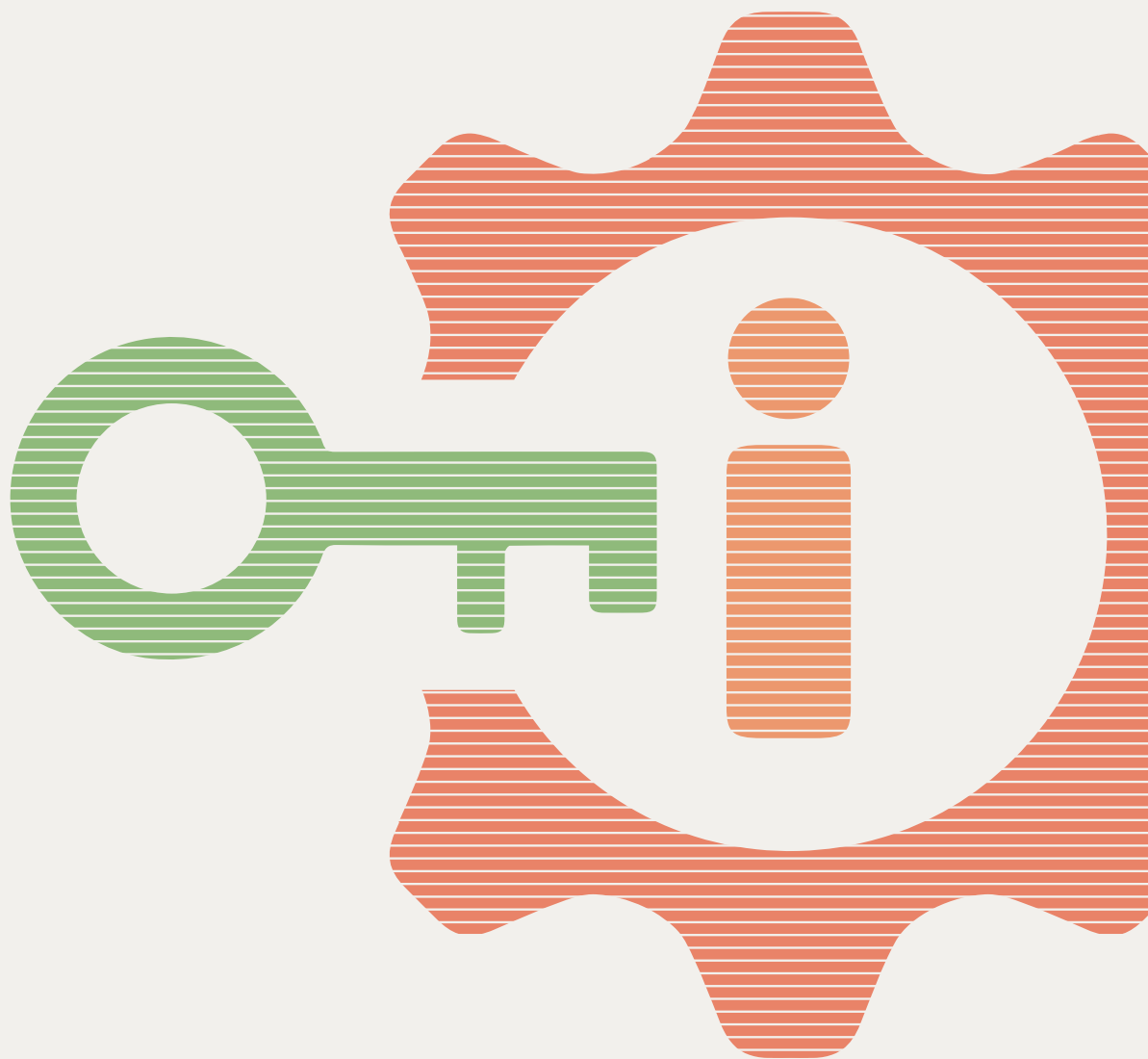# Development *and* Access to Information
2017

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IFLA in partnership with the Technology & Social Change Group

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The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) 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.

The Technology & Social Change Group (TASCHA) at the University of Washington Information School explores the design, use, and effects of information and communication technologies in communities facing social and economic challenges. With experience in over 50 countries, TASCHA brings together a multidisciplinary network of researchers, practitioners, and policy experts to advance knowledge, create public resources, and improve policy and program design.

