

Access to Information



PRACTICE NOTE

October 2003

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AMARC	-	The World Association of Community Broadcasters
BBC	-	British Broadcasting Corporation
BDP	-	Bureau for Development Policy
CBO	-	Community Based Organization
CCA	-	Common Country Assessment
CP	-	Country Programme
CSO	-	Civil Society Organization
DGG	-	Democratic Governance Group
DGPN	-	Democratic Governance Practice Network
DGTF	-	Democratic Governance Thematic Trust Fund
ICCPR	-	International Covenant on Civil & Political Rights
ICT	-	Information & Communications Technology
MDGs	-	Millennium Development Goals
MISA	-	Media Institute of Southern Africa
MKSS	-	Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan
NHDR	-	National Human Development Report
NGO	-	Non-Governmental Organization
OGC	-	Oslo Governance Centre
OSI	-	Open Society Institute
PPP	-	Public Private Partnerships
PRSP	-	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
SBAA	-	Standard Basic Assistance Agreement
SRF	-	Strategic Results Framework
SURF	-	Sub-Regional Resource Facility
UNDAF	-	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	-	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	-	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WSIS	-	World Summit on the Information Society

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

UNDP's mandate is poverty reduction. Its priorities reflect a specific commitment to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) within the framework of the Millennium Declaration. Together these present a global agenda for poverty eradication, democratic governance and human rights. The organization believes that democratic governance is a central plank in achieving the MDGs, and access to information, as an empowerment tool, underpins interventions in this area.

This practice note establishes a strategic framework for the support UNDP provides to access to information. At the core of this framework is one central objective – to lever support in a way that maximizes people's participation, especially the poor, in democratic and policy-making processes. To meet this objective, UNDP takes the following position on access to information:

- Implementation of the rights to freedom of expression and to access information are prerequisites for ensuring the *voice and participation* necessary for a democratic society.
- Access to information and *communication* build on these internationally recognized rights and together encompass the core principles of democratic governance: participation, transparency and accountability.
- The promotion and protection of both access to information itself and *flows of information* that exist between constituents, government, parliament, community groups, civil society organizations and the private sector are of equal importance.
- It is essential to create and strengthen communication *mechanisms* that enable poor people to influence national and local government policy and practice.

UNDP has a comparative advantage in access to information by enhancing the demand and supply of information to all stakeholders; using its expertise and experience in democratic governance; and promoting mechanisms that ensure poor people have access to receive and transmit information. For example, poor people are aware of the onset of famine often before governments, but they need access to mechanisms to share and give information.

The practice note introduces a conceptual model for access to information. By combining the conceptual model with UNDP's comparative advantage in this area, four main support areas emerge which serve to focus access to information work:

1. Strengthening the legal and regulatory environment for freedom and pluralism in information
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
3. Raising awareness on rights to official information and strengthening mechanisms to provide and access information
4. Strengthening communication mechanisms for vulnerable groups

The practice note includes a programming matrix that integrates these support areas within the conceptual framework. Practical guidance for access to information programming is provided in the final substantive part of the practice note. This section emphasizes the importance of establishing a baseline, and strengthening partnerships with government and civil society. Links are also provided to a range of resources.

PART ONE: UNDP AND ACCESS TO INFORMATION

1. Introduction

UNDP's mandate is poverty reduction. Its priorities reflect a specific commitment to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) within the framework of the Millennium Declaration. Together these present a global agenda for poverty eradication, democratic governance and human rights. The organization believes that democratic governance is a central plank in achieving the MDGs, and access to information, as an empowerment tool, underpins interventions in this area.

This practice note establishes a strategic framework for the support UNDP provides in access to information for democratic governance. At the core of this framework is one central objective – to lever UNDP's support to access to information in a way that maximizes people's participation, especially the poor, in sustainable poverty reduction.

The practice note is designed primarily to assist governance practitioners. The note synthesizes cutting edge thinking on access to information and provides signposts to relevant operational tools. It is based on UNDP's country experience and consultations with selected specialists from European/Nordic donors, international Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and other multilateral organizations. These consultations were extremely important in identifying emerging global policy trends and establishing UNDP's niche in the area of access to information.

The practice note is divided into two parts. Part One describes what is meant by access to information, introduces a conceptual framework for information and communication, and formulates UNDP's position in this regard. Part Two provides practical guidance for access to information programming.

1.1 Background and context

Political tensions, insecurity, threats of violence and crises within a country have a significant impact on access to information. Access to information and the free flow of information (communication) in countries in crisis are absolutely critical for providing effective humanitarian assistance as well as for long-term crisis and conflict prevention.

At a global level, increasing insecurity has in some instances intensified governments' surveillance and censorship activities and their tendency to withhold information under the guise of 'national security'. This is particularly the case in relation to Internet access and use. Balancing national security considerations as well as privacy concerns with access to information and communication is a key issue under consideration at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS).

UNDP supports access to information programmes and projects both stand-alone and as a part of other programmatic activities. In addition to the many access to information activities subsumed within governance and other development programmes, a mapping undertaken in 2002 and updated in 2003 identified the range of UNDP access to

information projects under implementation globally. (See *Access to Information for Democratic Governance: An Overview of UNDP Support to Access to Information Globally* <http://www.undp.org/oslocentre/civilsoc.htm>).

