



The American University of Beirut Libraries and the United Nations' 2030 Sustainable Development Goals: An Overview

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Background

“The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership. They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.” (<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>)

Like all responsible institutions, the American University of Beirut (AUB) is keen on supporting these SDGs and on incorporating them in its vision for the upcoming years. The University Libraries (UL) at AUB are a main entity on and beyond the AUB campus and play an integral role in supporting the University’s goals through their services and resources.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the UN



Figure 1. The UN’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals

AUB University Libraries Support the UN’s SDGs

The AUB University Libraries support AUB’s overall [mission](#), which is to “*provide excellence in education, to participate in the advancement of knowledge through research, and to serve the peoples of the Middle East and beyond.*”

The AUB University Libraries are also a member of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), which is the “*leading international body representing the interests of library and information services and their users. It is the global voice of the library and information profession.*” (<https://www.ifla.org/>)

IFLA has been working on getting libraries worldwide on board the UN SDG’s by creating awareness, depicting libraries’ role, and highlighting worldwide initiatives. IFLA has, in fact set up 10 general opportunities that libraries across the globe can take advantage of and invest in. IFLA has been planning

a series of events and workshops and will launch its 2019-2024 strategy in August of 2019 accordingly. More about the IFLA initiative is in [this report](#).

In line with this directive from AUB and from global institutions like IFLA, the AUB University Libraries will set up their strategy and goals for the coming years. Below is a representation of where the AUB Libraries currently stand in relation to the UN’s SDGs.

The University Libraries’ direct and obvious impact is on Goal 4, which is to “*Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.*” The goal is embedded in the University Libraries’ role in many ways. Moreover, like all SDGs, Goal 4 is not mutually exclusive, and is naturally co-dependent and intertwined with other goals. This means that investing in realizing Goal 4 will directly, or indirectly, have an impact on the other SDGs. This is why, at the University Libraries, we have broken down the sequence of the SDGs according to relevance and according to their direct/indirect impact through a visual representation of the order through which we believe we address, or support, the 17 UN SDGs, keeping in mind IFLA and AUB’s visions.

The figure below is a visualization, which helps the University Libraries plan its strategy for the upcoming years by prioritizing and envisioning its role and its objectives and by measuring the outcome of each project and initiative completed against the SDGs and their indicators.



Figure 2. The University Libraries’ visual sequence of the SDGs

Our work towards Goal 4, which is centered around “Quality Education”, is showcased through the Libraries’ role as the provider of information and research tools and has a direct impact on work, economic growth, sustainable industrialization and innovation within our communities, as well as on consumption and production patterns (Goals 8,9,12). Our work on Goal 4 also has a direct impact on the implementation and revitalization of the global partnership for sustainable development (Goal 17).

Attaining this set of goals supports knowledge and access to data, which in turn allows for a more extensive space for creativity and for innovative opportunities through projects and solutions related to safeguarding resources and conserving them, which, ultimately, influences Goals 6,7,14, and 15.

A good illustration of this impact would be how the University Libraries support AUB and non-AUB researchers in accessing, collecting and organizing information and then in publishing papers on current affairs and social issues such as sustainability and related topics.

Consequently, work on the 9 goals mentioned above will lead to achievements related to the social and cultural status of the world through realizing goals 1,2,3,5,10,11,13 and 16.

The table below describes the ways in which the University Libraries support the United Nation’s SDGs on a regular basis by fulfilling their role as an information and research services hub in the institution and the community at large.

Table 1. The University Libraries’ role in relation to the UN SDGs

University Libraries’ Role/Action Plan	Supported SDGs
<p>Enhance informed decision-making by collaborating with other institutions and providing equitable access to high quality information and resources in all fields including but not limited to medical, agricultural, social and environmental research. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperative collection development based on research and user needs • Regular library workshops and training sessions to thousands of users • Embedded librarians in classrooms upon request 	<p>1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 10, 16</p>
<p>Make learning accessible to all by providing neutral, welcoming, safe and inclusive spaces (reading areas and computer labs) and supporting Transfer of Technology (TOT) Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research support to all at AUB and beyond • Accessibility for patrons with Special Needs when possible • Partnership with research and academic institutions at the national and international levels to facilitate access and exchange information and resources 	<p>4, 5, 9, 10</p>
<p>Provide Open Access to research materials by promoting available resources and creating their own. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiating digitization projects to provide open access to library collections • Availing research done at AUB through AUB ScholarWorks • Availing AUB research data through AUB Databank • Raising awareness and promoting open access publishing among AUB community • Providing access to Open Access databases/resources and Research Guides 	<p>4, 15, 16</p>

