

Global Online Access to Legal Information (GOALI) – A New Legal Training Resource for Developing Countries

Richelle Van Snellenberg

Unit Head, ILO Library, International Labour Organization, Geneva, Switzerland

Edit Horváth

User and Outreach Officer, ILO Library, International Labour Organization, Geneva, Switzerland



Copyright © 2017 by Richelle Van Snellenberg, Edit Horváth. This work is made available under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

Abstract:

This paper presents a new programme called Global Online Access to Legal Information (GOALI) to be launched in February 2018 as the newest member of the Research4Life programme. The objective of GOALI is to provide free or very low cost online access to legal information and academic research to governments, universities and non-profit institutions in developing countries to promote access to justice and the rule of law. We look at the challenges in accessing and using legal information in the developing world and present GOALI as a tool that in conjunction with the Research4Life programme infrastructure, can address some of these challenges. Finally, we will point out how GOALI will support the promotion of Sustainable Development Goal 16 on promoting peace and inclusive societies.

Keywords: access to information, legal information, Sustainable Development Goals, developing countries

[Research4Life](#) will launch a new programme, Global Online Access to Legal Information (GOALI) in early 2018, with the aim of providing free or low cost online access to legal research in more than 115 low- and middle-income countries. The programme is managed by the [International Labour Organization](#) (ILO), a UN specialized agency promoting social justice and internationally recognized human and labour rights, in partnership with Cornell Law School Library and Yale University Library. GOALI will be the newest member of Research4Life, a long-time successful public-private partnership programme between UN agencies, publishers and academic institutions.

1 BRIDGING THE KNOWLEDGE GAP

The main objectives of the GOALI programme and Research4Life partnership are the same: reduce the knowledge gap in academic research between industrialized countries and the developing world. The new programme will empower people in governments, universities and not-for-profit institutions in participating countries by giving them access to critical legal research content provided by the world's leading academic publishers. It will contribute to the better education and training of new legal professionals.

1.1 Challenges to legal research in developing countries

Over the past twenty years, important advances have been made in the expansion of online access to legal information in many countries. Industrialized countries began to make available legislation in the 1990s. Other jurisdictions quickly followed suit. This was furthered by the inclusion of court decisions and case law. Free access to some legal information is now generally expected by the public in most countries.¹

Before the widespread adoption of the internet, legal information was often published through commercial channels. This was the case not only for commentary, but also for legislation. Today however, Freedom of Information acts in many countries make it increasingly important for governments to ensure reliable and authoritative access to essential legal materials. This generally refers to primary sources of law. The Free Access to Law Movement, in its Montreal Declaration makes explicit the importance of access to legal information: "Public legal information from all countries and international institutions is part of the common heritage of humanity. Maximising access to this information promotes justice and the rule of law."²

Commercial databases, national portals and institutional repositories that group legal resources together for ease of access have steadily risen in importance, usability and stability. In the 2000s, access to many resources was often unreliable, with portals not always maintained and links changing unpredictably. It was difficult to know whether the content was up-to-date and authoritative.

¹ (Greenleaf, Mowbray, & Chung, 2013)

² ("Free Access to Law Movement (FALM)," n.d.)

Despite developments in recent years in regional portals and repositories, in the international context the researcher needs to be able to navigate across different resources and systems to find comparable information from various countries. There is no comprehensive source of legal resources that covers all types of legal information.³

At national and regional levels initiatives exist to bring together primary sources in one place, such as the [African Law Library](#), [CanLII](#), [AustLII](#), [PacLII](#) for Canada, Australia and Pacific Island countries respectively. Most of the Legal Information Institutes are from common law countries, where English is the major language of the legal system. They are collaborating together in [World Legal Information Institute](#), providing free access through a mainly English-language interface to worldwide law following the Free Access to Law Movement.⁴ The commercial database, [Legis Palop](#) for Portuguese-speaking countries is an example of a regional resource bringing access to information from countries that otherwise are not well represented online. Other regional resources include SoyuzPravoInform, also known as [Spinform](#), which contains national legislation from members of the Commonwealth of Independent States, with text in Russian and [Eastlaws](#) for texts from the Arabic-speaking world. These initiatives provide valuable collections of legal resources to the researcher looking to review legislation across countries.

An important barrier to information access across countries and regions is language. As with the examples above, most legislation is produced in the official languages of the country. While some usually unofficial translations exist, it is generally necessary to be able to read the original language in order to fully understand the law.

While access to texts of national legislation, court decisions, regulations and codes may be freely available online in many countries, a large and important collection of sources generally remains accessible through license. Secondary legal materials are mostly available by way of commercial publishers. Some law journals are choosing to publish in open access repositories, however academics and professionals need to count on their respective libraries to purchase access, which is prohibitive to many institutions in the developing world.

In addition to the restrictions to access commercial journals, the user of legal information may require special knowledge in order to understand how to identify and retrieve useful information. While a document may be accessible on the web for all to download, it may not be usable by the average citizen without some legal education. Significant barriers to information exist, notably lack of knowledge of legal systems, the formal language and poor level of education overall prevent people from benefiting from free access to legal information.⁵

³ (Chung, Greenleaf, & Mowbray, 2016)

⁴ ("Free Access to Law Movement (FALM)," n.d.)

