

Leaving No One Behind: Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals through Accessibility for People with Disabilities

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ABSTRACT: *This paper aims to explore the importance of accessibility for people with disabilities in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to identify accessible resources that have contributed to the achievement of the SDGs for people with disabilities. This study investigates the need for increased investment, collaboration, and awareness to ensure that no one is left behind in the pursuit of sustainable development for people with disabilities. The paper also examines the relationship between disability and specific SDGs, including SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), and how achieving these SDGs can positively impact people with disabilities and the world as a whole. Additionally, the challenges and opportunities in providing accessible resources for people with disabilities are discussed, and the role of library and information centers in providing accessible resources is identified. The paper concludes that accessibility is crucial for people with disabilities to achieve their full potential and contribute to the achievement of the SDGs. To ensure that accessibility is integrated into all aspects of the SDGs, there is a need for increased awareness, investment, and collaboration across sectors. By promoting accessibility, we can create a more inclusive and sustainable world where all people, including those with disabilities, can achieve their full potential and contribute to the achievement of the SDGs.*

Keywords: Accessible Resources, Disabled People, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Challenges, Opportunities, Library and Information Centers

1. Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 to provide a blueprint for achieving a better and more sustainable future for all (United Nations, 2015c). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals pledge to leave no one behind and recognize disability as an issue that cuts across all SDGs (United Nations, n.d.). These goals cover a range of social, economic and environmental issues, such as poverty, education, gender equality, climate change and sustainable cities (Pulsiri et al., 2019).

However, despite the SDGs' ambition to leave no one behind, people with disabilities are often overlooked in the global development agenda. According to the World Health Organization, an estimated 16% of the world's population, or around 1.3 billion people, live with some form of disability (World Health Organization, 2022). Yet, they face significant barriers in accessing resources and participating fully in society, which can hinder their ability to achieve their full potential and contribute to the achievement of the SDGs.

In this context, it is crucial to ensure that the SDGs are inclusive and accessible to people with disabilities. This article explores the importance of accessibility for people with disabilities in achieving the SDGs and provides examples of

accessible resources that have contributed to their achievement. Furthermore, it will discuss the challenges and opportunities in providing accessible resources and highlight the need for increased investment, collaboration, and awareness to ensure that no one is left behind in the pursuit of sustainable development.

2. Study Background

The background of this study involves a thorough evaluation of previous research, providing a foundation for understanding the current state of research. This literature review examines the relationship between disability and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a focus on the significance of sustainable design for accessibility and the challenges faced by people with disabilities in attaining their social, economic, and communication rights.

Ghai (2009) located disability issues within the discourse of the MDGs, highlighted the reasons for the absence of disabled people from the MDGs agenda, and called for the expansion of democratic space to ensure that their rights were given due consideration. Brolan (2016) argued that although the post-2015 SDG agenda was an improvement on its precursor, the Millennium Development Goals, caution was needed. While there had been some advances for persons with disabilities, there were also potential "steps back" that needed to be monitored.

Zainol et al. (2018) emphasized the need to improve accessibility for people with disabilities at public transportation stations to make them self-reliant and self-dependent. Although there were common facilities for PWDs, they were not convenient to use, and this led to segregation from the community. Pulsiri et al. (2019) conducted a literature review to explore how digital technologies could help achieve the SDGs for people with disabilities. They identified clusters of digital technologies and research collaborations and provided a knowledge base for policymakers and scientists on relevant technologies.

Sadabadi and Mirzamani (2021) examined administrative collaborative leadership as a requirement for achieving the SDGs using a social innovation strategy to investigate whether the public sector used collaborative leadership in the governance model. Weir et al. (2022) and Wailes & Mackenzie (2022) highlighted the importance of addressing the unique barriers faced by individuals with communication disabilities. Weir et al. outlined four empowering solutions to address the economic and social disempowerment experienced by children with communication and/or swallowing disabilities, while Wailes & Mackenzie discussed the protection of people with communication disabilities from modern slavery and emphasized the importance of accessible information to ensure inclusion, safety, and justice. Both papers emphasized the crucial role of speech-language pathologists in developing and disseminating accessible information and taking action to address these issues in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.

