

UNDP and Access to Information



For UNDP, Access to information (A2I) is a key underpinning for work in democratic governance. It is vital for strengthening accountability, transparency, participation and rule of law. Accessible and understandable information and the means and ability to communicate are important enabling tools for people to participate in policy making processes and to influence decisions that affect their lives. UNDP's approach to Access to Information is in many ways similar to the emerging area of **communication for development** which calls for a more participative approach to, and an enabling environment for, the development of relevant information and communication strategies. It requires a focus on developing and strengthening the most appropriate communication and information sharing mechanisms that will support the development of national capacities and empower the poorest groups in society to participate successfully in relevant policy processes.

A more strategic and inclusive approach to information and communication is critical in UNDP's democratic governance programming and also for UNDP's role in supporting governments in the production of national annual Millennium Development Goals (MDG) reports. A growing number of country offices are giving increased emphasis to developing communication plans to reach specific groups at national and local levels. Activities vary from country to country but generally they aim to generate awareness about the MDGs amongst the public; raise awareness that MDG reports provide a platform to discuss priority policy and programme issues and provide information on how the public can participate in the process and promote debate.

UNDP's Practice Note on Access to Information (http://www.undp.org/oslocentre/access_prac.htm) focuses UNDP's support in four main areas:

1. Strengthening legal and regulatory environment for freedom and pluralism in information (**legislation/policy support**)
2. Supporting capacity strengthening, networking, and elevation of standards of media at national and local levels to promote the exchange of independent and pluralist information (**media development**)
3. Raising awareness on rights to official information and strengthening mechanisms to provide and access information (**right to official information**)
4. Developing **communication mechanisms for vulnerable groups**

Cross-cutting areas

E-governance and ICT initiatives serve as an important facilitator for enhancing the impact of UNDP's work across these four support areas. This is especially evident in the area of right to official information, where UNDP is supporting projects that strengthen the capacity of governments to develop communications policies and strategies that utilise ICTs. It is also apparent in the area of communication mechanisms for vulnerable groups, where UNDP is providing assistance to a number of projects that support the establishment of tele-centres in remote areas.

Many UNDP country offices are providing assistance to A2I activities that may not seem to fit easily into one of the four main support areas but fall into and cut across them all. Many civic education initiatives demonstrate this cross-cutting support. They are an important means for capacity development at the societal level and play a key role in empowering people for effective civic engagement.

UNDP's support to Access to Information in 2005

UNDP is currently supporting 91 Access to Information projects in 57 countries. Of these, 57 are discrete Access to Information projects (for example support to the development of independent and pluralist media). In the remaining 34 projects, Access to Information is an integral component of other democratic governance initiatives. The organization's support for Access to Information projects has increased significantly over the last three years: from 69 projects in 2003¹ to 91 in 2005.

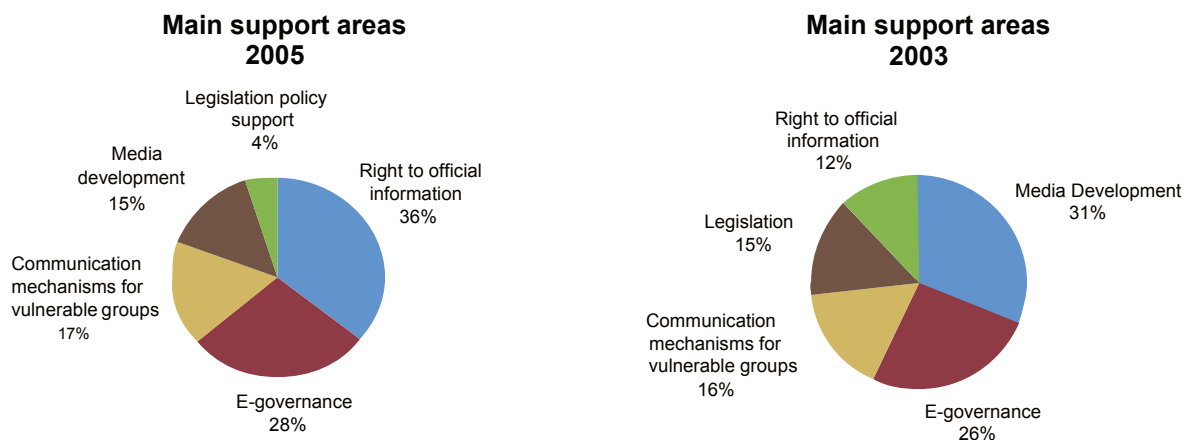
¹ Access to Information-UNDP's engagement and a guide to key actors, 2003.
(<http://www.undp.org/oslocentre/docsdec03/Full%20guide%20-%20single%20paged.pdf>)



Region	# Projects 2005	# Projects 2003
Africa	22	21
Arab States	17	6
Asia & the Pacific	21	20
Europe and the CIS	22	16
Latin America & the Caribbean	9	6
Total	91	69

