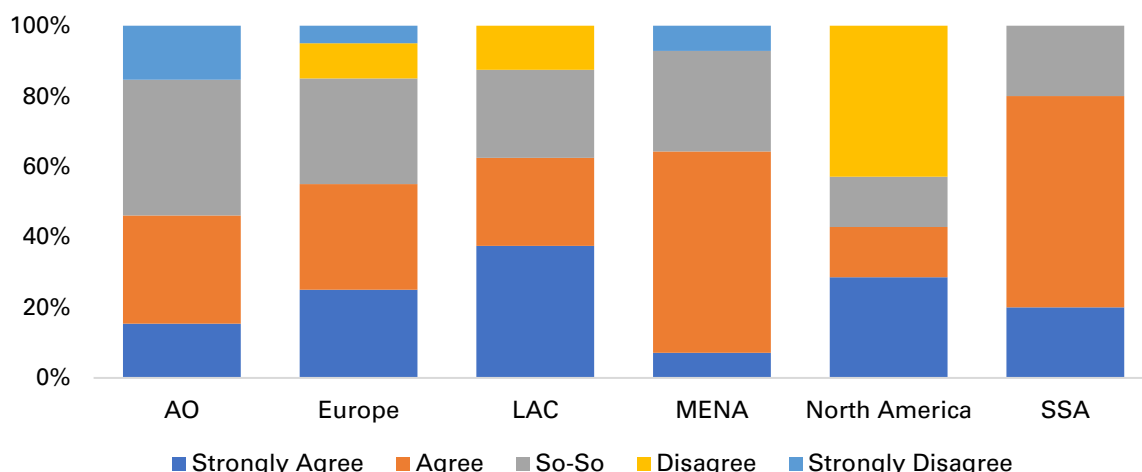
Graph 8: SDGs in Work Planning and Implementation

Meanwhile, over 1 in 6 respondents strongly agree with the statement that they have an active committee and/or staff that explicitly look at issues around the SDGs, and a further quarter agree with the statement. However, almost 2 in 5 disagree.
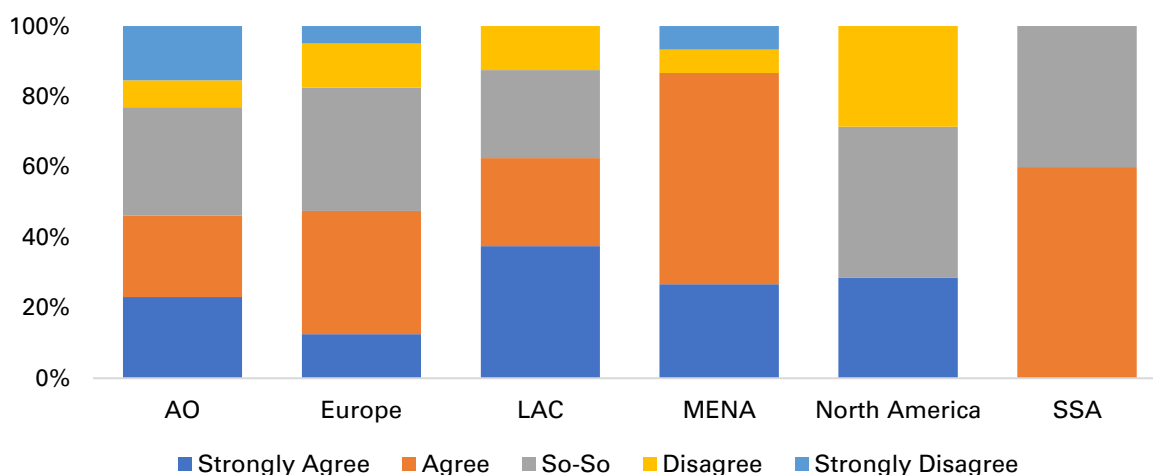
Graph 9: References to the SDGs in Workplans (by region)

Legend: Strongly Agree, Agree, So-So, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

Graph 9 looks at how far respondents report referring to the SDGs in their workplans. The highest scores for strongly agree are in LAC, North America and Europe, although the highest share of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing is in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is only in North America and Asia-Oceania that fewer than half of respondents agree in some way with the statement.