Jagoe et al. (2023) analyzed interpersonal violence experienced by people with communication disabilities in Iraq and the barriers they faced in accessing support, suggesting communication accessible data collection tools to enable an inclusive response. Sherratt (2023) discussed the cyclical relationship between poverty and communication and swallowing disabilities, highlighting the significant consequences across a person's lifetime and calling on speech-language pathologists to take steps toward addressing poverty-related communication and swallowing disabilities in children.

3. Study Objectives

The main objectives of this study are,

- 3.1 To understand the importance of accessibility for people with disabilities in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- 3.2 To explore the relationship between disability and specific SDGs, including SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG10 (Reduced Inequalities), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals), and how achieving these SDGs can positively impact people with disabilities and the world as a whole.
- 3.3 To identify accessible resources that have contributed to the achievement of the SDGs for people with disabilities.
- 3.4 To examine the challenges and opportunities in providing accessible resources for people with disabilities.
- 3.5 To identify the role of library and information centers in Providing accessible resources

4. Importance of Accessibility for People with Disabilities

4.1 Challenges for People with Disabilities in Participation in Society

People with disabilities face various challenges in accessing resources and participating in society. According to the World Bank, barriers to full social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities include inaccessible physical environments and transportation, the unavailability of assistive devices and technologies, non-adapted means of communication, gaps in service delivery, and discriminatory prejudice and stigma in society (The World Bank, 2022). These accessibility challenges also have negative impacts on their education and ultimately employment prospects. For instance, a report by USA shows that in 2017, only 35.5% of individuals with disabilities aged 18 to 64 years were employed, while 76.5% of individuals without disabilities were employed (Houtenville & Boege, 2019). Developing countries like India have even worse employment ratios for individuals with disabilities.

4.2 Why Accessibility is Essential for Disabled People?

Accessibility primarily focuses on people with disabilities and addresses discriminatory aspects related to the equivalent user experience for people with disabilities. Without accessibility, disabled individuals face barriers that limit their access to resources, opportunities, and social and political participation. Accessible environments, products, and services can help eliminate these barriers and enable disabled people to lead fulfilling lives and contribute to their communities. Several accessibility requirements can enhance usability for everyone, particularly in restricted situations. For instance, ensuring web accessibility while browsing online resources (W3C, 2016). Web accessibility encompasses all disabilities that affect access to the Web, including auditory (W3C, 2019). UNESCO provides policy advice to help its Member States implement international standards and report on their engagements related to the rights of persons with disabilities (UNESCO, 2016). Accessibility is also important for achieving the SDGs, as it promotes inclusion and equal opportunities for all.