The underlying governance principles of an access to information approach are transparency, active participation, responsiveness and accountability. Such a basis makes access to information a cross-cutting concern and of direct relevance to all activities within UNDP's governance programmes.

Access to information is also fundamental for other priority programme areas: for example HIV/AIDS, the environment (the Aarhus Convention on Access to Environmental Information <http://www.unece.org/env/pp/>), crisis prevention and recovery, gender equity, ICT for development and so on.

1.2 UNDP's position on access to information

Implementation of the rights to freedom of expression and to access information are prerequisites for ensuring the *voice and participation* necessary for a democratic society.

Access to information and *communication* build on these internationally recognized rights and together encompass the core principles of democratic governance: participation, transparency and accountability.

The promotion and protection of both access to information itself and *flows of information* that exist between constituents, government, parliament, community groups, civil society organizations and the private sector are of equal importance.

It is essential to create and strengthen communication mechanisms that enable poor people to influence national and local government policy and practice.

The achievement of democratic governance goals requires that information be widely available. However, in the particular context of the MDGs, there must be special regard for the needs of those who are poor, vulnerable and frequently excluded from mainstream governance processes and institutions as a result of poor access to information and communication support.

Poor and vulnerable groups often lack information that is vital to their lives – information on basic rights and entitlements, public services, health, education, work opportunities, public expenditure budgets, etc. They also lack visibility and voice to enable them to define and influence policy priorities and access resources. Gender is also a critical consideration in access to information. The differing information needs of men and women and the lack of gender-disaggregated data present important challenges for achieving the MDGs.

2. The Conceptual Framework

This section elaborates a conceptual framework for access to information.

2.1 What is access to information?

Access to information and freedom of expression are international human rights norms. Article 19 of both the UN Declaration on Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) states that the right to freedom of expression includes not only freedom to 'impart information and ideas of all kinds', but also freedom to 'seek' and 'receive' them 'regardless of frontiers' and in whatever medium.

Article 19 covers both concepts of information and communication. By doing so, people then become *generators*, *users* and *conduits* of information. Article 22 of the ICCPR also provides for the right to freedom of association with others which enables collective analysis of information and can lead to collective action.

Freedom of expression and the right to information held by public authorities are related but different concepts. Freedom of expression and the free flow of information and ideas include the right to information, but the right to official information is a more narrowly defined concept, which requires specific legislation.

Access to information is not only about promoting and protecting rights to information but is equally concerned with promoting and protecting communication (use of information) to voice one's views, to participate in democratic processes that take place at all levels (community, national, regional and global) and to set priorities for action.

2.1.1 Information

Information comes in many different forms of varying relevance, accessibility and quality. It can be held by governments, civil society organizations (CSOs), communities, and the private sector. Official information is extremely important and represents one of many information types that ordinary people need in order to make informed decisions on matters that affect their lives.

'Public' versus 'private' information is a prevailing issue in many countries in which UNDP is active. Public sector restructuring and the commercialization/privatization of public bodies, has the potential to erode right to information laws which give a qualified right to access to information held by public institutions. There is little consensus on how to address this problem, although a number of organizations and public policy institutes are exploring the proper scope of right to information requirements.

**'Informed debate is the
lifeblood of
democracies'**

(Human Development
Report 2002: 'Deepening
Democracy in a
Fragmented World')

There are a number of *stakeholders* in any access to information intervention. These include creators, users and intermediaries of information. 'Information intermediaries' or 'infomediaries' synthesize, translate, simplify and direct information on behalf of others. The media can often play a role in fulfilling this function but other entities, such as community spokespersons, local government officials, CSOs also fulfil an important intermediary role.

Information stakeholders include: individuals and groups (especially poor people and women and children); national government politicians and officials (administration), local government officials; political parties, parliamentarians; mass media (state and non-state) outlets and journalists; a wide spectrum of local and national CSOs including community groups, community spokespersons and opinion formers; trade unions, faith based organizations, national; multilateral and bilateral donors; development and humanitarian agencies; and the private sector. A key information stakeholder is government. Governments produce information but they also need information to (i) assess the impact of their policies and to adjust these accordingly, and (ii) to ensure security and stability. The fiscal budget, for example, is a central tool for government to improve the human development situation. However, vulnerable groups often have limited access to budget-creating processes or the budget itself.

Recent research on the information needs of the poor has confirmed that poor men and women face a series of problems in locating and using knowledge and information for their own benefit. Poor people have difficulty accessing the 'right' kind of information. Often the information is inappropriate to meet their needs, either in content (e.g. it does not reflect their reality) or in presentation (is not in their local language).

Furthermore, information is disseminated without understanding the needs of the users, or the contexts in which they can access and use the information. Many information systems exist to provide information to the poor that are not demand driven, overlook local knowledge, misunderstand the role of intermediaries and do not monitor usage.

'Those engaged in the provision of information services aimed at reducing poverty, emphasise that 'face to face' communication is the most effective mode of transferring information. This is consistent with research findings that for the majority of people the primary source of information is via social networks.