Graph 10: Using the SDGs in Preparing Workplans (by region)

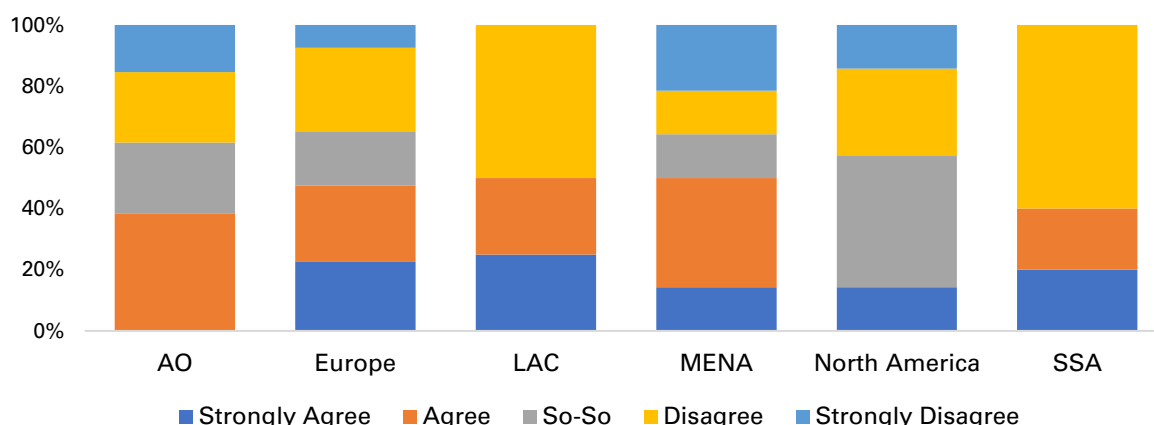Legend: Strongly Agree, Agree, So-So, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

As for how far respondents report using the SDGs to prepare their workplans (Graph 10), it is in LAC that the highest share say that they strongly agree with the statement, but MENA associations overall were the most likely to either strongly agree or agree in general. In LAC, MENA and Sub-Saharan Africa, over half of respondents agree or strongly agree, while slightly fewer do in Asia-Oceania and Europe, and over a quarter do so in North America.

Finally, data concerning agreement with the statement concerning the existence of staff explicitly focussing on the SDGs is in Graph 11. In LAC and MENA, half of all respondents agree or strongly agree with this point, with a slightly lower figure for Europe, and 40% in Sub-Sahara Africa and Asia-Oceania. It is only in North America where just 1 in 7 respondents agree in any way.

Graph 11: Staff or Committees Explicitly Focussed on the SDGs (by region)

Legend: Strongly Agree, Agree, So-So, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

Overall, the figures indicate widespread uptake of the 2030 Agenda by library associations as part of their work plans, in line with the overall call in the Agenda on all stakeholders to mobilise.

The fact that over half of respondents use the Goals in their planning is particularly positive, given that the objective of the Agenda is not just to allow for the labelling of pre-planned activities after the event, but change how stakeholders at all levels plan and act from the beginning.

The lower scores for the question around the existence of staff or groups tasked with work around the SDGs could be read in two ways. Of course, if the SDGs are part of a wider plan, then indeed they are helping to shape the work of associations as a whole, regardless of whether there's a dedicated group. At the same time, having a dedicated group can help both ensure an ongoing focus on the Goals, and allow for monitoring of work.

More positively, it is certainly the case that already in 2 in 5 library associations, there is a person or group which can act as an interlocutor for others involved in the SDGs, for example UN Resident Coordinators.

The SDGs in Advocacy and Engagement

The last main area of focus is around the degree to which library associations have integrated the SDGs into their advocacy work. We look at two broad dimensions of this.

First of all, we wanted to understand the place of the SDGs in wider advocacy planning and discourse – in other words, how far are association drawing on the potential of the Goals as a framework, language and structure for talking about the contribution of libraries to society. To this end, we asked respondents to indicate levels of agreement the following statements:

- *In my association, we use the Sustainable Development Goals extensively in targeting and structuring our advocacy*
- *In my association, we explicitly and systematically refer to the Sustainable Development Goals in our advocacy*
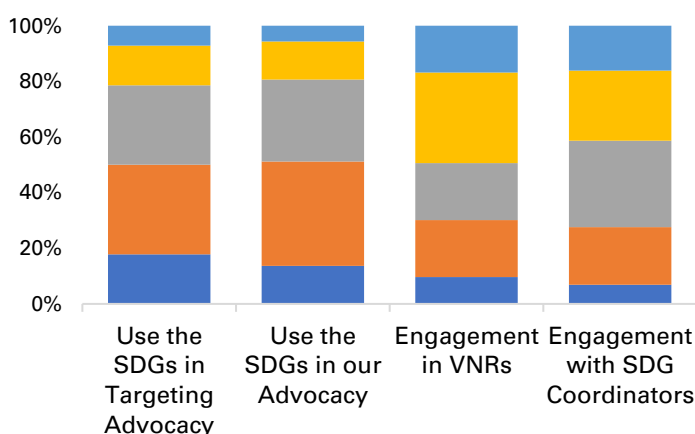
Secondly, we aimed to find out more about whether library associations are making the most of more formal opportunities that exist around the Goals, and in particular, Voluntary National Reviews (which should offer a chance for a range of stakeholders to contribute) and contacts with SDG coordinators within countries. These can be opportunities to diversify the range of contacts for libraries and help ensure that there is a wider support base for libraries, in particular from parts of government that might not usually think of them as relevant.

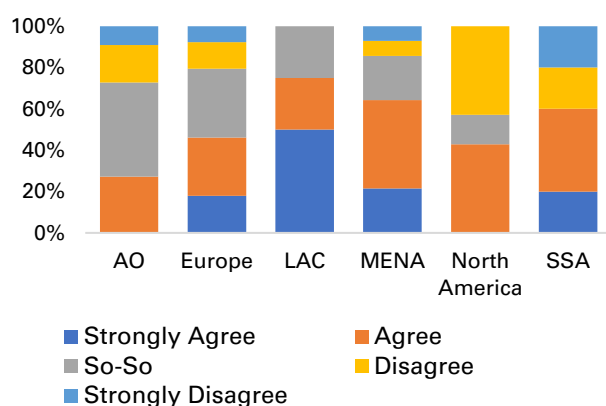Respondents were therefore asked to indicate levels of agreement the following statements:

- *My association has engaged closely in the preparation of a Voluntary National Review of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals*
- *My association has good contacts with the person or team in government responsible for overseeing implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals*

Graph 12 offers global responses on these. Around half of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the first two statements, suggesting that a significant share of library associations have indeed looked to incorporate the SDGs into their advocacy work. Figures are lower around engagement in formal opportunities, with around 30% of respondents reporting engagement with Voluntary National Reviews, and a little over a quarter having relationships with SDG Coordinators.
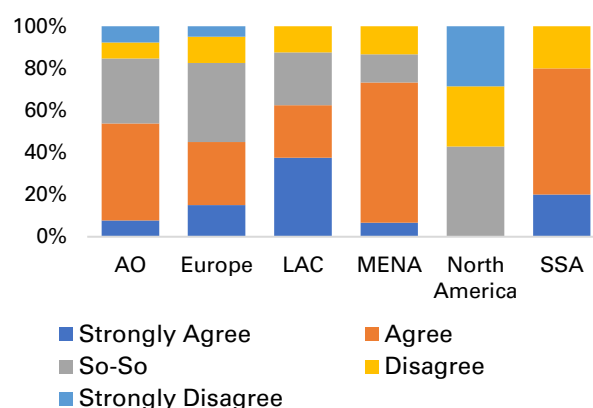
Graph 12: SDGs in Advocacy and Engagement

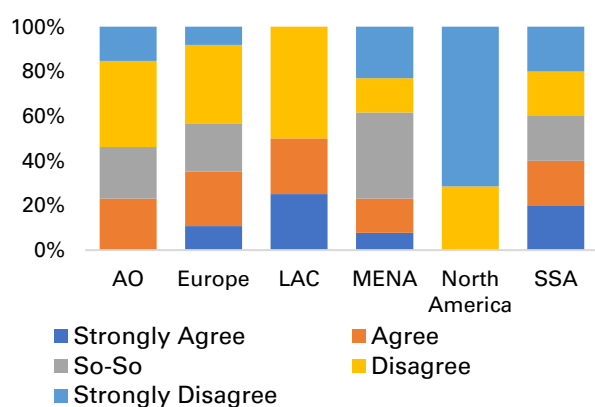## Graph 13: Use of the SDGs to Target and Plan Advocacy (by region)

Strongly Agree — Agree — So-So — Disagree — Strongly Disagree

Graph 14: Use of the SDGs in Advocacy Discourse (by region)