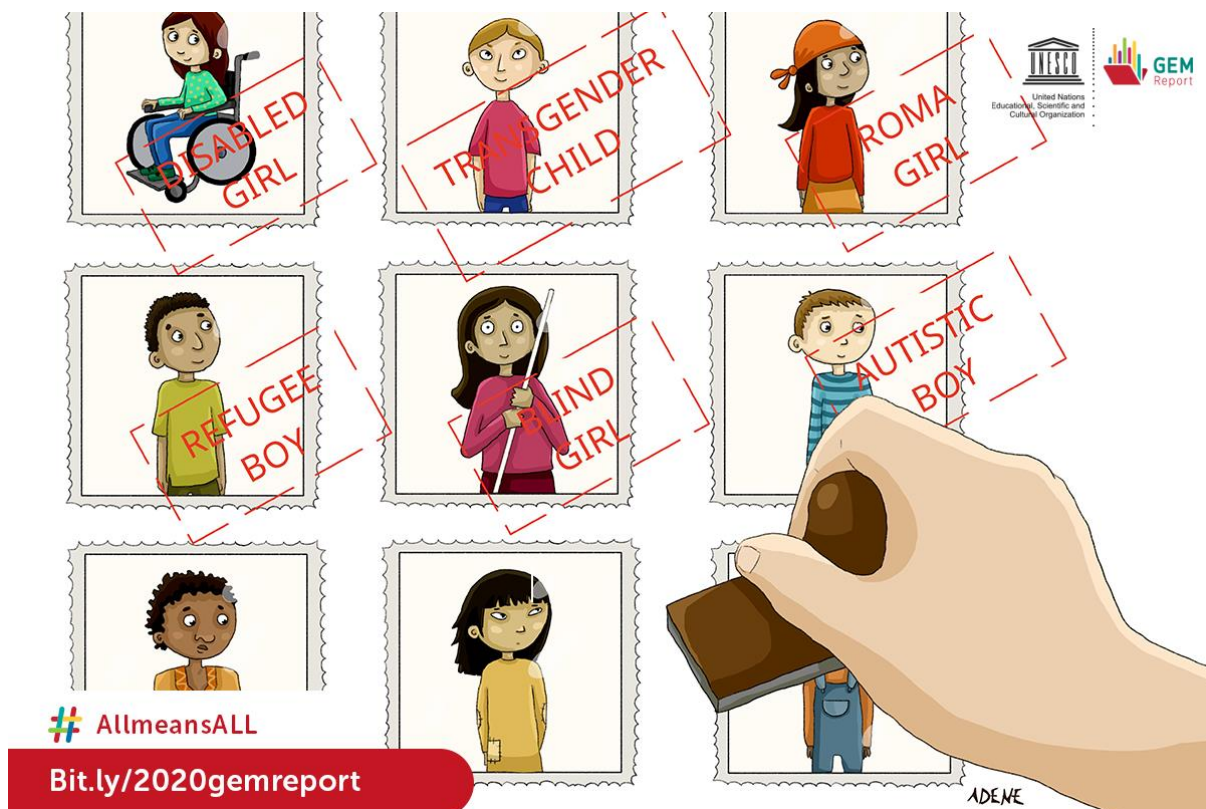


Figure 1: Social Discrimination: GEM Report (UNESCO, 2020)

5. The Relationship Between Disability and the SDGs

Several of the SDGs hold particular relevance to people with disabilities, as they significantly impact their lives and overall well-being. The following section discusses the SDGs that directly pertain to people with disabilities, along with practical examples of how these goals can be implemented to create positive change and foster inclusivity in society.



Figure 2: Disability Inclusive SDGs (Source: United Nations, 2015b)

5.1 SDG 4 (Quality Education)

This SDG ensures that all individuals have access to quality education and lifelong learning opportunities. For people with disabilities, this means ensuring that education is accessible, inclusive, and tailored to their needs, including the provision of assistive technologies and accessible formats for learning materials.

Examples: The Inclusive Education Initiative by UNESCO aims to promote inclusive education for children with disabilities, with a focus on removing barriers to their access and participation in mainstream schools. The initiative provides guidelines and resources for teachers, schools, and policymakers to implement inclusive education practices. (DESA, DSPD, United Nations, 2017) (UNESCO, 2022)

5.2 SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)

This SDG seeks to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment, and decent work for all. For people with disabilities, this means ensuring that workplaces are accessible, accommodating, and free from discrimination, as well as providing training and support to help them secure and maintain employment.

Example: The Disability Employment Initiative (DEI) by the US Department of Labor aims to improve employment opportunities for people with disabilities. The initiative provides funding and technical assistance to states to develop strategies to improve employment outcomes for people with disabilities. The DEI also collaborates with employers to promote inclusive hiring practices and increase awareness about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities. (International Labour Organization, 2019) (Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, 2021)

5.3 SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities)

This SDG aims to reduce inequalities within and among countries, including inequalities based on disability status. This includes promoting equal access to opportunities and resources, as well as combating discrimination and promoting inclusion and participation in all aspects of society.

Example: The Disability Rights Fund (DRF) is a grant-making organization that supports disabled people's organizations (DPOs) in the Global South to advance the rights of people with disabilities. The DRF provides funding for DPOs to implement advocacy and capacity-building initiatives that promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in society (Disability Rights Fund, n.d.-a, n.d.-b).

5.4 SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities)

This SDG seeks to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. For people with disabilities, this means ensuring that urban infrastructure, services, and public spaces are accessible and inclusive, as well as promoting equal access to affordable and accessible housing.