The challenge therefore is how any information system or network, and particularly one that is intended to deliver information to people living in poverty, can engage with this mode of communication'.

Making Knowledge Networks Work for the Poor, an ITDG Research Paper (March 2003)
<http://www.itcltd.com/docs/mknwp%20project%20final%20report.pdf>

2.1.2 Communication

Communication implies action and interaction. To communicate is to express one's opinions and preferences, and to share and exchange ideas. Information stakeholders use a range of communication channels and mechanisms to seek, receive, use and share

information. These include: official structures (e.g. departments, courts, hospitals and schools); formal consultation processes (e.g. community meetings and citizen juries, etc.) for national or local planning (e.g. Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers - PRSPs); traditional structures (e.g. governance systems and institutions, religious systems and institutions); formal media (e.g. print press, internet, TV, telephone, national radio, community radio); informal media (e.g. theatre, music, dance, puppetry, soap operas, public address systems, notice boards etc.); elections, referenda, opinion polls, surveys, public protests etc.

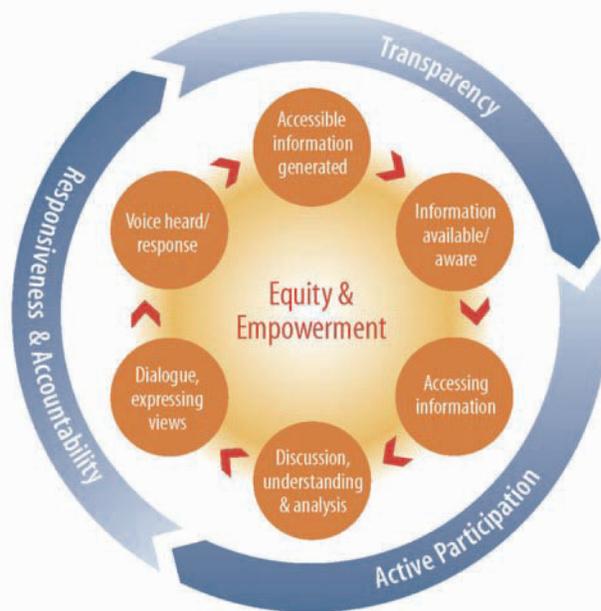
2.2 The information and communication circle

The information and communication circle below situates interrelated access to information and communications components within the framework of the key governance principles of transparency, active participation and responsiveness/accountability. This conceptualization is consistent with UNDP’s commitment to a human rights based approach to development which incorporates the core values of equity and empowerment. See the Practice Note on Poverty Reduction and Human Rights.

(See <http://www.undp.org/policy/docs/povertyreduction-humanrights0603.pdf>.)

Democratic governance is driven forward by the development of democratic institutions, processes and mechanisms. The circle below demonstrates how access to information can increase the demand for better governance and by so doing perpetuate its own demand. Each box in the circle requires the development of specific capacities for generating, accessing, analysing information and communicating views. The information and communication matrix in Part Two of the paper identifies a range of programme interventions to help develop these capacities.

Figure 1: The information and communication circle



The principles of transparency, responsiveness/accountability and active participation apply in all areas of the circle. In this respect they are dynamic and move around the circle.

Transparency: making information available is a direct example of transparency. But the mere act of making the information available means little if people are not aware it exists and how they might have access to it. Information availability also means little if the costs of accessing it are unreasonable (time and money) and if the information is not 'user-friendly'. The information needs of poor people (and other vulnerable groups) and a consideration of how poor people access information (relevancy and appropriateness of mechanisms) is critical in making transparency meaningful. Face-to-face meetings between organized groups of poor people and local government officials can be good examples of transparency.

Active Participation: the information and communication circle recognizes that for information to *empower* poor people, it must bring into focus the need to improve poor people's capacities to analyse and understand information and to act on that information through communicating views. Public hearings, public meetings, participatory planning, committees, forums and roundtables, focus groups and citizen advisory groups, surveys, lobbying, negotiation and mediation are all examples of mechanisms for accessing, analysing and understanding information and communicating their views. It is important to make these mechanisms relevant and accessible to the poor, for example through strengthening community-based organizations (CBOs). These can facilitate collective approaches whereby vulnerable groups organize and define their common concerns. Such processes allow them to develop a voice and make demands for information that is relevant to them, for example information concerning health, education, and employment.

Responsiveness and Accountability: responsiveness implies listening to people's views and concerns and acknowledging these in an impartial way in the design and implementation of policies and practices. Accountability implies being answerable to people and government for policies and actions. E-governance initiatives can play an important role in strengthening government responsiveness and accountability.

3. How Can UNDP Make A Difference?

Over the last ten years, both funding and the number of access to information projects and programmes in developing and transitional countries have increased substantially. In some countries, there are many actors on the ground working across different access to information support areas. For an overview of some of the main actors supporting access to information activities globally see <http://www.undp.org/oslocentre/civilsoc.htm>.

