



## IFLA Committees and the Sustainable Development Goals

11 August 2023

- *There are already strong levels of awareness of the SDGs among IFLA's volunteer groups, and over half have planned conference sessions on them or used them in action planning*
- *As for individual SDGs, SDG4 (quality education), SDG10 (reducing inequalities) and SDG17 (partnerships for the goals) are most commonly referenced*
- *There remains scope both to raise awareness, and build understanding of how to work with the SDGs in ways that boost the impact of IFLA's work on wider development*

IFLA's volunteer groups are at the heart of what the Federation is, providing spaces for learning, exchange, and creation of materials and tools to support the global library field. As such, they are both an important forum for building awareness and understanding of emerging issues, and key actors in developing library responses to them. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) represent just one such issue.

With the half-way point in the 2030 Agenda – which contains the 17 SDGs – almost reached, it is therefore worth looking at how far IFLA's own voluntary units have embraced them in their work. The below data comes from a survey of IFLA's different types of volunteer committee that took place over 4 weeks in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of 2023. 28 separate groups replied, with respondents asked to indicate that they were authorised to respond on behalf of the group.

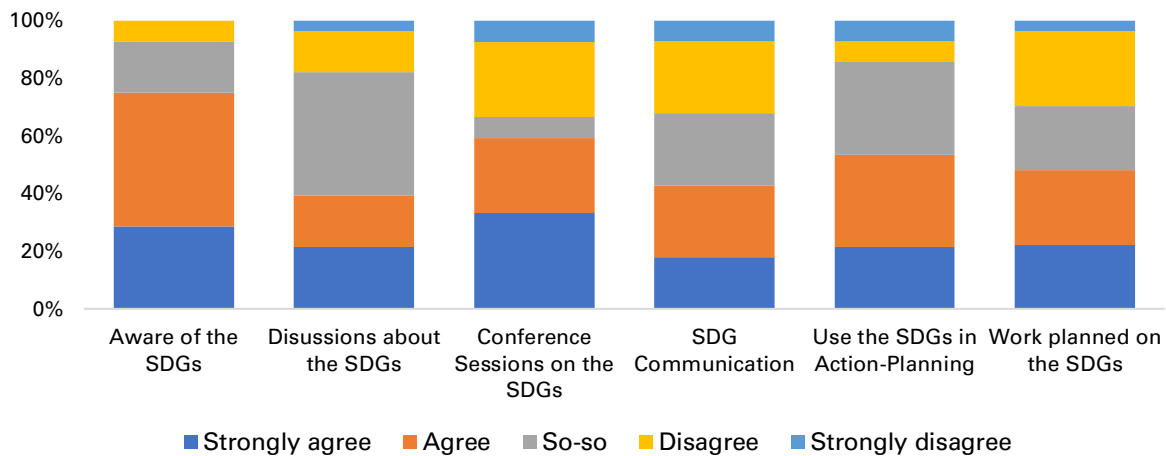
### Different ways of engaging with the SDGs

The survey asked respondents to indicate how far they agreed with the following statements:

1. In my unit, we are well aware of the Sustainable Development Goals
2. My unit has actively discussed the SDGs as part of our committee discussions
3. My unit has actively used the SDGs in the process of designing our action plan
4. My unit has previously run (or is planning to run) WLIC sessions focused on the SDGs
5. My unit has already produced (or is planning to produce) other outputs focused on the SDGs as a whole
6. My unit has actively communicated about the SDGs with our wider section membership

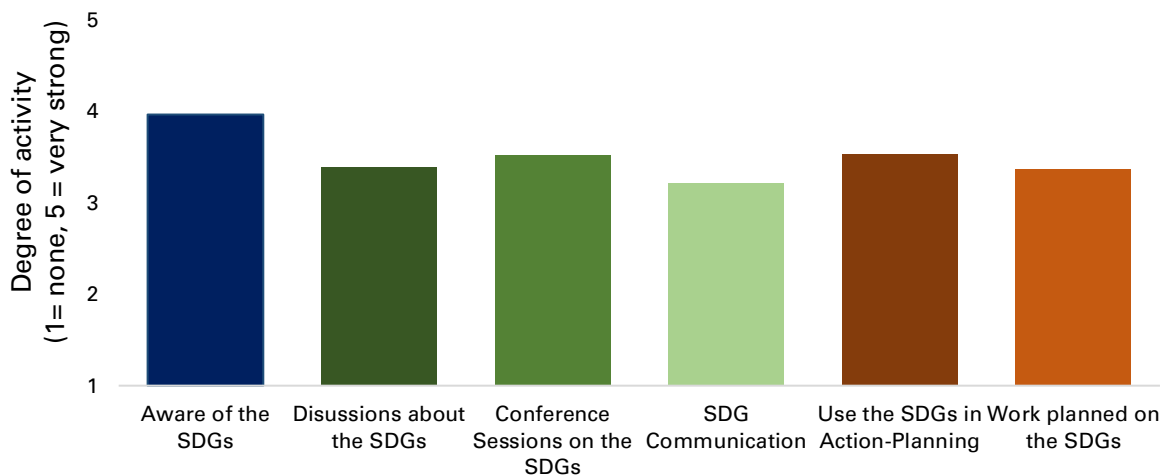
The results of this, in terms of the shares of respondents giving each answer, are provided in Graph 1 below:

**Graph 1: Volunteer Committee Engagement around the SDGs**



The highest share of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing were around awareness of the SDGs in general, followed by organising conference sessions on the SDGs, and using the SDGs in action planning (just over half of respondents). Meanwhile, a little fewer than half of units had planned work on the SDGs in future, or had communicated about the SDGs with their wider membership or addressed them in internal discussions.

