Using the Sustainable Development Goals in Museums

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1. Background to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

2. How are the SDGs relevant to museums, and how are museums relevant to the SDGs?

3. How to build the SDGs into all areas of museum activity to help support their achievement
1. Background to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
What are sustainability and sustainable development?

“sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland Commission 1987)

Sustainability is a state of balance, where people and nature flourish together, in harmony

Involves considerations of society, the environment and the economy (the three dimensions or pillars of sustainability)

Sustainability is the destination, and sustainable development is focussed activity that helps us get there

development is about aiming to do more good, and do less harm
Millennium Development Goals

• 2000-2015
• Aimed to reduce poverty and inequality
• Focused on the Global South
• Some progress made, but not enough (eg. extreme poverty reduced by more than half since 1990)
Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
OUR WORLD TODAY

“Billions of our citizens continue to live in poverty and are denied a life of dignity. There are rising inequalities within and among countries. There are enormous disparities of opportunity, wealth and power. Gender inequality remains a key challenge. Unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, is a major concern.

Global health threats, more frequent and intense natural disasters, spiralling conflict, violent extremism, terrorism and related humanitarian crises and forced displacement of people threaten to reverse much of the development progress made in recent decades.
Natural resource depletion and adverse impacts of environmental degradation, including desertification, drought, land degradation, freshwater scarcity and loss of biodiversity, add to and exacerbate the list of challenges which humanity faces.

Climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time and its adverse impacts undermine the ability of all countries to achieve sustainable development. Increases in global temperature, sea level rise, ocean acidification and other climate change impacts are seriously affecting coastal areas and low-lying coastal countries, including many least developed countries and small island developing States. The survival of many societies, and of the biological support systems of the planet, is at risk.
"A new approach is needed. Sustainable development recognises that eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, combating inequality within and among countries, preserving the planet, creating sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and fostering social inclusion are linked to each other and are interdependent."
The ‘5 Ps’

• People
• Planet
• Prosperity
• Peace
• Partnership
THE VISION

“In these Goals and targets, we are setting out a supremely ambitious and transformational vision. We envisage a world free of poverty, hunger, disease and want, where all life can thrive. We envisage a world free of fear and violence. A world with universal literacy. A world with equitable and universal access to quality education at all levels, to health care and social protection, where physical, mental and social well-being are assured.

A world where we reaffirm our commitments regarding the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation and where there is improved hygiene; and where food is sufficient, safe, affordable and nutritious. A world where human habitats are safe, resilient and sustainable and where there is universal access to affordable, reliable and sustainable energy.
We envisage a world of universal respect for human rights and human dignity, the rule of law, justice, equality and non-discrimination; of respect for race, ethnicity and cultural diversity; and of equal opportunity permitting the full realization of human potential and contributing to shared prosperity.

A world which invests in its children and in which every child grows up free from violence and exploitation. A world in which every woman and girl enjoys full gender equality and all legal, social and economic barriers to their empowerment have been removed. A just, equitable, tolerant, open and socially inclusive world in which the needs of the most vulnerable are met.

We envisage a world in which every country enjoys sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and decent work for all. A world in which consumption and production patterns and use of all natural resources – from air to land, from rivers, lakes and aquifers to oceans and seas – are sustainable.
One in which democracy, good governance and the rule of law, as well as an enabling environment at the national and international levels, are essential for sustainable development, including sustained and inclusive economic growth, social development, environmental protection and the eradication of poverty and hunger.

One in which development and the application of technology are climate-sensitive, respect biodiversity and are resilient.

One in which humanity lives in harmony with nature and in which wildlife and species are protected.”
Principles of 2030 Agenda and the SDGs

1. Protecting and enhancing human and environmental rights

2. They are about advancing international agreements and conventions, not a replacement

3. Reducing inequality within and between countries, eradicating poverty in all its forms

4. Sustainability

5. ‘Leave no-one behind’

6. Universality: they apply everywhere, and apply to everyone
“End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture”
• 2030 Agenda (‘Transforming Our World’)

• Agreed at the United Nations in 2015 by all member countries

• Came into effect in 2016 and will run until 2030

• An invitation to all sectors to collaborate to put the world – locally and globally – on track for a sustainable future

• Achieved through 17 Sustainable Development Goals
2. How are the SDGs relevant to museums, and how are museums relevant to the SDGs?
Universal Declaration of Human Rights

26. Everyone has the right to education…

27. Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits…

The SDGs need museums

1. Preserve cultural and natural heritage
2. Reach very large numbers of people
3. Can support cultural participation
4. Trusted by large numbers of people
5. Can make a significant contribution to local economies
6. Make a significant impact through their operations and use of resources
7. Can participate in and initiate partnerships with other sectors
But museums need the SDGs too