As one of the principal actors, UNDP can make a difference in the area of access to information by:

- i. Using its unique relationship with government
- ii. Enhancing the supply of, and facilitating demand for, information from government and others: supplying information on its own operational activities to other stakeholders
- iii. Using its co-ordinating and facilitation role
- iv. Drawing on its expertise and experience in democratic governance

As a UN agency, UNDP has a distinctive relationship with host country governments. This relationship built on trust, legitimacy and neutrality, enables UNDP to enter into meaningful dialogue with government counterparts on sensitive subjects like access to information. The organization can also act as a bridge between government counterparts and CSOs on access to information and communication issues.

UNDP is also well placed to assist the capacity development and strengthening of both the 'supply' and 'demand' for information.

DEMAND: develop and strengthen capacities and mechanisms that will increase demand for information and enhance communication and engagement in dialogue processes

e.g. strengthening CSOs and their networks, civic education activities on the right to information, building capacities of communities to organize, analyse information and communicate views to policy makers.

SUPPLY: develop and strengthen capacities and mechanisms that will enhance the supply (generation, availability, accessibility) of relevant information

e.g. building awareness within the civil service on the importance of the right to information, developing the capacity of government to provide official information on request, strengthening the capacity of media personnel.

In line with the commitments contained in its Information and Documentation Disclosure Policy (http://www.undp.org/cso/pdf/pubinf_dispol.pdf), UNDP has an important role as a *supplier of information*. This progressive policy is intended to ensure that information concerning UNDP's operational activities will be made available to the public in the absence of a compelling reason for confidentiality.

In-country, UNDP has often assumed an important *co-ordination and facilitation* role, acting as a liaison between project partners, officials and donors. This is especially important to create space for diverse development partners to engage in a constructive dialogue and to enhance collaboration amongst all actors. The co-ordination role is important to avoid duplication of work and prevent too much concentration on one area of access to information while other areas are neglected.

The organisation's *experience and expertise* within access to information is also an important consideration. The way in which access to information is viewed as underpinning democratic governance for poverty reduction requires not only that UNDP work closely with national government counterparts but also that it build strong relationships with local government and civil society who have access to the perspectives of the poor and vulnerable.

UNDP has a track record in democratic governance across its priority areas of parliamentary development, electoral systems and processes, justice and human rights, decentralization and local governance, and public administration reform and anti-corruption. (See <http://www.undp.org/governance/index.htm> for information on UNDP's governance programmes). It has its own in-house technical expertise and experience in these areas and has also developed close global partnerships with democratic governance institutions. The organization has access to external knowledge and learning through its engagement in national, regional and global networks.

PART TWO: PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR PROGRAMMING

4. Principal Support Areas for UNDP

UNDP's principal support areas in access to information are based on the conceptual framework and the areas identified in the previous section on how UNDP can make a difference.

4.1 The four principal support areas

The four principal areas in which UNDP is well placed to offer assistance are:

1. Strengthening the legal and regulatory environment for freedom and pluralism in information
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
3. Raising awareness on rights to official information and strengthening mechanisms to provide and access information
4. Strengthening communication mechanisms for vulnerable groups

All four areas are closely interrelated: achievement in one area enhances progress in the others with a correspondingly greater impact on poverty reduction. A pro-poor focus in all four areas will be further sharpened by establishing effective links with relevant CSOs. See UNDP's Policy Note on UNDP and Civil Society Organizations: A Policy Note on Engagement

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

Many donors, either directly or through intermediaries including CSOs, are providing assistance to one or more of the four support areas. They view an independent and vibrant media as an important force for empowerment of poor people, for fighting corruption and as crucial to strong, democratic societies. Several donors have been funding research and promoting a greater poverty perspective in e-governance and ICTs.

E-governance and related ICT initiatives can provide new and innovative opportunities to enhance the impact of UNDP's work across the four support areas. In particular they can provide effective entry points for improving public sector transparency, responsiveness and accountability especially by improving participatory governance, enhancing decentralization processes and expanding constituent outreach. Working with governments to strengthen their ICT capacities for disseminating information, providing official information and managing information (systems management) is of key importance.

4.1.1 *Legal and regulatory environment*

Effective legislation is a key element in any strategy to promote freedom of expression. UNDP is well placed to facilitate the provision of expert advice on the right to official information, freedom of expression, and media law (including new and traditional media). Legal and regulatory frameworks that protect and enhance community media are especially critical for ensuring vulnerable groups' freedom of expression and access to information.

Other organizations doing innovative work in this area include: the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters – AMARC (www.amarc.org), Article 19 (www.article19.org), the Media Institute of Southern Africa – MISA (www.misa.org) and the BBC World Service Trust (www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice)

Anticipated Outcomes: Measurable increase in the number of countries enacting open pluralistic media, and right to official information legislation; enhanced capacities of government bodies to implement such legislation.

4.1.2 *Independent and pluralist media at national and local levels*

An independent and pluralist media is a crucial 'institution' of governance and an important plank in poverty reduction. UNDP supports the development of an enabling environment for more inclusive and responsive forms of media such as community based media. UNDP also supports the development of professional standards in the media by encouraging self regulation (codes of conduct) and journalist training (investigative journalism). In all regions, UNDP has experience in supporting journalists to understand and report on issues that affect the poor. The National Human Development Reports (NHDRs), the MDG Reports and the PRSP process provide important entry points for this work.

