Access to Information Central to the Post-2015 Development Agenda

Access to information is crucial for everyone, including those living in poverty. It empowers them to:

- exercise their political and socio-economic rights
- be economically active
- learn new skills
- hold their governments to account.

Access to information is a prerequisite for development programmes across all sectors and at all levels. To safeguard the success of the post-2015 development agenda, the post-2015 process must focus on ensuring that governments, civil society, communities, and individuals have the right to the essential information needed to solve problems and make better decisions and effective access to that information.

What we believe

Access to information should be central to the post-2015 development agenda.

Governments, the private sector, civil society and international institutions should make an international commitment to ensure that everyone **has access to, understands, and is able to use and share the information that is necessary to promote sustainable development.**

Access to information has been recognised by the High Level Panel (HLP), the UN Secretary General and many other stakeholders as an essential component of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This recognition should be fully incorporated into the post-2015 development agenda.

A clear focus on the right to information would be transformational. It would:

- promote participatory development, empowering all people to exercise their rights and address their own development challenges
- make all governments, regardless of their level of economic development, more accountable for meeting commitments made as part of the post-2015 development agenda
- provide a means to promote progress on accountability, transparency, good governance, participation and empowerment

Better quality and greater availability of information would lead to improved allocation of resources and more informed decision-making by governments, civil society and the private sector. Access to information is essential for:

- a full understanding of which public services reach the population, especially those people who are living in poverty
- individuals and communities to engage with governments to improve public services
- Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and the private sector to be able to undertake targeted research & development, invest effectively, and improve public services.

Information intermediaries such as CSOs, the media, parliamentarians, and libraries can help governments and people communicate, organize, structure and understand data that is critical to development. They can do this by:

- providing information on basic rights and entitlements, public services, environment, health, education, work opportunities, and public expenditure
- identifying and focusing attention on the most relevant and pressing needs and problems of a population.
- using ICT infrastructure to speed up the delivery of services and provide access to crucial information. CSOs and libraries can use ICTs to bridge the gap between national policy and regional implementation, ensuring that development reaches all communities
- providing public forums and space for wider civil society participation and engagement in decision-making.

Risks of ignoring the importance of access to information

If access to information is left out of the post-2015 agenda, there is a risk that a top-down development agenda will be created. In that case, the focus will be on meeting goals through government action rather than enabling individuals and communities to take control of achieving their own development. If access to information is not included in the post-2015 framework, we risk:

- **Poor decision-making.** There is an assumption that the information we need to make good development decisions exists, is freely available, and is easy to interpret. In many instances, however, this is not the case. Incomplete and secret information often leads to decision-making that does not respond to the needs of the community.
- **Wasted money and effort.** We should not lose an opportunity to increase capacity and training to analyse data and translate it into information so it can be used by a wider community. Research on the information needs of individuals and communities, including those living in poverty, suggests that they face obstacles in locating and using the right information for their own benefit.
- **Reinventing the wheel.** We should avoid creating development policies that lack support for information intermediaries and infrastructure. If we support and reinforce existing infrastructure, such as libraries, we can ensure provision of information-related services for those who need them most.

How to measure progress

For the post-2015 period, we suggest considering new mechanisms for collecting information on indicators, including interactive data collection using mobile technologies and the internet. We also strongly encourage the adoption of open standards to enable comparison and interoperability of information across communities and bodies. CSOs should be actively engaged in the process. We suggest the following metrics to measure progress, based on existing metrics used by the UN and other international bodies:

Empower citizens and governments with information

Increase access **Making information accessible and timely**	**Guarantee the public's right to information and government data** a) Right to information legislation based on international standards adopted and implemented b) National Open Data Policy committing to publish data in an common, open, machine readable format
	Increase transparency of public budgets and ensure open access a) Open Budget Index b) Government budget data and documents publicly available in timely manner. c) National Open Access mandate implemented across funding, research and educational institutions.
Improve use **Developing an enabling environment for public participation and civic engagement**	**Improve the skills and information literacy of citizens** a) UNESCO's work on media and information literacy indicators b) WSIS ICT Indicators Target 7. c) WSIS ICT Indicators (Targets 1-6, 8, 10) on public's access to ICTs
	Increase public participation, citizen engagement and demonstrate a commitment to Open Government a) Open Government Partnership membership, action plans, including multi-stakeholder processes and reviews. b) CIVICUS Civil Society Enabling Environment Index. c) E-participation Index (UNPAN).

Further information

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