

GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2009

*Focus on access to online information and knowledge
– advancing human rights and democracy*



ASSOCIATION FOR PROGRESSIVE COMMUNICATIONS (APC)
AND HUMANIST INSTITUTE FOR COOPERATION WITH DEVELOPING COUNTRIES (Hivos)

Global Information Society Watch 2009

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*Dedicated to A.K. Mahan - an activist who valued
intellectual rigour and concrete outcomes.*

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Measuring progress

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Introduction

This report will review indicators to assess the extent to which they include human rights concerns around the freedom to access, use, share and transfer content, as well as legal and administrative environments that govern intellectual property (IP) enforcement.

Indicators are used for quantifying trends and developments. These can be single indicators – such as gross domestic product (GDP) or literacy levels – or clusters of indicators used to form a ranking. These are designed for providing insight into specific developments and particularly for benchmarking territories or geographic areas (countries, regions, etc.), but also to monitor progress over time. The focus here will be on the rankings in which individual indicators are clustered to indicate specific developments (e.g., the development of the information society). The reason for this is to take advantage of the work that has been done in developing these rankings and the broad coverage of the rankings of different individual indicators. When referring to “indicators”, this report is referring to individual indicators such as internet use or penetration of broadband, and when referring to “rankings” or “indices” it is referring to the clustered indicators.

There are a number of factors relevant for access to online information. First is *access to the equipment and infrastructure* necessary for accessing information (e.g., computers, internet, mobile phones, broadband, wireless). This includes both availability and affordability. Second is the *ability to use* the equipment and infrastructure to access the information. For example, do people have the necessary skills and education to use the equipment? This includes digital and, recently, media literacy. Third is *access to and accessibility of the information itself*. For example, is government information available online? This also refers to how freely accessible and easily available information is (e.g., is the internet filtered?), as well as appropriate content in terms of aspects like literacy levels, language and disabilities. Fourth, access to information not only relies on being able to access the information, but also the *environment* in which this takes place. For example, is the political environment stable enough to actually access and use information, and can the available information be trusted? This also involves media freedoms, and the extent to which citizens have access to public-interest documents. It is important to also take these indicators into account to fully assess accessibility and use of information.

The discussion of indices below is not exhaustive; it is a work in progress, identifying some of the rankings or indicators that are relevant to the general theme of “access to information”.¹

ICT Development Index²

This index, developed by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), captures the level of advancement of information and communications technologies (ICTs) in more than 150 countries worldwide. It compares progress made between 2002 and 2007. The index comprises a number of indices that were developed by ITU in earlier years, including the Digital Access Index (2003), the ICT Opportunity Index (2005) and the Digital Opportunity Index (2007). The index is a tool to benchmark and assess information society developments and to monitor progress that has been made globally to close the digital divide. The index consists of three sub-indices measuring access to ICTs, use of ICTs and skills in using ICTs. “Access” is measured in terms of the penetration of infrastructure (such as fixed and mobile phones), access to services (e.g., internet) and equipment (e.g., computers). “Use” shows how the internet is accessed, and the number of fixed and mobile broadband subscribers. “Skills” are measured by literacy and secondary and tertiary enrolment statistics. Combined, the index provides detailed insight into the preconditions for access to online information. Data are collected directly from governments by means of an annual questionnaire. This is complemented by collecting missing values from government websites and operators’ annual reports. Market research data are also used to cross-check and complement missing values.

The Networked Readiness Index³

The Networked Readiness Index (NRI), compiled by the World Economic Forum, is one of the most comprehensive discussed here, both in terms of geographic coverage (134 countries) as well as the number of indicators used in the index (68). The index is composed of three sub-indices measuring the extent to which the environment in a country is advantageous to the adoption of ICTs (the market, political and regulatory environment, and the infrastructure environment); the extent to which the main stakeholders are interested and prepared to use technology in their

1 In selecting the rankings, three factors have been taken into account: relevance to the subject of access to information, accessibility of the data in terms of costs (all are available either free of charge or at low cost), and the relative independence of the source of the information.