Good practice examples include: development of strong regional media networks in South East Asia, Southern Africa and the Latin America regions. Organisations supporting this work include PANOS(www.panos.org.uk), UNESCO (<http://www.unesco.org/webworld/ipdc/>) AMARC and MISA. Good practice examples in developing the capacity of the media professionals can be found in the work of such organizations as INTERNEWS (www.internews.org), the World Bank Institute (www.worldbank.org/wbi), the Open Society Institute (www.soros.org) and the Commonwealth Press Union (www.cpu.org).

Better information flows and a greater range of communication channels are needed to meet the information needs of the poor and to advance pro-poor perspectives in policy dialogue. This will require creating and/or strengthening networks between media and CSOs at both national and local levels.

The media sector in pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict situations plays an extremely important role. Several organizations are looking at how to engage the media as a key partner in conflict prevention, management and reduction. In pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict situations, it is critical that effective strategies are developed involving local

media to improve professional reporting. In this way, the media is better able to resist pressure to broadcast/disseminate biased propaganda in areas of tension.

Anticipated Outcomes: Measurable improvement in the quality of journalistic coverage, specifically in terms of independence and professionalism (enhanced capacities of media personnel); measurable increase in the coverage of vulnerable groups' issues and concerns.

4.1.3 Raising awareness on rights to official information

UNDP can play an important role in raising awareness on rights to official information. It does this by (i) supporting and facilitating initiatives that sensitize government officials on the importance of making official information available (ii) working with CSOs to promote civic education on rights and entitlements under official information legislation. An increasing number of CSOs across all regions have used the right to official information, specifically information concerning budgets and public expenditures, to monitor poverty reduction and progress in gender mainstreaming.

Article 19 and Transparency International (www.transparency.org) are two organizations advancing right to official information work at the global level. Organizations such as Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), an Indian people's movement has mobilised grass roots demands for greater public information disclosure through connecting abstract legislation to concrete local information needs.

Anticipated Outcome: Measurable improvement in the range of mechanisms used to promote awareness on rights to official information.

4.1.4 Communication mechanisms for vulnerable groups

UNDP has an important role to play in strengthening communication mechanisms, which allow vulnerable groups to participate effectively in policy-making processes. For example by supporting CBOs and the media to promote civic education on governance and development issues, CSOs that focus on improving the active participation of vulnerable groups in policy-making processes such as the PRSPs, and NHDRs; and direct support to community dialogue initiatives that promote social change/development. In all regions UNDP is engaged in civic education programmes covering a range of development themes such as peace and conflict, elections and governance and HIV/AIDS.

Organizations such as the Rockefeller Foundation (www.rockfound.org) and the BBC World Service Trust are using creative forms of communication to promote development and to alleviate the problems faced by the poor. Using communication for social change through radio soap operas, theatre and puppetry for example have proven useful in bringing about discussion and debate on subjects ranging from HIV/AIDS, to domestic violence and corruption.

Anticipated outcomes: Measurable increase in partnerships with CSOs and local government to strengthen communication mechanisms that enable vulnerable groups to organize and participate in policy making processes and public debates.

5. Enhancing Access to Information Programming

This section elaborates three areas, which are central to effective programming in access to information: (i) establishing a baseline, (ii) reviewing access to information proposals and (iii) partnerships. Information on implementation modalities for all programmatic activities, including access to information, is not included in this note and can be found in the UNDP programming manual <http://www.undp.org/bdp/pm/>.

5.1 Establishing a baseline

Establishing a reliable baseline is essential for defining project objectives against which relevant indicators can be set to monitor progress and measure impact. There are two main steps involved in establishing a baseline: (i) understanding the national context and (ii) completing a more detailed situational analysis.

5.1.1 Understanding the national context

For all UNDP supported programmes and projects, programme officers initially need to establish a common understanding of the context including the political, socio-economic and technical contexts. It is also important to map the key external players active within the sector. An analysis of these broad contextual factors will provide the initial 'landscape' in which the access to information intervention takes place. Such baselines can often draw on studies already completed by others.

The table below identifies basic questions necessary for a minimum understanding of the access to information 'landscape'.

Table 1: 'Landscape survey'

Political	What is the human rights situation? How transparent/open is the bureaucracy? Is there a vibrant civil society? To what extent is the legislative and policy environment conducive to the free flow of information? Is freedom of information and expression legislation in place and is there a political commitment to it? What are the underpinning political and/or economic power relationships?
Socio-economic	What are the societal factors that may affect access to information and communication? What are the relevant power relationships, e.g. gender, religion, class, age, etc? What are the literacy rates? What languages are being used?
Technical	What is the state of the infrastructure? What kinds of technology (traditional and modern) are available and used across different sections of society and across different parts of the country (rural/urban)?
External actors	Who are the significant bilateral and multilateral donors active within the sector? Who are they working with and in what areas? Who are the significant service providers – nationally, locally, globally based? Who are the main civil society actors? To what extent is the private sector/business community active? What are the actors doing in this sector?

5.1.2 *Situational analysis*

The situational analysis builds on this understanding of the ‘landscape’ and explores in more detail important factors relevant to each of the support areas. Some of the information needed to provide a satisfactory understanding of the situation may not be available in existing national planning documents.