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Access to Information and the Sustainable Development Goals

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We are determined to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path. As we embark on this collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind.
United Nations General Assembly (2015)

Can access to information create more socially and economically inclusive societies? Given the unprecedented ability we have today to gather, use, create, and exchange information, how can we capitalize on the strengths of the information society to help combat poverty and inequality, make governments more transparent and accountable, improve gender equity, increase youth's social and economic participation, and promote civic life in our communities?

These are not new questions. For decades, government agencies, practitioners, and researchers have applied information and communication technologies (ICTs) to solve community-level and national-level problems.[1] Over the years, they have amassed extensive evidence on how information and communication resources can be leveraged across highly diverse contexts and a wide variety of domains (e.g., education, workforce development, gender equality, health care, and governance) while employing a range of technologies (e.g. community radio, mobile cooperatives, software applications, and telecenters). Yet despite the lessons learned, we are still far from achieving a truly inclusive information society. It would be a mistake to assume – in a world increasingly driven by interconnectedness, immediacy of information, and ubiquitous communications – that everyone can get online, just as there is no guarantee that broad access to so much information will ensure that it is used in ways that lead to more desirable social goals.

What is holding us back from building an inclusive information society that puts "the world onto a sustainable and resilient path"? Some of the challenges run deep, rooted in social and economic inequalities that surface as obstacles to basic connectivity, digital literacy, and technology affordability. Other emergent and rapidly shifting challenges include security and privacy issues, the explosion of mobile devices, and the disruption of traditional publishing and distribution systems. As our information ecosystem continues to change and evolve, the array of new

challenges expands: lack of access among segments of the population, lack of connectivity in rural areas, monopolization of information access and curation, lack of mobile information literacy, and restrictions on freedom of expression, among other issues. In all countries, at all socioeconomic levels, the fight for the right to information is more pressing today than ever.

It is precisely in this complex information landscape that the United Nations agreed in 2015 on a new comprehensive framework: the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all. To achieve these aims, the agenda outlines 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in areas including poverty, health, agriculture, gender equality, innovation, and youth employment, with specific targets for each goal, and 169 targets in total. Within the SDGs framework, access to information and communication technologies underpins the achievement of the development goals. Eleven targets present access to information as a key tenet for achieving the targets' aims (See Table 1). The agenda differs dramatically from its predecessor, the Millennium Development Goals, in that it takes a rights-based approach to sustainable development. It acknowledges that sustainable development is multifaceted and that all its constitutive components are interrelated. Therefore, to address development challenges, it requires addressing all types of rights – social, economic, cultural, political, civil, and informational (Gigler, 2011; Souter, 2016; Esterhuysen, 2016).

A rights-based approach to information access recognizes that access is only one aspect of the human right to be informed; other dimensions (the ability to create, use, understand, and share) must also be considered before the right can be exercised. We argue, as the Association for Progressive Communications does for ICTs, that the right to information affects all other rights as well. Human rights are all interdependent and indivisible.

Table 1: Access to information codified in the SDGs targets

Goal 1: No Poverty

1.4. By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services.

Goal 2: Zero Hunger

2.c. Adopt measures to ensure the proper functioning of food commodity markets and their derivatives and facilitate timely access to market information, including on food reserves, in order to help limit extreme food price volatility.

Goal 3: Good Health and Well-Being

3.7. Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services, including for family planning, information and education, and the integration of reproductive health into national strategies and programs.

Goal 4: Quality Education

4.4. Substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.

Goal 5: Gender Equality

5.b. Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women.

Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

8.5. Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value.

Goal 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure

9.5. Enhance scientific research, upgrade the technological capabilities of industrial sectors in all countries, in particular developing countries

9.c. Significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the internet in least developed countries by 2020.

Goal 12: Responsible Production and Consumption

12.8. Ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature.

Goal 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

16.10. Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements.

Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals

17.6. Enhance North-South, South-South and triangular regional and international cooperation on and access to science, technology and innovation.

We can all agree that access to information, in all its dimensions, is a fundamental ingredient in the struggle to achieve more inclusive societies. However, we must not overlook the critical role of those who effectively translate that information into accessible knowledge and purposive use. Traditional media, civil society organizations, and public institutions such as libraries have performed this critical intermediary function by curating information, extending informational resources to communities in need, and offering social spaces for convening, learning, creating, and problem-solving in their communities. Such actors have been tremendously important in shaping the ways individuals interact with and apply information, while also helping communities leverage their knowledge and skills toward positive ends such as educational achievement and stronger civic participation. As such, libraries can act as agents of change to advance the SDGs.

