

Enabling Action Research and Action Learning to Enhance Capacity and Empowerment across SDGs Dimensions and Targets

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Abstract:

SDGs as a set of goals designed to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity, peace and security for all, occupy the centre of the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development agreed by United Nations Member States on 25 September 2015. The achievement of SDGs requires knowledge-based actions on all dimensions and targets of the goals. To be effective, knowledge-based actions must be grounded in enhanced capacity, empowerment, and continuous research and learning which in turn require the use of relevant and adequate library and information resources and services as well as information and communication technologies as vital inputs and catalysts. This paper explores how the provision of those knowledge inputs can enable action research and action learning at multiple scales of the learning sub-systems of knowledge systems for SDGs.

Introduction

The Member States of United Nations (UN) endorsed the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), at their Summit of 25 September 2015. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals aim to end poverty, hunger and inequality, take action on climate change and the environment, improve access to health and education, and build strong institutions and partnerships (United Nations 2015).

The goals and targets are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Sustainable Development Goals

GOAL	GOAL DESCRIPTION
Goal 1: No Poverty	End poverty in all its forms everywhere
Goal 2: Zero Hunger	End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.
Goal 3: Good Health & Well-being	Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
Goal 4: Quality Education	Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
Goal 5: Gender Equality	Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
Goal 6: Clean Water & Sanitation	Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.
Goal 7: Affordable and Clean Energy	Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
Goal 8: Decent work and Economic Growth	Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.
Goal 9: Industry, Innovation and	Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.
Goal 10: Reduced Inequality	Reduce inequality within and among countries.
Goal 11: Sustainable Cities & Communities	Make cities and human settlement inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.
Goal 12: Responsible Consumption and Production	Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns.
Goal 13: Climate Action	Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.
Goal 14: Life below Water	Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.
Goal 15: Life on Land	Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.
Goal 16: Peace, Justice & Strong	Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.
Goal 17: Partnership for the goals	Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

Knowledge System

“A knowledge system is an organized structure and dynamic process of generating and representing contents, component, classes, or types of knowledge that is domain specific or characterized by domain relevant features as defined by the user or consumer, reinforced by the set of logical relationship that connect knowledge to its value enhanced by a set of iterative process that enable the evaluation, revision, adaptation, advances and subject to criteria of relevance, relationship and equality”(IGI Global (2017). On a large scale, a knowledge system would include libraries, information centre, and documentation centre among other related components. These knowledge resources and services institutions select, acquire, preserve and disseminate knowledge to their clientele in a professional manner. Certain factors determine a good knowledge system, such as infrastructure, skilled staff and adequate funding.

Azubuike (2007) in his ‘FIRES’ framework of a national knowledge system explained that a national knowledge system is made up of knowledge functions like libraries, institutions, relationships, and enabling policies(FIRES) Argyris (1977) illustrated the value of intervention research in increasing the capacity of human communities to achieve their goals through double loop learning and feedback processes. Action learning and action research, as a set of methodologies, can be used to harness efforts and knowledge inputs to such action-oriented knowledge systems for empowerment and enhanced capacity.

The importance of empowerment and capacity building has occupied the attention of scholars, educationists, activists, politicians, development workers, and local and international organizations for many years. Though there are different perspectives to empowerment, there is a general consensus that empowerment will lead to good change manifested in enhanced capacity of people to obtain and have control over their material assets, intellectual assets, employment, participation in government, political and economic independence, adequate education, gender equality, sustainable development and peace. Knowledge is power and an essential ingredient in development, while libraries are a catalyst and essential support for many aspects of the UN 2030 Agenda’s vision and the SDGs. They are key public institutions that have a vital role to play in development at every level of society being designated spaces for information and learning (IFLA 2015).

Action Learning

Action learning emerged in the second half of the 20th century and is based on the theories of learning developed by David Kolb from the 1980’s. Kolb’s theory of the learning cycle implies that we have to go through a four step learning cycle in order to learn: experience, reflection, abstract conceptualizing and active experimenting. For learning to occur, it is important to complete the whole cycle (Kolb, 1999). Revans (1998), defined action learning as an experiential learning method in which participants learn by doing and then reflect on what they have done. World Institute for Action Learning (WIAL, 2016) sees action learning as a process that involves a small group working on real problems taking action and learning as individuals, as a team, and as an organization. It helps organizations develop creative, flexible and successful strategies to pressing problems. By this definition Action Learning solves problems and develops leaders simultaneously, because its simple rule forces participants to think critically and work collaboratively.

Action learning is particularly effective for solving complex problems that may appear unsolvable. It elevates the norms, the collaboration, the creativity, and the courage of groups, as they reflect on the advancement of their group functioning, rather than on their problem solving. It is based on the idea of growth and development of individuals and the organization, and effective operation of the group

in order to find solutions to problems through experience sharing, reflection and inquiry, with emphasis on the relationship between action and reflection.

Action Research

Action research can be described as: any research into practice undertaken by those involved in that practice, with an aim to change and improve it. It is quite possible to take action without research or to do research without taking action, but the unique combination of the two is what distinguishes action research from other forms of enquiry. Dencombe (2010) writes that an action research strategy is to solve particular problems and it produces guidelines for the best practices, and may be initiated to solve an immediate problem or a reflective process of progressive problem solving led by individuals working with others in teams or as part of a community of practice to improve. There are two types of action research: participatory and practical. It is an important part of action learning, without which members of the team in action learning cannot be efficient and effective. With it they enhance and constantly update their knowledge. Action learning and action research can be applied by institutions and groups all sizes to achieve their development goals.

Library and Information Resources and Services for Action Learning and Action Research for SDGs

Libraries can support the achievement of SDGs in various ways, including as enablers of action research and action learning for the development of the various sets of capacities needed for planning and action, using information resources, information technology, training, and advocacy. Today's libraries have gone beyond mere collecting and keeping of books and are partners and innovators for change in their communities. They are:

- a) Places where information services are rendered to users.
- b) Busy workshops where people of all ages share the experiences.
- c) Selectors and curators of documentary evidence of ideas and facts collected over hundreds and thousands of years.
- d) Providers of relevant and up to date information in all fields in all formats.
- e) Trainer on how to use technology to access and utilize information and knowledge.
- f) Awareness curators on how to find, access and use information from a variety of sources.

All and any of these resources and services can be purposed for specialized support to individuals and groups engaged in SDG projects and programmes at any governance level or sector.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has established the relationship between action research, action learning and services of the libraries and United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Based on these, the following recommendations are made:

- a) Adequate staffing of libraries with qualified and skilled professionals should be provided.
- b) Libraries should strive to acquire information materials on the Sustainable Development Goals and bring the materials to the awareness of their clientele.
- c) Librarians need to be more thorough and determined in running services that would directly impact the achievement of the SDG, including organizing awareness programmes, hosting local forums, partnering with other agencies and non-governmental organization.
- d) Governments and institution should support libraries in order to carry out these functions especially with regards to funding.
- e) Librarians should re-train and reposition themselves in order to enhance their readiness for the work needed to achieve sustainable developments goals.

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