

Global Online Access to Law (GOAL) to Further Sustainable Development

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Abstract:

This paper presents Global Online Access to Law (GOAL), a multi-stakeholder law initiative, proposed for inclusion in [Research4Life](#). The GOAL programme would provide free or very low cost online access to academic legal content to governmental, research and not-for-profit institutions in developing countries. The programme is currently in the initial phase where partnerships with publishers, academic institutions and the UN are being explored.

The fulfillment of basic rights is essential for advancing peace and security, and, in their own right, are often a prerequisite for economic development enabling people to enjoy their full rights as citizens in society. By providing affordable access to a wide range of law materials and subsequent tailormade trainings, the envisioned programme would strengthen a crucial area that is essential to further the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly the ones relating to Access to Information and Access to Justice that are currently being discussed for inclusion by the UN working groups.

Particular attention is being paid to the inclusion of key areas, such as international and human rights law that can help strengthen legal frameworks and institutions in developing countries and further the rule of law through promoting knowledge exchange and access to information.

GOAL is in dialogue with publishers and academic institutions seeking support in staffing, resources and the implementation of trainings as part of the Research4Life broader development scope.

Keywords: sustainable development, international law, online access, Research4Life, rule of law, access to information, access to justice

“At his best, man is the noblest of all animals; separated from law and justice he is the worst.” – Aristotle –

1. Introduction

This paper sets out an initiative that is currently being developed to provide online access to law research. Coupled with training and capacity building the aim is to further access to justice by helping realize basic rights, promote the rule of law through the strengthening of legal frameworks, and ultimately contribute to sustainable development. The development of the programme, which has as a working title: Global Online Access to Law (GOAL) is proposed as part of the unique, larger umbrella partnership network of Research4Life.

2. Research4Life

[Research4Life](#) is a public-private partnership that aims to improve the quality of research conducted in developing countries. It does so by offering affordable online access to research publications through thematic programmes that are hosted by and linked to UN agencies. In 2001, the first programme, Research in Health (HINARI) was launched at the World Health Organisation (WHO) in Geneva. Since then three other programmes have been added: Research in Agriculture (AGORA) hosted by the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), Research in the Environment (OARE) by the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) and Research for Development and Innovation (ARDI) led by the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO). Each programme seeks to contribute to the realization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as part of the larger development framework. Other partners involved are: the International Association of Technical and Medical Publishers (STM), 200 publishers, Cornell University, Yale University, and several technical partners including Microsoft.

The overarching goals of the programmes help advance higher education, inform public policy decisions, and equip researchers and professionals at more than 7,800 university, research, and policy institutions to contribute to development in more than 100 developing countries. The scientific literature is provided by publishers, scholarly societies, libraries and other content providers. They form an active part of the partnership and make their resources, over 45,000, available at no charge. The majority of these publications are high-quality subscription-based content (valuing over \$8million) and there is an increasing number of open access publications included in the offering. In addition, further contributions are in kind, whereby members actively take part in working groups that help run the programmes in areas of outreach, training, funding, and technical matters.

Developing countries are given access via institutions based on carefully selected eligibility criteria. Access is only the starting point. Research4Life and its partners actively conduct outreach to academics, students, and government personnel by providing training in information literacy skills, and promoting local authorship to help researchers in developing countries find solutions to critical development issues in their own countries.

A recent publication on the impact of Research4Life, [*Unsung Heroes: Stories from the Library*](#), attests to what has been achieved so far. One of last year's prize winners of the Unsung Heroes Award, Onan Mulumba, Agricultural Librarian at Makerere University in Uganda, said in his response: "Research4Life has enabled Makerere to have an increased number of publications, which has increased its visibility on the web and the rankings in Africa and worldwide." [1]

Research4Life is committed to extend its partnerships and outreach. Part of this strategy is to explore opportunities for new programmes that fit the objectives as formulated in the [*Beyond*](#)

[the 2015 Horizon](#) strategic plan.[2] The GOAL initiative meets these criteria and is therefore currently under review for inclusion with interested key stakeholders.

3. Global Online Access to Law (GOAL)

GOAL would be the premier programme in Law providing affordable online access to governmental, research and not-for-profit institutions in developing countries. Particular attention will be paid to the inclusion of key areas, such as international and human rights law. These can help strengthen legal frameworks and institutions, and further the rule of law through promoting knowledge exchange, access to information, and access to justice. The programme would seek to fulfill the following goals:

Goal One: Access to Information

Provide free or low cost access to the most up-to-date information in law to 2000+ eligible academic institutions in 100+ developing countries.