It will therefore be important to work closely with others, especially government counterparts and civil society. Such collaboration could include drawing on research and mappings undertaken by external actors, convening or taking part in consultative meetings, use of existing surveys, polling and participatory rapid appraisals etc. In some cases it will be necessary to contract consultants to pull together the information needed for a robust and accurate situational analysis. The table below sets out relevant questions for each support area.

Table 2: Key questions across the support areas

Support Areas	Key Questions
Legal and regulatory environment for freedom and pluralism in information	What is the existing legal framework for freedom of expression and the right to information – is legislation in place supported by regulations and other implementation mechanisms? Are the legislation/regulations too restrictive? How was the legislative framework developed? What is the existing legal framework for the media? (Ownership structures, control of broadcasting and printing, freedom of expression status, protection of journalists)?
Strengthening independent and pluralist media at national and local levels	What are the types of media outlets? What type of medium is the most widely used across different sections of the population (rich, poor, women, ethnic groups) and regions? What are the existing technical resources and capacities of the media? What is the content of the media (nationalised lens)? What are the key characteristics of journalists (number, level of training, security)? Are there multiple sources of information? Does the generator of the information have a bias that would affect the accuracy/neutrality of the information? Do the intended receivers of the information determine the production of information? What kinds of mechanisms are used to share information (formal – e.g. mass media) or informal mechanisms?
Promoting the right to official information and raising awareness on the right to official information	Is the information in a relevant form? Is the information easy to understand by the target group? Is there a ‘disconnect’ between the intended target group and that target group receiving information? Are the means for accessing information relevant and appropriate? Are rural groups disadvantaged from accessing this information? Are women especially disadvantaged from accessing this information? Is there a charge for the information? Is this fee reasonable? Are the means for accessing information relevant and appropriate to poor people? Is information available in local languages?
Communication and democratic dialogue mechanisms	What kinds of mechanisms exist to communicate views and opinions? What kinds of mechanisms are being used to communicate views and opinions? Do channels exist for vulnerable groups to voice their views and in their native language? Who is listening? Who is responding? How effective is the media in serving this purpose? Are the intended targets of the information actually using the information? Is the intended target group empowered to use the information?
E-Governance and related ICT initiatives	
What types of ICTs are used to facilitate the four support areas described above? To what extent do poor and rural groups have affordable access to new ICTs (internet, mobile telecommunications, info kiosks etc.)? Do vulnerable groups, and relevant intermediaries, have the opportunities to acquire the technical capacities to utilize emerging technologies? Is there a legislative framework to facilitate cost effective and open use of the Internet or does the existing policy seek to control access and use? To what extent is relevant public content available in local languages and user-friendly format? What are the kinds of e-governance and e-government initiatives being promoted? To what extent do national/international CSOs use ICTs in their public/policy advocacy work?	

5.2 Reviewing access to information proposals

Once an understanding of the context and the situation has been achieved, the next important step is to review potential proposals. Whether extending/integrating into an existing governance or other development programme or starting with a clean slate, there are typically three principal points of origin for access to information proposals:

- i. Receipt of a proposal or a request for support from a government counterpart
- ii. Identification of a specific need
- iii. Receipt of a request from a CSO

It is assumed, as with all project proposals, that the objectives of each proposal are SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-based) and include an articulated strategy for monitoring progress and measuring impact. In each of the three situations, programme officers should review the objectives of the proposal against:

- Existing UNDP *governance programmes* and the governance agenda of the government. Access to information impacts and cuts across priority governance areas. Suggested questions for consideration might include: how does the proposal fit in with other governance activities and how might the proposal further enhance the work in these areas?
- The country programme and other *national strategic documents*. Suggested questions might include: is it consistent with the national development priorities identified therein – if it deviates, is it complementary or does the proposal meet a need identified in the situational and baseline analyses?
- UNDP's commitment to a *rights based programming* approach. Suggested questions for consideration might include: are vulnerable groups clearly identified? How are they empowered to make claims on social, political and economic resources? Are mechanisms and procedures in place that promote democratic meetings between government officials and community groups? How are they empowered to hold key development actors accountable?
- The *four principal support areas and the information and communication programming circle*. The four support areas reflect UNDP's comparative advantage while the circle makes it easier to target the poor. The information and communication programming matrix (over page) brings both together to illuminate potential intervention areas. Suggested questions for consideration might include: where in the matrix does the proposal fit? Do the objectives of the proposal further the expected outcome of the relevant support area? If it does not fit in the matrix, is the proposal meeting a need or a gap that is not being met by either the government or external actors including donors?

If the proposal fits well with the checklist above, it merits further consideration. The next step is to establish the baseline through the setting of indicators and targets for monitoring progress against the objectives of the proposal itself and the expected relevant outcome for the support area. Specific indicators and targets will be programme and country specific. (See the UNDP Guidance Paper on Selecting Indicators <http://www.undp.org/eo/documents/methodology/rbm/Indicators-Paper1.doc>).