**Graph 2: Volunteer Committee Engagement (Averages)**



Graph 2 looks at the same data, but by ascribing numbers from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree) we can come up with averages. Once again, the highest average scores are on awareness of the SDGs, but this time it is use of the SDGs in action planning that comes second, just followed by conference sessions on the SDGs, discussions in committees, and planned future work. Communicating about the SDGs to relevant members came last.

Overall, it is not surprising that in general, scores for awareness are highest, given that this is arguably also the simplest activity referenced here. Nonetheless, there is perhaps room to work with the quarter who didn't agree in one way or another with the statement.

The next three questions focus on ways of raising awareness with others. Conference sessions appear to be the most popular option here, and indeed offer a good way to talk about the SDGs in front of an audience of potentially hundreds of people. They are also, traditionally, one of the core activities of IFLA’s volunteer groups. We might expect that scores will be higher still in 2023, given the emphasis on sustainability in the conference theme.

There was less engagement when it comes to discussions within committees, and with their wider memberships. This suggests that there is maybe an opportunity being missed to support reflection within committees and wider sections on what the SDGs are and what they could mean.

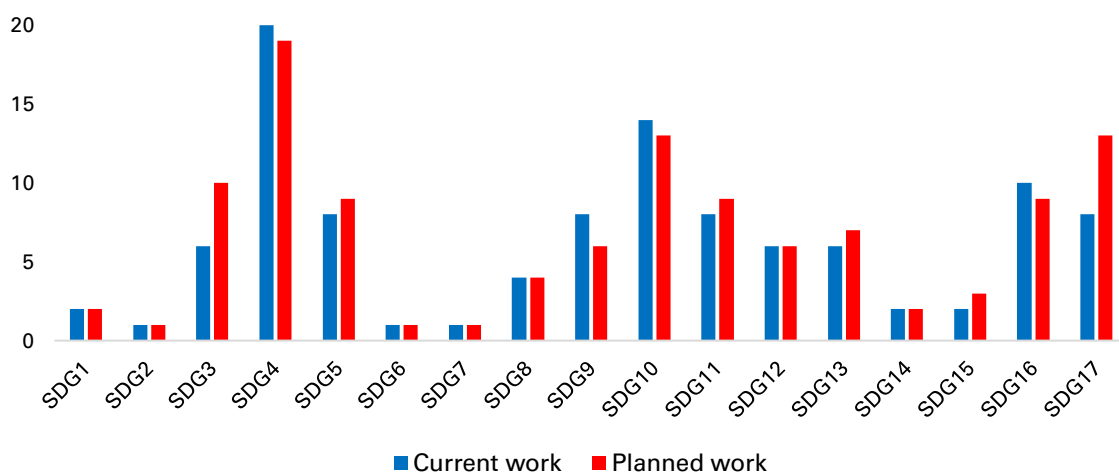
The last two questions are more about whether the SDGs are not just being talked about, but also having an impact on the choices volunteer groups are making. The fact that over half of respondents indeed did use the SDGs in their planning is welcome, while the lower scores on planned work could be explained by the survey taking place towards then end of the planning cycle, and before new plans had been developed. Nonetheless, there is scope to do more to make use of the SDGs as a framework and thought tool, perhaps in the context of action planning for 2023-25.

### SDGs in Focus

We also asked volunteer committee to indicate both those SDGs they are already engaging with, and those they intended to look at in future. There was no limit on the number of SDGs that any committee could suggest.

Graph 3 shares the responses from this with the left-hand bars (blue) indicating the number of respondents working on each SDG now, and the right-hand bars (red) showing how many are planning to work on them in the future.

**Graph 3: SDGs in Current and Planned Work**



Unsurprisingly, SDG 4 (quality education) is the most popular SDG. However, the strong emphasis on SDG10 (reducing inequalities), with around half of respondents indicating that they are working on it, both now and in future.

In terms of current work, SDG 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) comes next, with over a third of groups active. Then come SDGs 5 (gender equality), 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure), 11 (sustainable cities and communities) and 17 (partnerships for the goals).

There are some slight differences when looking at planned work. In particular, there is a notable increase in the number of groups planning to work on SDG17 (partnerships for the goals) and SDG3 (health). If these intentions feed into upcoming work plans, it would indicate possible value in intensifying work with health-focused partners, for example.

We also asked respondents to share information about the projects they had already undertaken. Particular highlights include:

- Sharing blogs and stories about working with the SDGs, and mobilising young librarians in particular
- Organising webinars specifically about how different library types (or associations) can work with the SDGs
- Using the SDGs to identify policy themes on which volunteer groups can focus, notably as they plan their actions
- Using the SDGs to structure work carried out (in particular with other IFLA units), and as a means of helping potential partners to engage
- Support for research work aimed at shedding light on key development challenges
- Promotion of SDG-related activities such as the Publishers SDG Compact
- Looking at the extent of SDG education in library schools, and scope to support this

Other lessons are that:

- Often, the work of IFLA committees may not have an obvious direct impact on achievement of one or more SDGs, but it can be an enabler, for example by allowing others to provide support more effectively
- IFLA groups can, in themselves, be a great example of partnerships for the goals
- The SDGs' own emphasis on setting targets and measuring success can help support similar efforts within IFLA

## **Conclusion**

From the results provided by the 28 volunteer groups responding, the SDGs have clearly found their way not just into the awareness of those carrying out IFLA's work, but also into the type of work that they are doing. There is encouraging evidence of many even using them to plan and structure work, rather than just noting alignment with the goals after the event. This points to volunteer groups indeed fulfilling the potential that they have.

Nonetheless, even of those answering the survey, there is plenty of space for greater integration of the SDGs both into communications activities, and as a basis for discussion and planning. An immediate step will be to provide practical ideas on how to do this as part of the action planning process for 2023-25.