<p>Promote cultural inclusion and understanding by offering internships and a fair research environment for all users and by planning annual events and Open House gatherings for meet-ups and information exchange. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular exhibits and workshops/presentations open to the public • Internships and mentoring services to librarians from other institutions in Lebanon • Cooperation with the Next Step program at the University to better include students with special needs • Open Day annual event and some other outreach events for students and faculty 	<p>11</p>
<p>Document and preserve cultural heritage for future generations by constantly acquiring special collections, documenting and preserving and/or digitizing them by specialists, using the latest state-of-the-art technologies. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Solicit and acquire special collections held by collectors and intellectuals worldwide • Manage an archives and special collections unit • Digitize, preserve and provide access through the digital collections 	<p>11</p>
<p>Strengthen societies by collaborating with local, regional and national civil society institutions, governments and organizations from private sectors to offer community-based programs and services that engage and empower citizens. Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and disseminate knowledge using digital tools, such as: Al-Ādāb magazine, Arabic Collections Online and Palestinian Oral History Archive • Provide research help and access to library collections for visitors and walk-in users from the national university and other education institutions • Collaborate with the Center for Civic Engagement and Community Services to provide services to marginalized communities 	<p>17</p>
<p>Support literacy programs by working with other community members to hold programs and events that support this cause. Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An intensive information literacy program catered to students at all levels and subjects • Regular workshops, presentations, and seminars to introduce research tools to students and the wider community • Events in collaboration with student clubs, Community Book Exchange and Children’s Book Exhibits 	<p>4</p>
<p>Support access, application and reuse of data and information to create new knowledge by offering programs and support for Information and data literacy and research best practice. The University Libraries also offers convenient and professional online support through its LibGuides and chat service, in addition to its One-on-One research assistance sessions and daily walk-in support.</p>	<p>4</p>
<p>Conserve and preserve natural resources by implementing responsible policies and procedures at the Libraries, as established by the institution. This is mostly highlighted through the University Libraries’ on-going digitization initiatives, which directly affect the preservation of environmental resources. This also includes procedures related to water and energy saving, recycling, shifting from print to electronic subscriptions, encouraging staff and students to use the stairs rather than elevators, and providing students with large computer screens to facilitate online reading rather than printing.</p>	<p>6, 7, 12, 13, 14, 15</p>

Conclusion

The AUB University Libraries contribute significantly to AUB's strategy and therefore to local and regional communities by taking initiatives and implementing projects that realize the goals set for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The most common challenges facing the University Libraries when attaining these goals usually fall under the umbrella of resource scarcity:

1. **Financial:** small budgets and the difficulty of receiving funding for projects and initiatives is one of the main challenges encountered by the University Libraries
2. **Professional:** The University Libraries is proud to have a sizeable number of librarians and technologists among its staff. Yet, the University Libraries constantly needs to work on the professional development of its staff by investing in their higher education at library science accredited programs in the U.S. and by encouraging its staff to attend workshops, conferences, and exchange programs worldwide. Despite the efforts, the University Libraries still falls short in some aspects, especially when it comes to some technical and media skills.
3. **Physical:** The University Libraries provides study space to less than 10% of the student body at a time, whereas the best practice suggests that we provide a minimum of 20%. The University Libraries staff office space is quite limited. There is no modern/decent area for students to study collaboratively, and there is no multi-media integrated in the space. This often hinders the University Libraries' role and vision, which is to be inclusive and promote fair space and information-reach for all.

Major programs planned by the University Libraries that will enhance the SDGs in the future include:

- **Open access to knowledge** – through activities that improve access to scholarly information
 - AUB ScholarWorks/AUB DataBank
 - Open Access Publishing
 - Advancements in copyright legislation to improve equitable access to information
- **Digital Literacy and Digital transformation** by rethinking the role of Libraries in the digital age
 - Acquiring new tools and skills for learning and teaching
 - Digital Literacy training for staff and users and integrating Digital Literacy into the classroom and into the Information Literacy program
 - Continuous digitization and automation initiatives and processes
- **Physical transformation** by rethinking the design and function of the modern library as a research and information-sharing hub, including expanding the library space and using it more efficiently, integrating technology into the design and creating more interactive and social spaces.
- **Outreach** optimization through partnerships with internal, local and regional entities to facilitate the role of the University Libraries in support of the exchange of knowledge and research.