



**Publishers Compact Boosts UN's Sustainable Development Goals
Interview with Michiel Kolman, IPA & Elsevier**

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KENNEALLY: When United Nations Secretary General António Guterres urged member states in 2019 to support a decade of action to support the UN's Sustainable Development Goals initiative, he laid out ambitious goals regarding climate change, poverty, hunger, and gender equality. The new decade that arrived in 2020 then came back with an unexpected twist – a global pandemic.

Welcome to Copyright Clearance Center's podcast series. I'm Christopher Kenneally for Velocity of Content. As the UN has noted, the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on all 17 SDGs has shown that what began as a health crisis has quickly become a human and socioeconomic crisis. While this crisis is imperiling progress toward the SDGs, it will also make their achievement all the more urgent and necessary.

At Frankfurt Book Fair last October, the International Publishers Association launched the SDG Publishers Compact in collaboration with the UN. Signatories to the Publishers Compact commit to implementing sustainable practices in their businesses. They will also serve as SDG champions, publishing books and journals that will help inform, develop, and inspire global action.

Michiel Kolman is past president of IPA, where he continues to serve as chair of the inclusive publishing and literacy committee. He is also senior vice president at Elsevier for information industry relations. Michiel Kolman joins me now from Amsterdam. Welcome back to the program, Michiel.

KOLMAN: Very happy to be here, Chris.

KENNEALLY: We look forward to talking with you about the SDGs. We have spoken about it in past episodes, but this new Publishers Compact is one that we need to catch up with you on, and it asks publishers of all kinds, all over the world, to undertake two complementary activities – adopting the UN's Sustainable Development Goals for their own businesses and then publishing content that advocates for those themes. I guess we have to ask you what the impact of signing on to the Publishers Compact has on publishing practices.

KOLMAN: Yeah, it's a great question. What happened was that the IPA compiled a beautiful report of its contributions to the SDG in our industry, a 144-page report, and we were



thinking, so what could we do to make this a little bit more practical? What can publishers and publishing organizations do to really start tomorrow supporting the SDGs? That's why we came up with the SDG Publishers Compact together with the UN. It's really a super-concrete plan that you could start tomorrow both internally within your publishing organization as well as externally. So how could you get a little bit your own house in order, so to say, around sustainability, but also how could you think about what to publish? You know that publishers are the catalysts of societal change. So through what we publish, we can definitely influence agendas around sustainability today, but also in the many years to come.

KENNEALLY: How significant are the changes that the compact expects from publishers?

KOLMAN: Well, expectations are high, so we really hope that publishers will embrace the SDGs and incorporate it in their strategy. It's something they could do more or less this year and then start executing in the coming years. We are in the decade of action. The SDGs have a strict deadline, and it's at the end of this decade. There are not that many years left. So that's why we really hope that if publishers and publishing organizations embrace the SDG Publishers Compact, they will take action immediately and that it will have impact in the next coming years, because there is lots at stake here. I hope I conveyed a sense of urgency here.

KENNEALLY: Indeed. I guess readers, consumers, they should notice and have a sense of urgency themselves. But how will they notice the difference from publishers who have signed on to the compact?

KOLMAN: Of course, that is through the content. So what we publish will have immediate impact on what the readers and consumers see. For instance, if you talk about diversity and inclusion, we'll see books which really embrace that. When you talk about gender equality, we'll see that in children's books, in textbooks, that they will depict gender in a more equal and equitable way. When we talk about environmental issues, we hope they will be captured as well, both in books for children, books around educational works, etc. So we really hope that the SDGs will come through in what we publish.

KENNEALLY: Of course, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected every aspect of our lives, and no doubt it has had an impact on the SDGs and on the Publishers Compact. So how do the SDGs interact with the pandemic, with the crisis that we're all going through now?

KOLMAN: The corona pandemic was really a setback, and it's affected the vulnerable groups much more – therefore, the groups that really are going to benefit from the SDGs – minority groups, for instance, the environment. Everything is at stake. So you can clearly say that because of COVID-19 that the SDGs had a setback of at least a year, maybe two.



