Development and Access to Information: Assessing the Contribution of Access to Information to Advancing the UN Sustainable Development Goals

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Abstract
Access to information (A2I) is an issue that underpins development policies globally. We see this play out prominently in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN 2030 Agenda, where A2I is embedded in targets on ensuring public access to information, universal internet access, and international knowledge sharing, while also supporting targets related to improved health, education, economic, and governance outcomes. The Development and Access to Information Project will assess how A2I contributes to advancing the SDGs over the 15 years covered by this global agenda. This poster outlines our approach and shares early outputs from our research, including (1) a baseline of established indicators and (2) a conceptual framework created to monitor progress in the A2I landscape through 2030.

Keywords: access to information; information policy; Sustainable Development Goals; development indicators


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1 Project Overview
The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) has partnered with the Technology & Social Change (TASCHA) group to demonstrate how access to information (A2I) contributes to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN 2030 Agenda. This project, Development and Access to Information, 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.”

The project consists of three major activities:

1. Establish a baseline of indicators to monitor global changes in the A2I landscape from 2015 through 2030;
2. Formulate a conceptual framework to track progress in the A2I landscape in relationship to selected SDG targets through 2030;
3. Release a biennial report to present data and findings, as well as spotlight key A2I issues via thought-pieces from leading organizations in the field.

This poster presents the results of these first two project activities. The publication of the project’s first report is anticipated for June 2017, with subsequent reports released biannually until the Agenda concludes in 2030.

1 See http://www.lyondeclaration.org/
2 Early Project Results

2.1 Indicator Baseline

The indicator baseline is comprised of 12 global A2I indicators and 12 environmental or explanatory variables.

The process of finding and selecting indicators to measure progress on SDG targets was a multi-step process that included document review, stakeholder consultations, defining criteria, and scoring indicators against criteria. (See Figure 1 for an overview of our process and the results).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Result</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identify A2I-oriented SDG targets</td>
<td>Reviewed 17 SDGs and their 169, applying the Lyon Declaration’s conceptualization of A2I</td>
<td>Identified 14 targets spanning 11 SDGs (See Table 2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Establish indicator criteria and scoring rubric</td>
<td>Articulated project values and data priorities; reviewed evaluation reports from UN agencies to determine standard criteria used; designed rubric and applied 3-point score for each criterion to 300 indicators</td>
<td>Defined six criteria and three-level scoring (high, medium, low): validity (credible, well-documented sources), comparability (actively collected and global), directness to SDG target, relevance to project objectives, availability, and availability of disaggregated data</td>
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<td>Locate and select indicators</td>
<td>Scanned databases and reports from 30+ NGOs and international organizations, including UNDP, ITU, UNSD, ILO, UNESCO, Eurostat, Freedom House, Bill &amp; Melinda Gates Foundation Global Libraries program, and OCLC Global Library Statistics; downloaded data and methodology; compiled a preliminary list of 1000 indicators; culled list by applying criteria</td>
<td>Identified 64 indicators to track, distributed across the 14 targets over period of UN Agenda 2030, including 12 A2I indicators</td>
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<td>Consult with stakeholder organizations</td>
<td>Conducted three rounds of stakeholder consultations with NGOs, IFLA congress participants, and UNESCO statistics office</td>
<td>Gained stakeholder buy-in; identified new data sources; identified priority A2I indicators; revised analysis plan</td>
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<td>Categorize indicators</td>
<td>Discussed indicator analytical categorizations within project team as analysis approach crystalized</td>
<td>Established categories: baseline indicators (A2I and comparative) and other indicators (general, library-related)</td>
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Table 1. Actions Taken to Establish an Indicator Baseline

This project conceptualizes A2I as an enabling environment that allows people to access, understand, and use information. As such, we have found that A2I applies to 11 of the 17 SDGs (and 14 of the 169 targets), being at once embedded in targets on ensuring public access to information (16.10), universal internet access (9.c), and international knowledge sharing (17.6), while also present in targets related to poverty (1.4), agriculture (2.c), health (3.7), education (4.4, 4.6), gender equality (5.b), employment (8.5), research and innovation (9.5), cultural heritage (11.4), sustainable development (12.8), and governance (16.6).
2.2 Conceptual Framework

There are many ways to conceptualize “access to information,” and the term has been applied to a range of issues, including press freedom and federal freedom of information laws. We apply a broad definition: “an enabling environment that allows people to access and use information, and further develop their capabilities to apply this information meaningfully in their everyday lives.”

The conceptual framework used for this project is adapted from Jaeger and Barnett’s (2005) access to information framework, which describes the physical, intellectual, and social aspects of information. That approach is combined with elements from UNESCO’s Global Media and Information Literacy (MIL) Assessment Framework (2015). The MIL framework which was designed to guide national assessments of the information and media environment, including competencies on MIL, which combines elements of multiple literacies: information, media, ICT, and digital.

This framework identifies dimensions of information access that together account for the factors affecting the ability of people to acquire, understand, and use information. The four dimensions include:

1. Legal framework on rights to information and to press freedom. E.g., freedom of information acts (FOIA); freedom of the press; right to know; freedom of speech; internet freedom
2. Nature of the communications infrastructure (ICT and media infrastructure). E.g., access infrastructure (mobile, internet, etc.); media plurality
3. Capabilities of citizens to access, use, and act on information. E.g., places of access (online and offline); ICT skills and literacies; types of uses by citizens as members of a social sphere; perception of the quality of information in the public domain
4. Socio-economic environment. E.g., poverty and inequality, education access, health.

Analytical approach: Assess findings gathered from secondary data sources to elucidate interrelationships between A2I and the SDGs along the four dimensions of information access described above.

2.3 Analytical Framework

The research team tested several iterations of analytical approaches, most involving correlations between A2I indicators and exploratory variables. However, based on feedback from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics in November 2016, the research team revamped its approach so as to depend less on correlations between indicators in a given year and more on changes over time.

Analytical approach: Monitor changes in the SDG/A2I landscape from 2015 through 2030. For each of the A2I indicators selected, calculate year-to-year changes in the data over time by region and sex. Example: Change in mobile phone ownership by gender, compared across UN-designated regions.

2.4 Analysis Results - Forthcoming

We are currently conducting our first round of data analysis. Early results will be available as soon as December 2016. Although the results are not available now, we will be in a position to include analysis results on our poster, and to incorporate feedback received from conference participants into our final report.

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