Template – Session Outcome Document

(*2 pages max*)

Summary of Session: The importance of meaningful access to information

International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions

16 March 2023, 16:00

https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2023/Agenda/Session/380

Key Issues discussed (5- 8 bullet points)

- Progress towards achieving universal connectivity has not been matched by progress in other areas which are relevant for achieving meaningful access to information, in particular gender equality, skills, and broader freedoms and rights, as demonstrated by the Development and Access to Information Regional Dashboards 2023

- While the internet has huge potential to support the open government agenda, this has not yet been realised on the ground.

- In response, we need both more proactive disclosure and investment in open government by governments, but also investment in the infrastructure by which people can access this data, and the awareness, skills and confidence to use it

- Similarly, the internet has enabled open access and open science, as well as offering valuable tools for search. However, we have not yet managed to lift copyright-related barriers, or ensure possibilities to work across underlying data.

- Strategies for making a reality of open science, in line with the UNESCO Recommendation, are needed, including support for open access infrastructures as digital public goods

- Even where people are connected, the commercial logic of the internet and focus on more 'profitable' groups and uses risks leading many excluded.

- There needs to be space and support for public/community interest internet uses, supported by the values of libraries.

Towards WSIS+20 and WSIS beyond 2025, please share your views on the emerging trends, challenges, achievements, and opportunities in the implementation of the WSIS Action Lines to date (5-8 bullets)

- Access to information continues to be an essential area of focus, given how closely this is intertwined with the potential of the internet to deliver positive change. However, a focus on purely technical or sectoral concerns means that we do not think sufficiently in the round about what is needed to ensure that everyone has the practical possibility, skills, knowledge, rights and confidence to make the most of it.

- We have achieved much (although have much to do) on connectivity, but investments in this will be under-realised unless we accompany them with similar work to promote full an equal access. In all areas touched on by the WSIS Action Lines, we need to think about what reforms are needed in order to make sure that the internet delivers properly by enabling meaningful access to information (C3, but also C6, C7 and C8). It is not enough to look only at more 'conventional' digital/internet regulatory tools, but rather to think about the interaction between different types of action, in a similar way as has been done in looking at interlinkages between the SDGs.

- Following on from this, one area of focus should be on how we can ensure that an 'offer' (both of connectivity, and of content online, such as open government data and information) can meet a 'demand' from citizens. We would argue that a well-supported library sector can play a major role, acting as a portal to such information, including through skills provision and raising awareness of opportunities.

- Another area would be to encourage an approach to scientific information that prioritises access, putting an end to the default position where research is paywalled in order to cover costs of publication and dissemination, as well as developing means of ensuring that the underlying data or annotations in publications can also be shared, in order to deliver on truly open science.

- An additional example is in the way in which minority groups can find themselves on the internet, and the threat posed to this by models that place profitability first and foremost. While it is of course welcome that the internet supports and drives economic growth, this should still leave space for indigenous communities, for example, to develop and share their own content and ideas. The non-profit/community interest approach taken by libraries to information management could provide an inspiration here.

- Particularly precious is the internet's ability to be the core infrastructure for a genuine knowledge commons, building on the very positive emphasis on the public domain in the original action lines (C3). We need to think about overall internet governance in terms of how to build a space where information can be created, shared and applied in the public interest,

and with respect for the needs of individuals and communities. There is an opportunity to think hard about how we can build such a public domain/knowledge commons.

Tangible outcomes (such as key achievements, announcements, launches, agreements, and commitments (3-5 bullet points)

- The session provided the opportunity for the first public presentation of data from the Development and Access to Information Regional Dashboards, which will be further promoted in subsequent SDG-related events this year.

- The session is a first step in efforts to update IFLA's own Internet Manifesto in order to develop a positive vision of the internet libraries want and can help to build. This process will run over the coming.

- IFLA will continue to seek out examples that build understanding of how the 'access gap' is holding back progress in the different areas covered by the WSIS Action Points, in order to provide further input into any future review.

Actionable plan (2-5 points)

- IFLA will engage the global library community in a process of updating the IFLA Internet Manifesto, with a view to deriving both helpful recommendations for any future review

- IFLA will work with the global library community to assess where there are 'access gaps' – i.e. where despite advances in connectivity, people are not able to access the information they need for development

- The Technology and Social Change Group will prepare briefings and publications allowing for more extensive engagement with the Development and Access to Information Regional Dashboards, in order to facilitate work with these

Suggestions for thematic aspects that might be included in the WSIS Forum 2024 (WSIS+20 Forum High-Level Event) (one paragraph)

- A cross-cutting look from the perspective of different sectors (in particular those highlighted in the WSIS Action Lines and linked to the SDGs) of how well the internet is doing in delivering on progress in these areas. We would, of course, also suggest

that if post offices are included in high-level segments, it would be valuable also to bring in a library perspective, given their deep and extensive global role in supporting inclusive and meaningful internet access and use.