Table 3: The information and communication programming matrix

	Legal and reg. framework	Media	Right to official information	Communication mechanisms
The CIRCLE	Support to:	Support to:	Support to:	Support to:
Information generation	Protect freedom of expression, the free operation of the media and development of public service broadcasting	Strengthen networks of media organizations that seek to meet the info needs of poor and vulnerable groups		Ensure that accessible and understandable info as a basis for communication and engagement is produced
Information available / Aware information available	Develop laws and regulations that promote and implement the right to info	Develop capacity of the media at national and local levels (i) to make info available to the poor and (ii) use local knowledge to make info on pro-poor concerns available to key stakeholders	Strengthen capacities of government and organizations to develop strategies to ensure people are made aware of their info rights	Civic education activities to enhance government/civil society dialogue on national development priorities
Accessing information	Legislation that enshrines and implements the right to access official info	Develop capacity of journalists to use right to info legislation effectively especially info of use to vulnerable groups	Support alternative forms of info production that benefit vulnerable groups: literacy programmes with an info base, community radio, e-governance initiatives	Non-formal media organizations that use alternative media to communicate effectively with vulnerable groups
Discussion, understanding and analysis	Legislation that protects freedom of association and organizations' rights to produce and disseminate info	Improve professional standards of the media and encourage interaction with organizations of the poor. Encourage and strengthen media networking at national and local level	Develop capacities of CBOs/CSOs through training in public policy analysis, understanding decision-making processes, most effective ways to use right to info laws	Encourage and strengthen CSO networking for developing the capacities of local groups to mobilize on issues.
Dialogue, expressing views	Policies and legislation that commit to establishing participative policy making mechanisms and institutions	Protect media's right to freedom of expression (protection of journalists)	Develop capacity of government to respond, monitor and record official info requests and to engage with CSOs, especially those representing the poor	Develop capacity of communities to analyse info and communicate views to policy makers. Technical assistance for info analysis and preparation of organizational positions
Voice heard/response	Develop awareness within civil service on the importance of the right to info and freedom of expression. Policies that promote accountability	Develop media's understanding of the situation of the poor and ensure their views are expressed in the media. Redress mechanisms for violations of freedom of expression	Enhance awareness by government officials of the importance of the freedom of expression. Establish institutions to oversee access to info	Enhance dialogue between government officials and civil society on national development priorities and public resource allocations that will benefit poor people
E-governance and related ICT initiatives				
Support to: ensuring that emerging information and media policies enhance pluralism, public access and facilitate broad-based use of ICT for development; enhancing capacities of governments to provide information and public services in a user-friendly and cost-effective manner, developing ICT solutions that facilitate affordable and user-friendly access to information, ICT initiatives that improve capacities to use ICT for citizen-to-citizen/CSO networking and information sharing, enhancing participation in consultative processes and decision-making through the use of ICTs and supporting the use of ICTs by CSOs to communicate, track inputs & outcomes (public audits) and enhance dialogue between different stakeholders				

5.3 Partnerships

UNDP can lever its relatively limited resources to enhance the impact of its work in access to information by working in partnership with other development actors. Strengthening and deepening existing partnerships is an organisational priority recognising that partnerships enable greater sharing of information and learning and provide access to specialist expertise and experience. They may also reduce duplication of efforts.

“Our partnerships with civil society organizations are going to be as important as our partnerships with governments in shaping the future of development”

UNDP Administrator
Mark Malloch Brown (2003)

While there is no set formula for partnerships, there are a number of critical components, which can contribute in varying degrees to a successful partnership. These include:

- Clear criteria for identifying relevant civil society partners
- Mutual trust and commitment
- Well thought out project plan with clear objectives
- Responsibilities and roles of each partner clearly defined
- Transparency on each partner’s expectations from the partnership
- Ongoing monitoring of the relationships within the partnership

UNDP’s main partners in access to information programming are government (national and local) and CSOs including media organizations. Other partners are likely to include other UN agencies/bilateral/multilateral organizations and the private sector (including public/private partnership relationships). See <http://www.undp.org/oslocentre/civilsoc.htm> for an overview of selected CSOs engaged in access to information work.

Governments

National governments are the principal partner of UNDP. Its relationship with governments is a special one based on respect, mutual accountability and recognition of the importance of national ownership of development processes. The organisation has a key role in enhancing national and local government officials’ awareness of the importance of access to information in national development policies and strategies. The United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), Common Country Assessment (CCA), Country Programme (CP) and the Standard Basic Assistance Agreement (SBAA) are products of this partnership and reflect the important collaboration between UNDP and host governments.

The idea of sustaining a dialogue with, or even providing funding for CSOs, particularly media organizations, which retain the right to criticize government policies, sits uneasily with a number of governments. UNDP has an important role in mediating this dialogue between government and CSOs.

Civil society organizations: identification of civil society partners

Many CSOs, through their local partners, can bring to a partnership valuable and authoritative expertise and experience from working on access to information and communication issues with disadvantaged communities at local level. They can also provide an important alternative insight into the situation of different sections of society. However, not all CSOs work necessarily in the interests of the poor. If access to information interventions are to reflect the needs and circumstances of poor people, UNDP needs to identify relevant CSO partners at national and local level.

