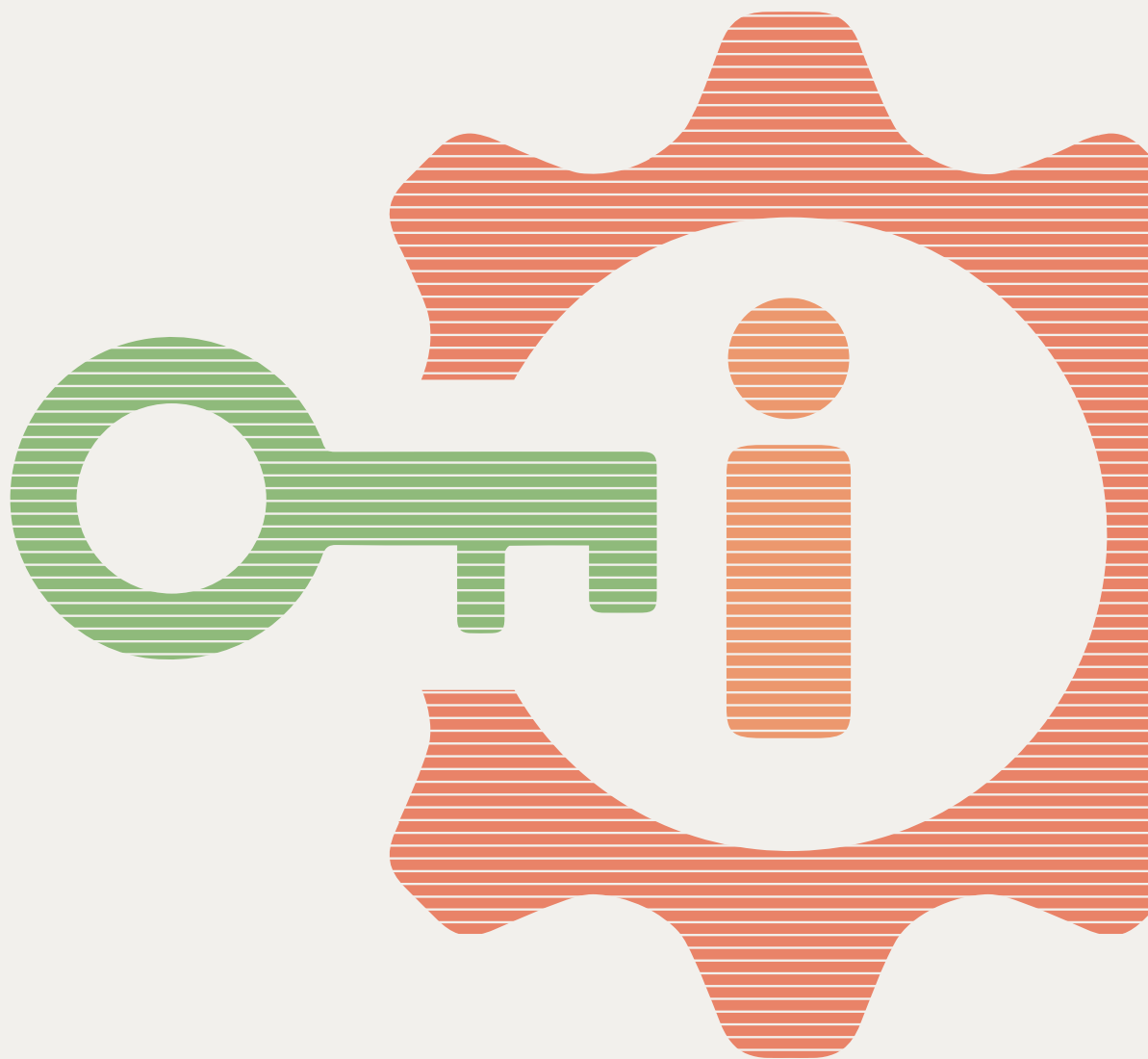




Development *and* Access to Information

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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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The role of A2I in advancing the SDGs: *The road ahead*

This report set out to answer the following questions: 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?

To answer these questions, we began by taking a rights-based approach to information and establishing the Development and Access to Information framework, based on our definition of access to information as “the rights and capacity to use, create, and share information in ways that are meaningful to each individual, community, or organization.” We established a baseline of access-to-information indicators to track progress over the lifespan of the SDGs Agenda and examined the ways in which access to information and libraries are contributing to advancing the SDGs. In so doing, this report 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.

Through this approach, we emphasize that access to information alone does not suffice to guarantee a truly inclusive society. The rights all taken together – economic, social, political, and civil – have an amplifying effect on each other. The rights are indivisible and inalienable. For example, strong infrastructure will only be fully utilized if legal frameworks are in place to establish and promote open access to government data and information. Further, internet access for women is only one factor in achieving gender equality. Understanding the role of access to information in development requires a multifaceted approach to measuring progress. We need to measure and track not only infrastructure indicators, but also those of inequality, freedom, and the capability to use information and communication technologies

in meaningful ways. By establishing a baseline as this report does, limited as it may be, we can and will continue to measure these interconnected indicators to track progress.

While this report makes clear that affordability remains a significant challenge, simply making technology and connectivity cheaper will not ensure access to information for all. The challenges run deep, and are rooted in social and economic inequalities that surface as obstacles to basic connectivity, digital literacy, and technology affordability. These challenges must be overcome in order to ensure meaningful access to information and advance the SDGs. By providing free access to information, knowledge, and technology, libraries are exceptionally well-suited to help combat inequality. Libraries are usually safe physical places where people – regardless of gender, sexuality, income, race, or religion – can come to access information of all kinds. Through digital and information literacy and skill development programs, libraries encourage not only access to and consumption of information and knowledge, but creation and production of information and knowledge as well. When more people participate in creating and sharing information, our collective and individual knowledge grows and deepens. Further, many libraries around the world are going beyond just providing access to information and a physical space. As demonstrated in this report, there are a myriad of examples of libraries actively developing and hosting programs and services specific to meeting the SDGs.

As the chapters in this report show, there is huge potential for access to information to have a transformational role in advancing gender equality, sustainable agriculture, better health, and resilient infrastructure. This is not only the case in less-developed economies – the role access to information can play in every facet of development is critical for all countries and regions, regardless of their GDP. Of course, the needs of each country may differ depending on income levels, but as detailed in this report, there are threats to access to information – such as restrictions on freedom on the internet – in every country, across the income spectrum. Along with other social, political, and civil rights, access to information increases the likelihood of building equitable and just societies. By realizing how access to information can contribute to the SDGs and incorporating the right to access to information in development plans, services, and programs,