2 www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/publications/idi/2009/index.html

3 World Economic Forum (2009) *The Global Information Technology Report 2008-2009*. www.weforum.org/en/initiatives/gcp/Global%20Information%20Technology%20Report/index.htm

daily activities (individuals, businesses and government); and the extent to which the technology is actually used (by individuals, businesses and government). In terms of access to information, a number of indicators in this index are especially relevant. For instance, “freedom of press”, “accessibility of digital content”, “intellectual property protection”, “tertiary education” and “education expenditure” all indicate how beneficial the environment is regarding the social and legal factors that help to exploit the potential of ICTs. Actual usage is described by indicators such as those showing subscriber data, ownership of or access to computers, use by governments, and availability of government online services. For the latter, the United Nations (UN) e-Government Readiness Index⁴ and e-Participation Index⁵ are incorporated. Similar to the e-government benchmark published by the European Commission,⁶ these measure the availability and sophistication of public services online. The data for the NRI is collected via various organisations such as the World Bank, ITU, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the UN.

Open Source Index⁷

This index has been developed by Red Hat and Georgia Tech University and measures the open source *activity and environment* in 75 countries. Each country is given a score based on its policies, practices and other data in the fields of government, industry and community. Although the index focuses on open source software, it also provides useful information for open standards and technologies. For “activity”, the index includes indicators such as development and use of open source by companies, open source installed and used by households, open source courses in education, and open source funding by government. For environment, the index takes government software policy (support for open source and procurement of open source), e-government and IP legislation into account.

4 Based on the UN e-Government Survey 2008. The e-Government Index is based on website assessment, telecommunications infrastructure and human resource endowment.

5 Based on the UN e-Government Survey 2008. The e-Participation Index assesses the quality, relevance, usefulness and willingness of government websites for providing online information and participatory tools and services to people.

6 Caggemini (2007) *The User Challenge: Benchmarking the Supply of Online Public Services*, commissioned by the European Commission. ec.europa.eu/information_society/eeurope/i2010/benchmarking/index_en.htm

7 www.redhat.com/about/where-is-open-source/activity

The Human Freedom Index⁸

This index was developed for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and published in 1991 in the Human Development Report. The index was designed by examining UN conventions and international treaties, and distilling 40 indicators for assessing freedom. These include relevant indicators such as the right to teach ideas and receive information; freedom from such things as compulsory organisational membership, compulsory religion or state ideology in schools, and the monitoring of postal mail and telecommunications; and the independence of the media (i.e., newspapers, publishing, and radio and television). This index is interesting as it serves not only as an instrument for measuring freedom, but also provides an overview of rights and freedoms that are part of international treaties.

Press Freedom Index⁹

Reporters Without Borders compiles and publishes an annual ranking of countries based upon the organisation’s assessment of their press freedom records. This is done by surveys with questions about direct attacks on journalists and the media as well as other indirect sources of pressure against the free press. Although it does not take into account the quality of the press, it does provide a useful clue as to the environment in which an important source of information is produced. Although the press will also be part of information provisioning via the internet, it is a specifically important source of information in those areas where people might not be able to access online sources.

Freedom in the World¹⁰

Freedom House produces a comparative assessment of global political rights and civil liberties in its Freedom in the World report. This has been published annually since 1972 and covers 193 countries. The report uses indicators to report on political rights and civil liberties. The indicators used to determine civil liberties, particularly freedom of expression and belief, are most relevant to this discussion as they measure the presence of free and independent media; freedom for religious institutions and communities to practise their faith and express themselves in public and private; academic freedom and the extent to which an educational system is free of extensive political indoctrination; and whether there are open civil society discussions. The indicators are ratings that are provided by analysts and senior-level academic advisors.

8 UNDP (1991) *Human Development Report 1991*. hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr1991/chapters

9 www.rsf.org/en-classement794-2008.html

10 www.freedomhouse.org

The Boston Indicators Project¹¹

This project reports on change in ten sectors: civic vitality, cultural life and the arts, the economy, education, the environment, health, housing, public safety, technology, and transportation. It aims to “democratize access to information, foster informed public discourse and track progress on shared civic goals.”¹² In this project a number of indicators are available that are relevant for access to information, including those that measure access to information and workforce skills, several education indicators, and indicators regarding access to and use of technology. The data are drawn from public agencies, civic institutions, think tanks and community-based organisations. The data are geared towards a very specific geographic area, but can provide inspiration for applying similar methodologies to other areas.