An analysis of what constitutes civil society in each national context is a prerequisite in order to be able to identify appropriate partners. Such an analysis would include answers to questions such as: what sorts of organizations comprise civil society? e.g. trade unions, media organizations, NGOs, professional associations, etc. How strong, organized and connected are these various parts of civil society at national and local levels? Which organizations are working with poor and vulnerable groups? What type of reputation do they have both with government and community groups? Where are they working? What are their links to government and opposition parties?

UNDP's 'Essentials' paper on Civic Engagement summarizes and synthesizes main lessons learned and recommendations made by UNDP and other development agencies on civic engagement (<http://www.undp.org/eo/documents/essentials/CivicEngagement-Final31October2002.pdf>)

Public/Private Partnerships

In some countries, Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) can provide a pooling of financial resources, know-how and expertise to improve access to information within a country. PPPs are increasingly common in relation to the use of ICT for facilitating the *supply* of state-held information and in the management of public records systems. PPPs can offer an alternative to full privatization, and can combine the advantages of both the public and the private sector. They also can offer an opportunity for socially responsible and progressive private sector organizations to contribute to development.

6. Links to UNDP Resources

6.1 Documents

- Access to Information for Democratic Governance: An Overview of UNDP Support to Access to Information Globally:
<http://www.undp.org/oslocentre/civilsoc.htm>
- Selected organizations active in access to information:
<http://www.undp.org/oslocentre/civilsoc.htm>
- Links to research papers, books and other reference literature on access to information:
<http://www.undp.org/oslocentre/civilsoc.htm>
- UNDP Human Development Report 2002: Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World
http://hdr.undp.org/reports/view_reports.cfm?type=1
- Essentials – Civic Engagement: Synthesis of Lessons Learned (October 2002)
<http://www.undp.org/eo/documents/essentials/CivicEngagement-Final31October2002.pdf>
- UNDP News archive and searchable database on e-government/e-governance:
<http://www.sdn.undp.org/perl/news/articles.pl?do=browse&categories=8>

6.1.1 Relevant UNDP Practice/Policy Notes

- UNDP Practice Note: Poverty Reduction and Human Rights
<http://www.undp.org/policy/docs/povertyreduction-humanrights0603.pdf>
- UNDP Practice Note: Gender Equality
<http://www.undp.org/policy/docs/policynotes/gender-9dec02.doc>
- UNDP and Civil Society Organizations: A Policy Note on Engagement
<http://www.undp.org/policy/docs/policynotes/UNDPCSOPolicy.pdf>
- UNDP's Information and Documentation Disclosure Policy
http://www.undp.org/cso/pdf/pubinf_dispol.pdf
- UNDP Policy Note on Parliamentary Development
<http://www.undp.org/policy/docs/policynotes/parliamentarydevelopmentpdf>
- UNDP Policy Note on UNDP's Engagement in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers
<http://www.undp.org/policy/docs/prsp.pdf>

6.2 Other resources

Sub-Regional Resource Facilities (SURFs)

The SURFs are an integral part of the Bureau of Development Policy (BDP) which provide policy support to clusters of UNDP Country Offices. Nine SURFs have been set up – Addis Ababa, Bangkok, Beirut, Bratislava, Dakar, Harare, Kathmandu, Panama and Port of Spain to provide for: networking and information sharing between staff and development partners; expert referrals and access to technical and programme-related information; technical support for programme identification, design, formulation and review; and documentation and dissemination of comparative experiences and best practices. See the SURF Fact Sheet at http://www.surf-as.org/about/SURFfactsheet_Nov02.doc

Democratic Governance Practice Network (DGPN)

The Democratic Governance Practice Network electronically links UNDP practitioners working on, or interested in, governance issues. The DGPN enables practitioners to share insights and advice on matters of interest and importance to their work. There are currently over 600 members covering all continents. To subscribe to the Network, please send a message to surf-gov@groups.undp.org with "subscribe" as the subject heading.

Democratic Governance Fellowship Programme at the UNDP Oslo Governance Centre

The Oslo Governance Centre (OGC) is an integral part of BDP support services in democratic governance. Its fellowship programme provides staff members with opportunities to spend between 1-2 months in residence in Oslo, where they can reflect on and write up their experiences on governance issues. More information on the fellowship programme can be obtained by contacting the Oslo Governance Centre at oslogovcentre@undp.org.

Democratic Governance Thematic Trust Fund (DGTTF)

"Access to Information" is one service line of the Democratic Governance Thematic Trust Fund. Resources for the DGTTF support innovative and catalytic activities. The overall responsibility for the DGTTF lies with Gita Welch, Democratic Governance Group Leader. Projects up to \$350,000, to be completed within one calendar year, are eligible for funding under the DGTTF. The application process for the DGTTF typically begins in September of the prior calendar year. Detailed information on the DGTTF can be found on the BDP web site (<http://intra.undp.org/bdp/index.html>).

Policy adviser on Civil Society/Access to information

UNDP is equipped to advise programme countries on issues relating to access to information through its BDP Democratic Governance Group Adviser for Civil Society based at the Oslo Governance Centre, Elizabeth McCall Elizabeth.mccall@undp.org. Visit www.undp.org/oslocentre/.



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