1. Many want to contribute to a more sustainable future, but are not sure how

2. Lack of a shared language, goal or understanding of sustainability

3. Activity is scatter-gun, not replicated or scaled-up

4. Often not well connected with other sectors or with real-world agendas

5. Often struggle to articulate their relevance
Using the SDGs can help museums:

1. Provide people with meaningful activities
2. Put their unique resources to good use
3. Play a significant and distinctive part in an ambitious global agenda
4. Build partnerships and collaborations
5. Create and demonstrate impact
ICOM resolution "On sustainability and the implementation of Agenda 2030, Transforming Our World (Kyoto triennial, 2019)"
3. How to build the SDGs into all areas of museum activity to help support their achievement
Six-step plan

Seven key activities

That map on to 1/3 of all SDG targets

bit.ly/2ZdSFUR
STEP 1

Understand the SDGs to be an integrated programme of 17 Goals for the benefit of people, planet and prosperity, in pursuit of and supported by peace, and enabled by partnerships.

The SDGs are about strengthening and enhancing human and environmental rights, and achieving a sustainable future.

Remember, they apply everywhere, and to every sector. That means they include you.
STEP 2

Consider what position[s] you should be taking in society, and in helping achieve the SDGs:

Leader, follower, supporter, enabler, provide encouragement, collaborate in partnership

Decide on, or recognize, your position[s], and commit to them.

Remember the SDGs are not about ‘business as usual’, but a commitment to playing your part in making the future.
STEP 3

Consider how you and your museum (or network, organisation or partnership) contribute to each Goal currently, both positively and negatively, and identity which SDGs connect most with the subject area of your museum or your work.
STEP 4

Understand the part you can play
Key activity 1.

Protect and safeguard cultural and natural heritage, both within museums and more generally
11.4 “Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world’s cultural and natural heritage”

The key activity is framed in terms of what is in museums, and heritage in the wider world.

Collections in museums form a basis of a wide range of activities, and they need to be cared for, managed, made available and developed in ways that sustain their purpose and function.

Curators, conservators and educators can support this key activity
Key activity 2.
Support and provide learning opportunities in support of the SDGs
4.7 By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development...

12.8 By 2030, ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature.

13.3 Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change...

16.7 Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making...

16.10 Ensure public access to information...

Curators, exhibition makers and educators can support this key activity.
Key activity 3.
Enable cultural participation for all
1.4 By 2030, ensure that all men and women... have equal rights...

5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere

10.2 By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all...

11.7 By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces...

All staff can contribute to this key activity, ensuring accessibility of services for all
Key activity 4.
Support sustainable tourism
“tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.”

8.9 By 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products. Marketing teams can support this key activity, as can financial and commercial teams (by selling sustainable and local products).
Key activity 5.
Enable research in support of the SDGs
9.1 Develop quality, reliable, sustainable and resilient infrastructure...

9.5 Enhance scientific research...

11.4 Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world’s cultural and natural heritage

Relates clearly to heritage science

Curators and conservators can support this key activity, by developing collections, making them available, and providing access to research-useful collections.
Key activity 6.

Direct internal leadership, management and operations to support the SDGs
Making day-to-day decisions to better support the SDGs

Supporting staff to better support the SDGs

Ensuring workers’ rights are protected

Ensuring fair access to work

Improving energy use of buildings

Increasing proportion of renewable energy

Reducing waste of all kinds

Being accountable and building SDGs into planning and processes
Key activity 7.
Direct external leadership, collaboration and partnerships towards the SDGs
Build partnerships that achieve what can’t be achieved alone, to better support the SDGs

17.14 Enhance policy coherence for sustainable development

17.16 Enhance the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships...

17.17 Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships...

(and goals specific to each museum)
If these seven key activities are kept in balance, supported and developed, that is how a museum will itself be sustainable, and how staff will be able to work collaboratively and productively.
STEP 5

Develop an action plan to enhance positive contributions to the SDGs and reduce negative contributions based on the seven activities, spanning the gap between ‘where you are now’ and ‘where you want to get to’. Incorporate this into your organisational development, monitoring and reporting cycle, and communicate it both internally and externally.
STEP 6

Review and renew your action plan regularly, and repeat this six-step process. Enjoy it and celebrate it. Don’t wait, start now if you haven’t already started. The future needs you.
A better future won’t happen by accident, we have to make it, and we have to make it together.

The SDGs are a huge opportunity for museums

They are a blueprint to enhancing their contributions to society and the environment, and reducing their negative impacts.

Now you know what to do, please make a plan and do it. Don’t wait, start. The benefits are huge.

Jasper Visser’s NEMO webinar: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jHBKVZvy1_k

Main SDG website: https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/

Two-pagers on each SDG: https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/why-the-sdgs-matter/

In-depth explorations of topics & partnerships: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/topics

UNESCO resources for educators: https://en.unesco.org/themes/education/sdgs/material
Thank you, and good luck!

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