World Values Survey¹³

The World Values Survey (WVS) is a global network of social scientists who have surveyed the basic values and beliefs of the publics of more than 80 societies, on all six inhabited continents. This survey focuses on people and their values. Although there is no data describing actual access to information, this indicator does provide interesting insights into the environment in which access to information takes place and the attitude of people towards sources of information (and their receptiveness to different sources of information). For example, the participation of people in societal organisations is measured as well as confidence in the education system, press and media. Although not specifically aimed at online information, it has added value in terms of identifying the receptiveness of citizens to information online or offline.

A piece of the puzzle

Overall, each index on its own provides partial insight regarding the freedom to access and use online content as a democratic and human right in the countries covered. In general, most indices have indicators dealing with access to and use of information and content. Although the indices do not specifically address the right to share and transfer content, indicators such as freedom of expression and the freedom and availability of the press do indirectly provide insight into these factors. Some indices contain information regarding IP enforcement. However, in order to create a full and detailed view including all human rights concerns, the indices would need to be combined.

Currently, one of the most extensive rankings covering a broad area of topics is the NRI. Although it is geared towards ICT development, it does cover a broad range of topics that are relevant to accessing online information; besides the availability and use of technology it includes the environment (freedom of the press, accessibility of digital content, IP protection and education enrolment), quality of education (and thereby access to educational material), and access to public information (e-government and e-inclusion). The downside to the indicators used is that they do not take into account topics such as open standards and open data. (These topics are to some extent covered by the Open Source Index). With the exception of freedom of the press, the NRI ranking also does not include any indicators assessing the environment in terms of open culture and society. For describing the latter, other rankings provide better indicators. In particular, the Freedom in the World project provides a good assessment of political rights and civil liberties. In doing so, it takes into account freedom of expression in terms of, for example, government influence on media (via censorship or indirect measures), self-censorship, the financial dependence of media on public funds, and the censorship of cultural expression (such as art or literature). Moreover, it takes into account the degree of freedom in the educational system. A downside to these indicators is that they are subjective: countries are rated by analysts and experts. This does, nevertheless, raise the question of how far quantitative data can go in measuring access to online information, particularly when it comes to more qualitative criteria such as the quality, accuracy, trustworthiness or value of the content to communities, citizens or users generally.

The rankings and surveys that have been discussed cover a broad range of indicators on the four levels of access to information outlined at the beginning of this report. They range from hard data on access to technologies and the number of users of specific services, to more qualitative assessments by experts or citizens. However, having indicators is one thing, but actually producing data is another. Hard, up-to-date data might be difficult to come by in some countries and methodologies to collect data might differ. Moreover, one should be aware that specific indicators can be rendered obsolete by new social, economic or technological developments. For example, the importance of the internet or mobile phones, and the growing importance of social computing (peer-to-peer), should be taken into account as alternatives to traditional (producer-consumer) sources of information. ■

11 www.bostonindicators.org

12 www.bostonindicators.org/IndicatorsProject/Content.aspx?id=602

13 www.worldvaluessurvey.org

GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH (GISWatch) 2009 is the third in a series of yearly reports critically covering the state of the information society *from the perspectives of civil society organisations across the world.*

GISWatch has three interrelated goals:

- **Surveying** the state of the field of information and communications technology (ICT) policy at the local and global levels
- **Encouraging** critical debate
- **Strengthening** networking and advocacy for a just, inclusive information society.

Each year the report focuses on a particular theme. **GISWatch 2009** focuses on *access to online information and knowledge – advancing human rights and democracy*. It includes several thematic reports dealing with key issues in the field, as well as an institutional overview and a reflection on indicators that track access to information and knowledge. There is also an innovative section on visual mapping of global rights and political crises.

In addition, 48 country reports analyse the status of access to online information and knowledge in countries as diverse as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mexico, Switzerland and Kazakhstan, while six regional overviews offer a bird's eye perspective on regional trends.

GISWatch is a joint initiative of the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) and the Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (Hivos).

GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH

2009 Report

www.GISWatch.org