The DA2I lens: A framework to analyze the SDGs

Development and Access to Information (DA2I) is a joint project between the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) and the Technology & Social Change Group (TASCHA) at the University of Washington Information School that aims to demonstrate how access to information and libraries contribute to the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. This project was conceived as part of the Lyon Declaration on Access to Information and Development, which calls on global institutions and associations to "ensure that everyone has access to, and is able to understand, use and share the information that is necessary to promote sustainable development and democratic societies."[2]

Throughout this report, access to information is defined as *the rights and capacity to use, create, and share information in ways that are meaningful to each individual, community, or organization.* The ability of information access to contribute to sustainable development is influenced by a combination of structural factors (e.g., policies and physical infrastructure) and human/social factors (e.g., usage, population characteristics, and skills). Therefore, we propose a *DA2I framework* to describe four interdependent dimensions that influence access to information and its ability to advance the SDGs:

1. **Information and communications access infrastructure:** the connectivity (and material resources) that establishes the physical connection to information.

2. **Social context of use:** the variety of local, cultural factors that shape the way users will engage with information.

3. **Capabilities:** the body of functional knowledge, skills, and resources a population develops over

time that shapes the nature of how information is used or not used.

4. **Legal and policy landscape:** the policies and regulatory frameworks that promote or hinder connectivity, affordability, inclusiveness, and rights. (E.g., spectrum management, universal access funds, copyrights, freedom of speech, privacy, and security.)

The DA2I framework is substantially informed by Burnett & Jaeger's (2005) Information Life Worlds, combined with elements from UNESCO's Media and Information Literacy Assessment Framework. The DA2I framework also reflects a general consensus among practitioners, researchers, and informed policymakers that access to technology alone is not enough to build inclusive and participatory societies. The social context of adoption and use of information is key to unlocking the transformational nature of these resources for improving the well-being of individuals and their communities (Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2012).

Additionally, factors such as access to education, fair housing, decent jobs, affordable health care, and cultural norms around gender and minority groups determine not only the ability of people to access information, but most importantly their capability to use it in ways that are meaningful in their everyday lives. Furthermore, the myriad policies that regulate information access – such as the development and use of the communications infrastructure and the rights of citizens to freedom of expression, association, and discussion – set up the rules of engagement for different actors. This strongly influences whether and how access to information materializes for positive social ends.

The DA2I framework captures the multifaceted and interdependent dimensions of access, providing an opportunity to systematically examine the SDGs through the lens of access to information. It also provides a model for understanding the bidirectional relationship between achieving SDG targets and meaningful access to information – the gains go both ways. Access advances the SDGs, and achieving the SDGs advances access. Progress along the four dimensions outlined above is a bellwether for progress toward both the SDGs and meaningful access to information. The DA2I framework also applies to libraries, particularly as they situate themselves and their services within the universe of access to information and make choices about how to leverage their position in a meaningful way for their local communities.

To recap, the DA2I framework is built on a large body of research that identifies four dimensions that influence meaningful access to information: technical infrastructure, social context, user capabilities, and the legal and policy landscape. This framework provides useful insights for analyzing the interdependent variables that shape access regardless of the unit of analysis. It can be applied to a group of people, to a nation, to the planet. While there are limitations when applied to

increasingly larger scales, there are benefits as well. We believe it is a useful tool for considering access to information in the context of the SDGs.

Structure of the report

This report is the first in a series of annual Development and Access to Information (DA2I) reports that will monitor the impact of access to information on a number of relevant SDGs and related targets. The overall objective of these annual reports is to bring together different voices to show the importance of access to information, in all its dimensions, in promoting more socially and economically inclusive societies. In order to accomplish this, this report will:

- Establish a baseline of access to information indicators to track progress over the lifespan of the SDGs Agenda (2015-2030).

- Examine the different ways in which access to information and libraries are contributing to advancing the SDGs, focusing specifically on the priority areas identified by the High Level Political Forum in 2017.

The purpose of this effort is to draw attention of UN member states, intergovernmental organizations, funders, civil society groups and other stakeholders working in development, and the library community itself, toward the valuable contribution information access makes to development, and to highlight examples of how libraries are successfully supporting the achievement of the SDGs.