Example: The Accessible Cities Award by the European Commission recognizes cities that have made significant progress in improving accessibility for people with disabilities. The award encourages cities to implement policies and programs that promote accessibility, such as improving transportation infrastructure, increasing the availability of accessible housing, and promoting inclusive urban planning (European Union, 2021).

5.5 SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals)

This SDG promotes partnerships between governments, civil society, and the private sector to achieve the SDGs. For people with disabilities, this means ensuring that they are included in decision-making processes and that their voices and needs are considered in the development and implementation of policies and programs.

Example: The Global Partnership for Disability and Development (GPDD) is a multi-stakeholder initiative that aims to promote inclusive development for people with disabilities. The GPDD brings together governments, civil society organizations, and disabled people's organizations to develop and implement policies and programs that promote disability-inclusive development (United Nations, 2018).

6. How Achieving these SDGs Can Positively Impact People with Disabilities?

Achieving the SDGs can have a positive impact on people with disabilities and the world as a whole in several ways:

6.1 By Achieving Quality Education (SDG 4): Access to quality education can provide people with disabilities with the skills and knowledge they need to participate fully in society, improve their employment prospects, and increase their independence. This can lead to a more inclusive society that values the contributions of all individuals, regardless of their abilities.

6.2 By Achieving Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8): Providing people with disabilities with decent work opportunities and promoting their economic growth can help reduce poverty and inequality, improve their standard of living, and contribute to the overall economic development of a country. It can also help break down negative attitudes and stigma towards disability by showcasing the talents and capabilities of people with disabilities in the workforce.

6.3 By Achieving Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10): Reducing inequalities for people with disabilities can have a positive impact on their overall well-being, as well as on the world as a whole. This can include addressing discriminatory laws and policies, increasing access to resources and services, and promoting inclusion and participation in all aspects of society.

6.4 By Achieving Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11): Creating sustainable cities and communities that are accessible to all can have a significant impact on the quality of life for people with disabilities. This can include accessible transportation, housing, public spaces, and infrastructure, which can enable people with disabilities to participate more fully in community life and improve their social and economic opportunities.

6.5 By Achieving Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17): Building partnerships and collaborations among governments, civil society, and the private sector can help create more inclusive and accessible societies that benefit everyone. This

can involve sharing resources and knowledge, promoting innovation, and working together to achieve common goals, including the inclusion and empowerment of people with disabilities.

By achieving these SDGs, we can positively impact the lives of people with disabilities and the world as a whole. Promoting education, employment, and accessible infrastructure can help to reduce poverty, inequality, and social exclusion, and promote sustainable development.

7. The Role of Accessible Resources in Achieving the SDGs

7.1 What are the Accessible Resources?

Accessible resources refer to resources, tools, products, and services that are designed and developed in a way that makes them usable and available to everyone, including people with disabilities. For example,

Accessible infrastructure, such as buildings and transportation, ensures that people with disabilities can move around independently and access education, healthcare, and employment opportunities.

Accessible technology, such as screen readers and captioning, enables people with disabilities to use digital tools and access online resources.

Accessible education ensures that people with disabilities receive the necessary skills and knowledge to participate fully in society.

Accessible employment opportunities ensure that people with disabilities have the opportunity to work and contribute to the economy.

7.2 Importance of Accessible Resources in Achieving the SDGs

Accessible resources play a crucial role in achieving the SDGs by ensuring that people with disabilities can participate fully in society and have equal access to opportunities. Accessible resources can include physical infrastructure, such as buildings, transportation, and public spaces, as well as technology, education, and employment opportunities.

Education: Accessible educational resources, such as textbooks in accessible formats and assistive technology, can help students with disabilities to learn effectively and reach their full potential.

Employment: Accessible resources in the workplace, such as assistive technology and accessible communication, can help employees with disabilities to perform their job duties and contribute to the success of their organization.

Transportation: Accessible transportation resources, such as wheelchair accessible vehicles and audio announcements on public transit, can enable people with disabilities to travel independently and access employment, education, and healthcare.

Healthcare: Accessible healthcare resources, such as sign language interpreters and accessible medical equipment, can ensure that people with disabilities can access healthcare services and receive appropriate treatment.