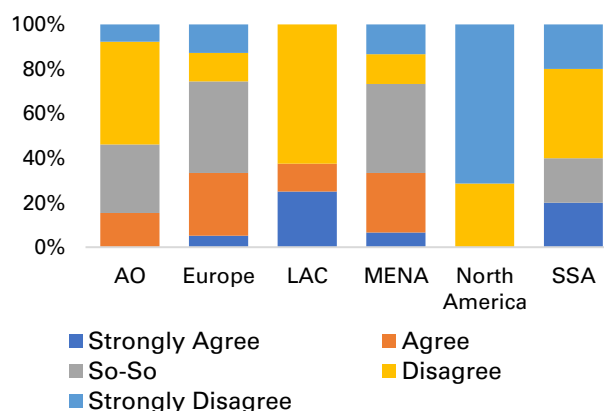Strongly Agree — Agree — So-So — Disagree — Strongly Disagree

Graphs 13 and 14 offer a regional breakdown for the first two questions around use of the SDGs in planning and delivering advocacy. They show that the LAC region stands out for reference to the Goals in planning and targeting advocacy, followed by the MENA, Sub-Saharan Africa regions, while Sub-Saharan Africa leads in references to the SDGs in advocacy, followed by MENA and LAC.

In terms of how to read this data, results in these areas likely reflect, to some extent, how far the SDGs provide opportunities for advocacy. In countries where the SDGs are less well-known or valued by decision-makers and populations, the value of planning and delivering advocacy around them may be lower compared to other themes. At the same time, even without referring to the SDGs by name, the goals that they set out provide a helpful language for advocacy and engagement, and so there may be an under-realised potential here.

Graph 15: Engagement in Voluntary National Reviews (by region)

Strongly Agree — Agree — So-So — Disagree — Strongly Disagree

Graph 16: Engagement with SDG Coordinators (by region)

Strongly Agree — Agree — So-So — Disagree — Strongly Disagree

Graphs 15 and 16 look at engagement in formal SDG-related processes by library associations. Looking at contributions to Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs), half of LAC respondents agree or strongly agree with the statement that they have been

involved. 40% of Sub-Saharan African, and between a quarter and a third of European and MENA respondents do so. Notably, no North American respondents agree or strongly agree, although it is worth noting that the United States has yet to carry out a VNR, and Canadian associations have, since the survey, engaged.

As for work with SDG coordinators, over a third of European, LAC and MENA associations have established contacts, opening up a path to regular collaboration. This is the case for a fifth of Sub-Saharan African and a sixth of Asia-Oceania respondents. Again, all North American respondents disagree or strongly disagree, although these figures have likely changed.
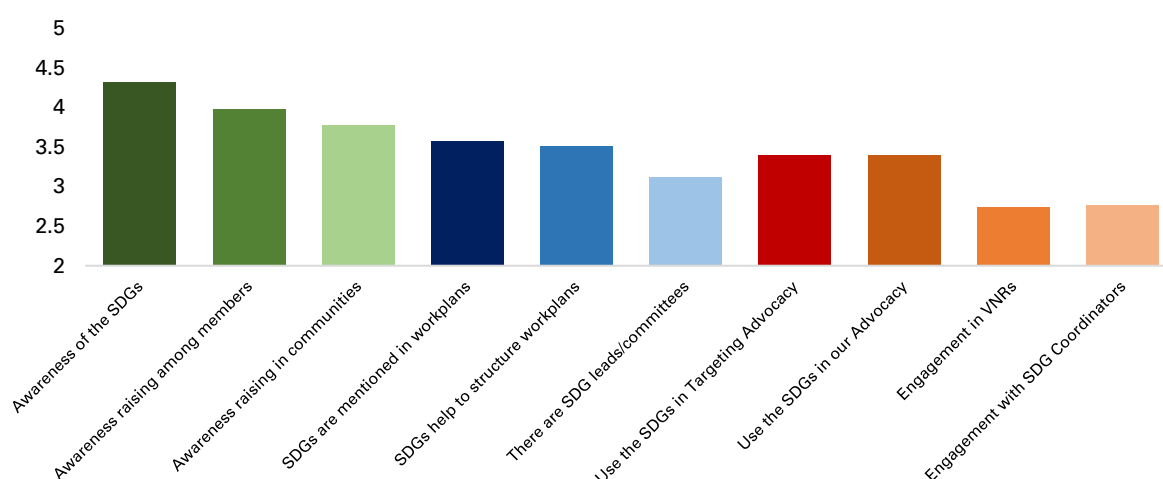
In terms of the story to take from this, it is impossible to conclude from this data whether the issue is associations themselves not reaching out, or whether the mechanisms in place for carrying out VNRs or coordinating work around the SDGs in general are less inclusive than they might be.