Access to information first and foremost targets the academic institutions and the researchers affiliated with them, but also equips civil society, through non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations (CBOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs), to inform citizens and assist them in effecting their basic rights. Equally, government officials and policy makers are provided informed means to strengthen the legal framework at the institutional and national level, effecting the right to information (R2I) critical to and fundamental for any democratic knowledge-based society.

Goal Two: Knowledge Exchange

Bridge the information gap between developed and developing countries as set out in goal one, encouraging research and publication whereby authors actively engage in international scholarly communication.

Goal Three: Legal Empowerment through Advocacy and Training

Strengthen legal frameworks and advance peace and security in developing countries. When academics, policy makers and civil society are equipped with a thorough legal understanding and tools to put these to use for the good of society and its citizens, this will advance the rule of law, peace and strengthen justice and access to justice.

GOAL would provide trainings and raise awareness with policy-makers, NGO staff, paralegals and academics on how to best use the resources in their specific subject areas. Investing in legal empowerment is investing in social capital. International NGOs, such as [Namati](#) and [BRAC](#), and other members of the [Global Legal Empowerment Network](#), are good examples of how knowledge of law and access to information can help realise the fulfillment of basic rights that ultimately contribute to a country's economic and social development. Should national NGOs have access to a resource, such as GOAL, this could strengthen their work. Naturally, development is more than economic growth: it is the realization of individual rights and the human potential that can be realised in this way.

Goal Four: Sustainable Development

Knowledge consumed and gained should ultimately lead to sustainable development whereby researchers and policy makers find solutions to critical development issues and challenges in their own countries. A knowledge-based society is critical for development, and research and its application for society are crucial in this process.

4. Sustainable Development Goals

The fulfillment of basic rights is essential for advancing peace and security, and, in their own right, basic rights are often a prerequisite for economic development. They enable people to enjoy their full rights as citizens in society. Currently more than four billion people, around the world, are living outside the protection of the law. [4]

The UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that have guided the development agenda for the last decade are expiring in 2015. As part of the post-2015 development agenda a new development framework is currently being discussed. Justice and Access to Information were so far lacking from the goals and are now being discussed for inclusion in proposed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which would run up to 2030.

The envisioned GOAL programme would help strengthen these crucial goals and is therefore very timely. Not only by providing access to critical resources in International and Human Rights Law, but moreover through capacity building trainings on how these resources can be used for research and legal empowerment at institutions in developing countries.

Access to Information

IFLA, together with several other organisations, has taken a lead to further the inclusion of Access to Information as an SDG. The [Lyon Declaration on Access to Information and Development](#) will be launched on Monday 18 August at the IFLA conference in Lyon in support of this.[3] The declaration contains a strong call to extend the benefits of ICT for everyone. Providing online access to legal resources, through the GOAL initiative would contribute to this.

Access to Justice

Namati and the Open Society Foundations have taken a lead in calling for justice to be made central to the development agenda. They launched the campaign [Justice 2015](#), and address the UN General Assembly in an [open letter](#): [4,5]

“The open letter urges member states to integrate five priorities into the new global development agenda: (1) access to information; (2) access to legal identity; (3) secure rights to land and property; (4) legal participation in basic service delivery; and (5) access to quality legal services. These priorities will help people around the world to take part in the decisions – and demand accountability from the institutions – that affect their lives. They grew out of a month-long dialogue with members of the [Global Legal Empowerment Network](#).”[4]

Legal empowerment means giving all people the power to understand and use the law to secure justice and meet basic needs. Again the GOAL initiative would contribute to its realization by providing access to legal resources coupled with training and capacity building in line with the mission of the UN agency who would host the programme.

5. Multi-stakeholders

GOAL is in dialogue with publishers and academic institutions seeking support in staffing, resources and the implementation of trainings as part of the Research4Life’s broader development scope. Discussions are currently taking place with a UN agency to seek commitment for the hosting of such a programme. Should you, your library or organization, like to get involved, please contact: info@research4life.org.

6. Conclusion

This theme's sessions is 'Access to law at the digital cross roads: Innovative solutions to complex challenges'. As outlined in my paper the challenges in development relating to law, justice and access to information are complex, but many issues overlap and can be addressed through a multi-stakeholder approach that brings together unique partners that are united in a common goal. Research4Life embodies such a partnership and is therefore well-placed to carry out the GOAL programme with the support of a designated and dedicated UN agency. It would greatly contribute to an area that the other four programmes do not cover and would really be unique and timely given the post-2015 development agenda that is currently being discussed.

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