Information and Communication: Accessible resources for information and communication, such as captioning and sign language interpretation, can ensure that people with disabilities can participate in social and political life and access information about their rights and services.

7.3 Successful Example of Accessible Resources Contributing to SDG Achievement

Below are five successful examples of accessible resources that have contributed to the achievement of the SDGs:

Sign language interpretation in education: The UNESCO reported that in Bangladesh, providing sign language interpretation to students with hearing impairments led to an increase in enrollment and retention rates, and improved academic performance. (Ahuja & Ibrahim, 2006)

Accessible transportation: The Bus Rapid Transit system in Cape Town, South Africa, which was designed with accessibility features such as low bus floors, audible and visual announcements, and priority seating for people with disabilities, has improved access to employment, healthcare, and education for people with disabilities. (Rickert, 2007)

Braille signage in public spaces: The installation of Braille signage in public spaces such as train stations and airports has increased independence and mobility for people with visual impairments. For example, the installation of Braille signage in the Delhi Metro system in India has improved accessibility and reduced barriers to transportation for people with visual impairments. (Delhi Metro, n.d.)

Accessible information and communication technology: The UK government's Access to Work program provides funding for disabled individuals to purchase assistive technology such as screen readers and voice recognition software, enabling them to access employment opportunities and contribute to the workforce. (Government Digital Service, UK Government, 2012)

Universal design in architecture: The award-winning Maggie's Centre in Lanarkshire, Scotland, which provides support and information for people with cancer and their families, was designed with universal design principles in mind, creating an inclusive environment that is accessible to people with disabilities. (ArchDaily, 2019) Other examples such as the Accessible India Campaign launched by the Indian government in 2015 (DEPD, MSJE, GoI, n.d.) aim to create accessible infrastructure and transportation, provide accessible information and communication, and promote positive attitudes toward disability. Similarly, the Global Initiative for Inclusive ICTs (G3ict) has worked to promote the accessibility of digital technologies and ensure that people with disabilities have equal access to online resources and communication (International Disability Alliance, 2018).

These successful examples demonstrate the potential of accessible resources to promote sustainable development and ensure that no one is left behind. However, there is still much work to be done to ensure that accessibility is integrated into all aspects of the SDGs and that people with disabilities have equal access to opportunities and resources.

8. Challenges and Opportunities in Providing Accessible Resources

There are various challenges and opportunities that need to be considered while providing accessible resources to help people with disabilities achieve the SDGs. These challenges arise due to several conditions, including financial constraints, lack of awareness, and cultural barriers. To ensure the success of accessible resources, it is crucial to study the available opportunities and overcome the challenges that hinder their implementation.

8.1. Challenges

Some unavoidable challenges faced during providing accessible resources:

Financial Constraints: One of the biggest challenges in providing accessible resources is the cost involved. It can be expensive to make modifications to buildings, technologies, and services to make them accessible to people with disabilities. This can be particularly challenging in developing countries where resources are limited.

Lack of Awareness: Many people do not understand the needs of people with disabilities and the importance of accessibility. This can result in a lack of demand for accessible resources, which can lead to a lack of investment in making them available. There is a need for greater education and awareness-raising about disability and accessibility issues. (United Nations, 2015a)

Cultural Barriers: In some cultures, there may be a stigma attached to disability, and people with disabilities may be marginalized or excluded. This can make it difficult to provide accessible resources and can also result in people with disabilities being reluctant to ask for help. There is a need to break down cultural barriers and promote a more inclusive society.

Legal and Policy Framework: While there are laws and policies in place in many countries to protect the rights of people with disabilities, these may not always be effectively implemented or enforced. This can lead to a lack of accessible resources, as organizations may not feel legally compelled to make their services or products accessible.

Technical Expertise: Providing accessible resources often requires specialized technical expertise. This can be a challenge, particularly in developing countries where there may be a lack of qualified professionals with the necessary skills.

8.2 Opportunities:

Some potential opportunities in providing accessible resources (United Nations, 2022):

The potential for increased economic growth and innovation through inclusive design: Providing accessible resources can lead to new business opportunities and can enhance the economy by including more individuals in the workforce.