As I mentioned before, we have only the decade of action, which is now. And with the setback, that means that we have to take even more action.

At the same time, it's also an opportunity for us, because we can go back to exactly the way we did things before the corona crisis, but we can also think, well, this is a time to shape a new future, a more sustainable future, a more equitable future, a future where we take more care of our impacts on nature, on the oceans, etc. So I believe that it will complicate things, absolutely. I hope we have an even stronger sense of urgency. But at the same time, it's also a clear opportunity for all of us.

KENNEALLY: The COVID-19 pandemic has certainly united the world around a common issue, and perhaps that kind of global collaboration can continue with the SDGs. So I have to ask you, Michiel Kolman, about the areas of special attention. Any particular ones that you point to that you think are particularly ripe for action?

KOLMAN: Yeah, there are 17 SDGs, but one that really jumps out for me personally, and it's about climate change, climate action. There is so much at stake, and we are really heading in the wrong way, so to say. If we want to be serious about the future of our planet, the action to take is now.

So I really hope that when publishers and publishing organizations embrace the SDG Publishers Compact that they will keep SDG number 13 in mind around climate action and say, well, let's put that high on the agenda, both internally – so what can they do in their own organizations, for instance, to become carbon-neutral – but also externally, so how they can contribute to society as a whole.

KENNEALLY: What kinds of SDG-related projects are publishers already working on? Perhaps you could share with us some specific projects underway at Elsevier.

KOLMAN: At Elsevier, we started the SDG Resource Center together with our sister companies at RELX. All the information there, which could be scientific articles, could be books, could be datasets, they are available related to all the 17 SDGs. That has been underway for a couple of years with great success. We've seen it in the number of downloads.

We also linked all the research to the SDGs. So if you publish a research article, we can tell this is linked to SDG number so-and-so. As a result, we can, for instance, talk to a university and say, well, you are really contributing very high in SDG number this or number that by the number of articles you publish or the impact of the articles on citations. So it's extremely powerful that we can help our customers, the universities, with their SDG profile, so to say.



KENNEALLY: It really comes down to data in that case. It's fascinating. I guess the global collaboration that's at the heart of this is of interest to the International Publishers Association, of course. Tell us about the role IPA is going to play in the Publishers Compact.

KOLMAN: The IPA, of course, has an international outlook, and it's very important that we cover both the global north and the global south. We've already seen this with the SDG Book Club and now also with the SDG Publishers Compact. There are many related topics which I will put on the agenda as chair of the inclusive publishing and literacy committee at the IPA. But I really feel it's important here that we embrace all the players in, say, the book ecosystem. So partnerships – it's not all about publishers, but it's also with the library community, it's with the booksellers, it's with the book fairs. So this kind of comprehensive approach which we're supporting from the IPA will be really crucial for the Publishers Compact to be a success.

KENNEALLY: And as you mentioned there, the SDG Book Club is an ongoing project, one I'm sure that has provided some insights and some lessons that will apply to the compact itself.

KOLMAN: Yeah, absolutely. We started in the six UN languages, and it was a great success. As I mentioned earlier, it did have all the players in the book ecosystem. Now, we're going with regional and national versions of the book club – in Norway, in Indonesia, and we just launched one in Portuguese, which will be very effective both in Brazil and Portugal and other Portuguese-speaking countries. In April, we will also launch an SDG Book Club out of Africa, covering African literature for children in local languages and also in French and English. So I think it extremely powerful that we can take a global approach, but then also have regional and national solutions.

KENNEALLY: Michiel Kolman, who is chair of the inclusive publishing and literacy committee at the International Publishers Association, as well as senior vice president at Elsevier for information industry relations, thank you so much for joining me on the program.

KOLMAN: Thank you, Chris, for having me here.

KENNEALLY: Our co-producer and recording engineer is Jeremy Brieske of Burst Marketing. You can subscribe to the program wherever you go for podcasts and follow us on Twitter and Facebook. I'm Christopher Kenneally. Thanks for listening and join us again soon for another Velocity of Content podcast from CCC.

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