In 2003, media development and e-governance initiatives were the primary focus areas for the 69 projects that UNDP supported. In 2005, the focus has shifted with the right to official information being the area in most demand for UNDP support. In response to this demand, UNDP's Bureau for Development Policy developed practical guidance materials to assist programme officers support the establishment of legal mechanisms that ensure that people, especially the poor, have access to information which enhances their ability to exercise their rights. The practical guidance note on the right to official information can be found at this link:

<http://www.undp.org/oslocentre/docs04/RighttoInformation.pdf>



UNDP support to Access to Information by region

Africa region

UNDP is currently supporting 22 Access to Information projects in 15 countries.* Almost a third of the assistance provided in Africa is related to right to official information and just under a quarter focuses on communication mechanisms for vulnerable groups.

*Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Lesotho, Mauritania, Mozambique, Niger, Nigeria, Sao Tome and Principe, Tanzania, Zambia.

UNDP Botswana is supporting the area of communication mechanisms for vulnerable groups through a project focused on the development and implementation of a civic education strategy. Key activities of the project include the development of education materials, support to a media campaign and training workshops for civil society organisations.

Arab States region

UNDP is currently supporting 18 Access to Information projects in ten countries in the Arab States region.* Almost half of the assistance provided in the Arab States region is related to right to official information and just under a quarter focuses on e-governance.

* Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Palestinian Programme, Somalia, Tunisia, Yemen

UNDP Jordan is supporting a project that focuses on strengthening the capacities of staff in the Department of Statistics (DOS) in undertaking socio-economic data analysis; integrating the gender dimension in statistical activities; establishing an electronic data documentation system; and enhancing DOS' capacity to produce user demand-driven statistics.

Asia & the Pacific region

UNDP is currently supporting 21 Access to Information projects in ten countries and one regional initiative in this region. Over half of the work supported in this region relates to either right to official information or e-governance with assistance to media development accounting for 16% of projects.

* Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Pakistan, Timor-Leste, Philippines, a regional project (Cook Islands, Niue and Tokelau)

- **UNDP India** is supporting a project that uses community radio to empower vulnerable groups. The project aims to use the medium of community radio to sensitise communities on human rights issues and to provide communities with an alternative forum for dispute resolution.

Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) region

UNDP is currently supporting 22 Access to Information projects in 15 countries.* Almost half of the assistance provided in this region is related to e-governance. The second largest support area is the right to official information with 42 % of projects.

* Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkey

- **UNDP Bulgaria** supports the area of right to official information with its 'T-Centres' project. The project aims to establish a broad-based network of public telecentres providing services to the widest possible range of users in small or economically underdeveloped communities.

Latin America & the Caribbean region

UNDP is currently supporting nine Access to Information projects in seven countries. More than half of the assistance provided in this region is related to right to official information or e-governance. Media development accounts for 20% of projects in this region.

* Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Paraguay, Suriname, Venezuela

- **UNDP Suriname** is supporting an Electoral Assistance project which has a focus on journalist capacity development. The training programme aims to raise awareness on the role of journalists in a democracy in general and in electoral reporting and ethical writing in particular.

Additional resources

The information presented here is based on an extensive mapping of UNDP support to Access to Information carried out by the Oslo Governance Centre in July 2005. The results of this mapping are available on a searchable database.

<http://undp.net-factors.no/default.aspx>

Access to Information Practice Note http://www.undp.org/oslocentre/access_prac.htm

Practical Guidance Note on Civic Education <http://www.undp.org/oslocentre/docs04/Civic%20education.pdf>

Practical Guidance Note on the Right to Information <http://www.undp.org/oslocentre/docs04/RighttoInformation.pdf>

Supporting Public Service Broadcasting: Learning from Bosnia and Herzegovina's experience <http://www.undp.org/oslocentre/docs04/PublicServiceBroadcasting.pdf>

Civil Society and Right to Information: A Perspective on India's Experience http://www.undp.org/oslocentre/docs04/21_sept_04/pradeepsharmafellowshippaper.pdf

Essentials – Civic Engagement: Synthesis of Lessons Learned (October 2002) <http://www.undp.org/eo/documents/essentials/CivicEngagement-Final31October2002.pdf>

Essentials – E-Governance (April 2004) <http://www.undp.org/eo/documents/essentials/En-egov-essential-No-15.pdf>

UNDP and Civil Society Organizations: A Policy Note on Engagement

<http://www.undp.org/policy/docs/policynotes/UNDP%20CSO%20Policy.pdf>

UNDP's Information and Documentation Disclosure Policy http://www.undp.org/cso/resource/policies/idpan1_en.doc

A Guide to Civil Society Organisations working on Democratic Governance

http://www.undp.org/oslocentre/docs05/3665%20Booklet_heleWEB_.pdf

For further information on UNDP's work in the area of democratic governance, contact:

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