The chance to address global inequality: By providing accessible resources, there is an opportunity to reduce inequality and promote social inclusion by ensuring that individuals with disabilities are not left behind in development initiatives.

The potential for positive impact on the wider community: Making resources accessible for individuals with disabilities can benefit the wider community by creating more accessible and inclusive environments for everyone, including the elderly and individuals with temporary disabilities.

The opportunity to improve education and learning outcomes: Providing accessible resources in education can enhance learning outcomes for all students, not just those with disabilities, by promoting inclusive learning environments and accommodating diverse learning needs.

The potential for better health outcomes: Accessible resources in healthcare can improve the quality of care for individuals with disabilities and can reduce healthcare costs by preventing or managing chronic conditions (World Health Organization, 2021).

9. Role of Library and Information Centers in Providing Accessible Content

Library and information centers can play an important role in providing accessible contents to people with disabilities and help them in achieving the SDGs. Below are some potential areas where they can do so (IFLA, 2018) (Cyr & Connaway, 2020):

Accessible Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs): Libraries and information centers can provide accessible ICTs, such as computers equipped with screen readers and other assistive technologies, that can be used by people with disabilities to access information, communicate, and participate in online activities.

Accessible Formats: Libraries can provide accessible formats of books, journals, and other materials, such as large print, audio books, and e-books, to enable people with print disabilities to access and benefit from these resources.

Training and Support: Libraries and information centers can provide training and support to people with disabilities, as well as their families and caregivers, on how to use assistive technologies and accessible resources, and how to access information and participate in online activities.

Collaboration and Partnerships: Libraries and information centers can collaborate with disability organizations, governments, and other stakeholders to ensure that their services and resources are accessible to people with disabilities, and to advocate for the rights and inclusion of people with disabilities.

Community Engagement: Libraries and information centers can engage with people with disabilities, their families, and their communities to better understand their needs and preferences, and to tailor their services and resources accordingly. This can involve hosting events and activities that are accessible and inclusive, such as book clubs, lectures, and workshops.

Offering assistive technologies: Libraries and information centers can provide access to assistive technologies such as screen readers, text-to-speech software, and magnification tools, making it easier for people with disabilities to access information and participate in society.

Hosting training sessions: Libraries and information centers can host training sessions to teach people with disabilities how to use assistive technologies and provide guidance on how to access and navigate digital content.

Collaborating with disability organizations: Libraries and information centers can work with local disability organizations to identify the needs of the community and develop programs and services that meet those needs.

Providing accessible physical spaces: Libraries and information centers can ensure that their physical spaces are accessible by providing ramps, elevators, and other accommodations for people with disabilities.

Promoting disability awareness: Libraries and information centers can promote disability awareness by offering educational resources and hosting events that focus on disability rights, accessibility, and inclusion.

10. Conclusion

Accessibility is crucial for people with disabilities to achieve their full potential and contribute to the achievement of the SDGs. Accessible resources, such as physical infrastructure, technology, education, and employment opportunities, are essential for promoting inclusion, reducing poverty and inequality, and promoting sustainable development. This study highlights the importance of accessibility for people with disabilities in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The identification of accessible resources that have contributed to the achievement of the SDGs for people with disabilities indicates the need for increased investment, collaboration, and awareness to ensure that no one is left behind in the pursuit of sustainable development. The relationship between disability and specific SDGs, including SDG 4, SDG 8, SDG 10, SDG 11, and SDG 17, demonstrates how achieving these goals can positively impact people with disabilities and the world as a whole.

Furthermore, the challenges and opportunities in providing accessible resources for people with disabilities are also discussed thoroughly. Financial constraints, lack of awareness, and cultural barriers are identified as significant challenges that must be overcome to ensure that accessibility is integrated into all aspects of the SDGs. However, the role of library and information centers in providing accessible resources presents an opportunity to overcome these challenges and promote accessibility in all areas of society.

Therefore, it is essential to recognize the importance of accessibility and take action to promote accessibility in all areas of society. By doing so, we can create a more inclusive and sustainable world where all people, including those with disabilities, can achieve their full potential and contribute to the achievement of the SDGs.

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