We also asked whether library associations were formally part of national SDG councils. Of those respondents providing a positive or negative answer, just over 18% answered yes. Again, this could be because such councils do not exist, that they are not particularly inclusive, or that associations themselves have not yet managed to build a profile as a key player in SDG delivery.

Taking an Overview

Finally, we can bring together all of the answers in order to get a sense of responses in general. For this, we have calculated 'average' scores for each question by assigning a numerical score to each answer, with 'strongly agree' being 5 and 'strongly disagree' being 1.

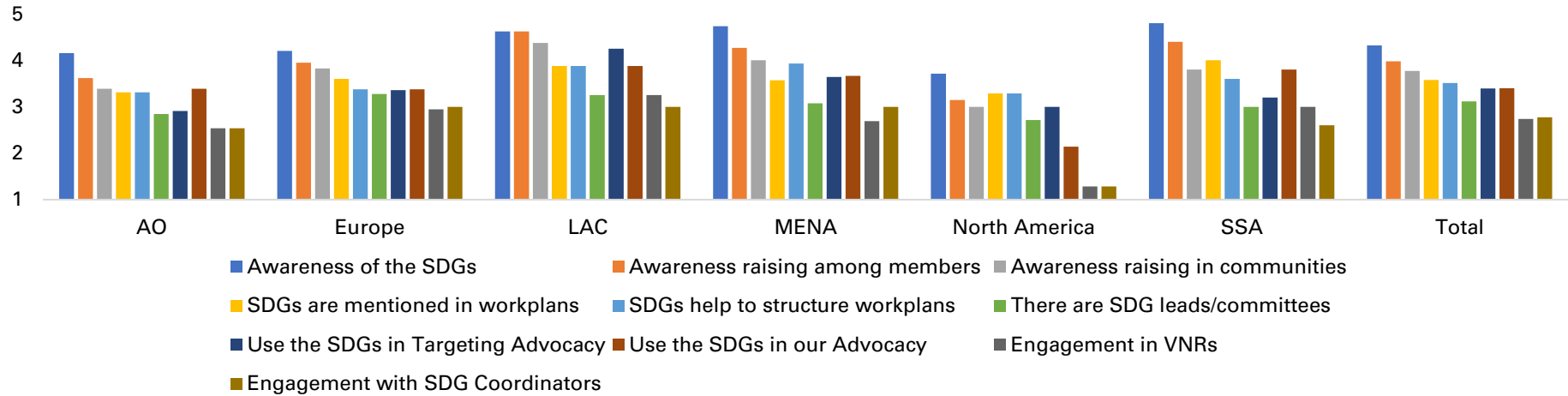### Graph 17: Average Responses for all Questions