The primary objectives of the project are as follows:

- Demonstrate how access to information contributes to development, and how it is embedded across the UN 2030 Agenda;

- Demonstrate libraries' contributions to providing equitable access to information in the context of the UN 2030 Agenda;

- Raise the visibility of libraries within the context of development agendas, particularly the UN 2030 Agenda;

- Serve as a tool to engage access-to-information campaigners, organizations, and libraries at the national level to generate conversations around the contributions of libraries to development.

The report is structured in the following way:

Chapter 1: **The State of Access to Information and Development in the UN 2030 Agenda**

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce a set of indicators that will serve as the basis for the DA2I project, now and through 2030, to track global and regional changes in development and access to information. Using these indicators, the chapter describes the state of access to information as of 2015 in four sections, each of which correspond to a dimension of the DA2I framework: infrastructure, the social context of use, capabilities, and the legal and policy landscape. The chapter also includes a discussion of measurement gaps that must be addressed in order to improve international monitoring and paint a clearer picture of our progress toward achieving the SDG targets.

Chapter 2: **Libraries as Agents for Sustainable Development**

The library is an institution that meets people's information needs. That has been its role historically: providing a place for people to visit, ask questions, and access and use information resources. In doing so, libraries have long played a role as an enabler of individuals in their paths for lifelong learning. The public library, the focus of this chapter, is a community institution, and has the added role of meeting community-wide needs. By applying their inherent resources – including technology infrastructure, knowledgeable staff, and social space – public libraries are able to offer a range of services that address the economic, health, educational, and civic needs of their communities. In doing so, libraries can support the SDGs by acting as agents of change at the local level.

Chapter 3: **A2I for Sustainable Agriculture**

Access to information has a critical role to play in achieving the targets of SDG2. Many farmers, and particularly those working on smallholder family farms, lack access to information on modern farming methods, appropriate inputs (e.g., seeds and fertilizers), market opportunities, prices, and weather forecasts. They may also be unaware of relevant agricultural laws, environmental regulations, and subsidies that could influence their farming practices. Meanwhile, governments, NGOs, research institutions, and others could use open data that smallholder farmers provide to make positive contributions toward ensuring food security, while also holding each other accountable for SDG2 monitoring. This essay highlights twelve A2I initiatives that helped improve agricultural production and farmer livelihoods.

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Chapter 4: **A2I for Better Health**

As the UN aims to secure healthy lives and promote well-being for everyone, at every stage of life, access to information on health research, health education, and public health data are of prime importance. But such information contributes to health and wellness only when it is mobilized appropriately: the right kinds of information, engaging the right kinds of users, under conditions that allow it to be used appropriately and trusted accordingly. As such, libraries can play a crucial role in public health initiatives by facilitating digital access, ensuring the quality of health information, promoting and enhancing health literacy, and providing community spaces for people to safely gather information and share ideas. This essay provides some examples.

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Chapter 5: **A2I for Gender Equality**

The benefits to girls and women of increased access to information are myriad and far-reaching. However, numerous obstacles hinder their quest for information, including socioeconomic, cultural, and political constraints. This essay provides examples of best practices in information provision for and utilization by girls and women, with particular emphasis on the multiple ways libraries in developing countries are assisting gendered access to information.

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Chapter 6: **A2I for Sustainable Infrastructure**

Businesses and governments need information to innovate, and the momentum created by innovations can contribute to the development of healthy, sustainable, and economically vibrant societies. This essay demonstrates how open data and information have provided an underlying infrastructure tapped by the public and private sectors to develop more efficient infrastructure, improve research and innovation, ensure greater accountability, and support a more informed citizenry.

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End Notes

[1] There is an extensive and well-established body of research committed to studying the contributions of access to information for the purpose of advancing social and economic goals. Numerous studies in the fields of communication, particularly development communication (for example, Castells, 1996; Melkote, 2000; Wilkins, 2000; Castells, Fernandez, & Sey, 2009; Toyama, 2011; Heeks, 2010) and information sciences (for example, Burnett & Jaeger, 2011), have shed light on different ways in which communities, civil society organizations, governments, and international bodies used a variety of information and communication resources to advance social change.

[2] For the full document, visit http://www.lyondeclaration.org.