Graph 17 looks at all questions and shows that there are the highest levels of reported engagement around activities related to awareness-raising. There are roughly similar levels of engagement with the SDGs in work planning and in advocacy, but lower levels when it comes to having structures for ongoing work with the SDGs and work with formal SDG opportunities (VNRs and cooperation with SDG coordinators).
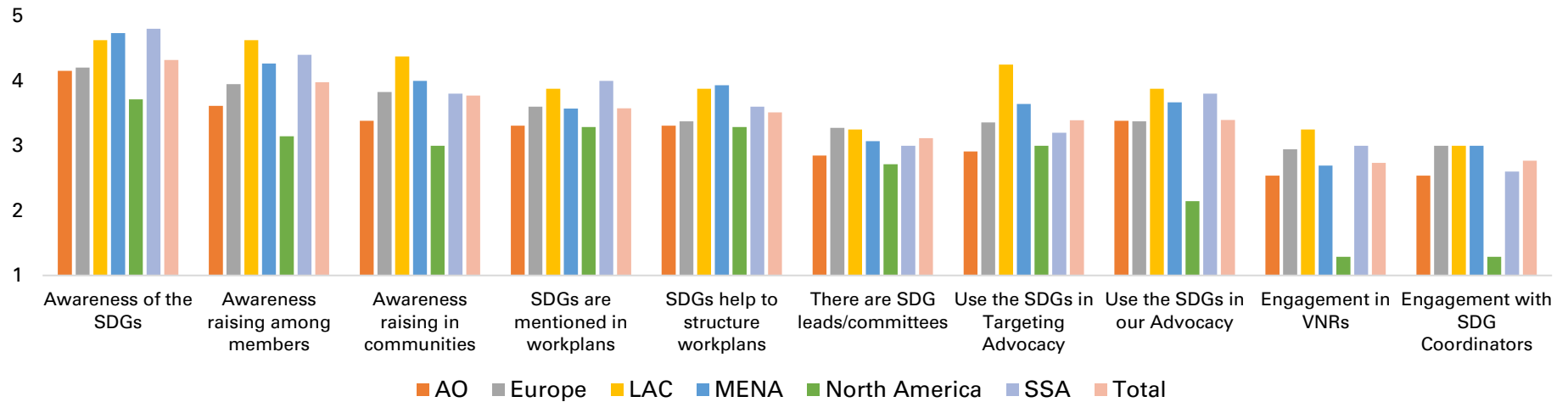
Graphs 18 breaks down these figures by region, showing roughly similar patterns overall, although the LAC region perhaps stands out for its relatively high emphasis on the SDGs in advocacy work, and the North America for its comparatively high use of the SDGs in planning in relation to other responses.

Graph 19 sets out the figures differently, potentially suggesting which regions can offer most lessons for others around working with the SDGs in different ways. For example, LAC and MENA appear to be leaders in work through library associations to support SDG awareness-raising in communities. Meanwhile, the LAC and Sub-Saharan Africa region stand out in their integration of the SDGs into advocacy, while Europe, LAC and MENA may have the most to offer others when it comes to working with official SDG coordinators.

Graph 18: All Responses (by Region)

Legend:
- Awareness of the SDGs
- Awareness raising among members
- Awareness raising in communities
- SDGs are mentioned in workplans
- SDGs help to structure workplans
- There are SDG leads/committees
- Use the SDGs in Targeting Advocacy
- Use the SDGs in our Advocacy
- Engagement in VNRs
- Engagement with SDG Coordinators

Graph 19: All Responses (by Statement)

Legend: AO, Europe, LAC, MENA, North America, SSA, Total

Conclusions and Recommendations

The data provided in this report offer a useful snapshot of the level of engagement of a large share of the world's library associations in the SDGs.

Looking back at the four types of engagement identified at the beginning, we can see that awareness of the SDGs was high among respondents, and a large share were also involved in promoting awareness amongst their communities. This indicates interesting potential to work through associations as part of wider SDG promotion efforts, or development education more broadly, building on the experience and networks that are already in place.

Concerning the use of the SDGs in planning and subsequent focus on them, around half of respondents were already doing this. This is a powerful message – proof that the library field has heard the message that the 2030 Agenda is not a manifesto for business as usual, but rather for doing things differently, and acted on it. However, the results do imply that there may also be scope to do more to help library associations make the most of the SDGs as a tool for planning and prioritising actions.

Data around the integration of the SDGs into advocacy activities are also encouraging, with again around half of respondents reporting doing so. As highlighted above, the potential for this may be limited by how relevant the SDGs are seen in the context of debate within any given country. Nonetheless, there is scope to do more here.

Finally, around a quarter of respondents were already making use of formal SDG processes such as Voluntary National Reviews or contact with SDG Coordinators. As mentioned, this may be as much about the level of openness of these processes as about library associations themselves. Either way, it is clear that more progress could be made in this area.

In terms of potential recommendations from this report, the following are possible:

- Library associations are well-placed to be involved in SDG awareness-raising and wider development education initiatives. UN and other stakeholders should be active in looking to work with them to this end.
- There is scope for IFLA itself to do more to underline the potential of the SDGs as a tool for supporting work planning and advocacy, even if they are not explicitly referred to. It would be valuable to draw on the experience of those who have already done to support work in this area.
- There may be value in bringing together information about the activities of those associations that do have people or groups explicitly working on the SDGs. This could provide inspiration and ideas for those who are yet to do this.
- There is still plenty of space to involve libraries in Voluntary National Review processes, as well as to encourage closer links between library associations and national SDG coordinators. One way of doing this could be through cooperation between associations and UN Information Centres or Resident Coordinators.