⁵ (Anderson, 1999)

2 ADDED VALUE OF GOALI FOR END-USERS

The GOALI programme will bring together resources from both commercial and free access platforms to serve users in the countries that most need information. The convenience of having resources grouped together will allow users to discover resources that they might otherwise miss. Inclusion of high-quality academic content from commercial publishers will deliver valuable tools to professors, researchers and practicing professionals to increase their knowledge.

A critical factor in the success of the Research4Life programmes is that the partners understand the importance of training and the effective promotion of services. The partners are committed to providing long-term training to librarians and information specialists on how to locate, use or manage online information resources. As librarians explain in their stories in several case studies or in videos, they continue to give training to university or research staff on online research and information literacy. Capacity building workshops have helped make the difference between access to information and usage. “The user experience survey clearly shows that 87% of respondents who participated in training reported success in accessing full-text articles, whereas only 51% among self-taught respondents reported success.”⁶

2.1 Target groups: traditional and new audiences

Existing Research4Life beneficiaries are governments, universities, research institutions and other publicly funded not-for-profit organizations in most low and middle income countries based on the [eligibility criteria](#). The inclusion of GOALI will bring new participation from ministries of labour, social security and justice as well as from national courts or public defenders. The ILO, as a tripartite agency bringing together governments, employers and workers representatives, will also involve secretariats of national federations of employers’ and workers’ organizations. These groups are key actors in the fight for social justice.

2.2 What’s available?

Content will be provided by the world’s leading academic publishers and learned societies, mainly those who are already long-term contributors to Research4Life programmes, but other major legal publishers are also committed to the project. GOALI will include peer-reviewed international scientific journals, ebooks, reports and grey literature and online resources (databases, reference works, bibliographies, dictionaries) in subject areas such as private and public international law, human rights law, humanitarian law, labour law, environmental law, criminal law, law of the sea, treaty law and practice, and other areas of international importance.

⁶ (Research4Life, 2015, p. 17)

3 GOALI PARTNERS

GOALI was set up as a multi-stakeholder law initiative of publishers and academic institutions and proposed for inclusion in Research4Life in 2014.⁷ The GOALI team includes [Cornell University Law Library](#) and the [Lillian Goldman Law Library](#) at Yale University working together with publishers, and other Research4Life partners. The International Labour Organization and the [International Training Centre of the ILO](#) joined the programme in 2016 with the main objective to support the development of strong institutions by giving them access to legal research and thus furthering the rule of law.

In the broader development framework, Research4Life has been active since 2002 with partners: WHO, FAO, UNEP, WIPO, Cornell and Yale Universities, the International Association of Scientific, Technical & Medical Publishers with up to 185 international scientific publishers and technology partners. According to latest statistics available on the [Research4Life website](#), since 2002 the four programmes, focusing on research in health (Hinari), agriculture (AGORA), the environment (OARE) and on innovation (ARDI), “have provided researchers at more than 8,200 institutions in more than 115 low- and middle-income countries with free or low-cost online access to up to 77,000 leading journals and books.”⁸

While there are similar programmes established with the objective to reduce the scientific knowledge gap between industrialized countries and the developing world, Research4Life is one of the biggest partnerships with this purpose considering either the available content or the number of beneficiary countries (100+).

3.1 How does Research4Life work?

Member UN agencies mainly focus on partnership engagement, training, outreach and technical innovation. More precisely, the role of the UN agencies in Research4Life is to host the programme, provide technical background and support, as well as to ensure that non-profit, academic or research institutions with the highest possible impact and outreach to researchers from low or middle income countries have access to the database. The International Labour Organization, the newest member of this partnership will contribute its expertise in legal research and knowledge management.

The world’s largest academic publishers not only contribute peer-reviewed, high-quality academic resources through extensive databases, but some of them also take the lead in communication. Research4Life communication tools and activities include promotional videos, posters, banners, brochures and competitions demonstrating how the programme can make a real difference to peoples’ lives as well as regular outreach to international and local journalists, end-users and librarians. Yale University Library mainly provide bibliographic and content selection expertise, while Cornell University is engaged in capacity building and end-user training.

⁷ (Kanis, 2014)

⁸ (Research4Life, 2017)

3.2 What are the benefits of a partnership?

The advantage for a new initiative of joining a well-established partnership is obvious. Creating a database from scratch with the ambitious objective of providing developing countries with affordable access to legal research online would be very expensive and labour intensive, if not impossible. Therefore GOALI will take advantage of the portal developed for use by other Research4Life programmes, thus reducing the cost of database creation.

Registration for GOALI will be made through the common registration and authentication system based on the Research4Life programme eligibility criteria.

GOALI will also benefit from the new “programme agnostic” approach soon to be rolled out by Research4Life in 2017. In order to improve the end-user experience, once an institute has registered for one Research4Life programme, users at that institution will have access to all the programmes. This will not only deliver much more content to each institution, it will save the end-user who wants to consult more than one programme at a time by not requiring them to sign in and out of each portal separately. Finally, those who have already gained some expertise in other programmes will find the GOALI interface familiar.

3.3 Training and outreach

GOALI users will have access to a wide range of training tools and products developed by Research4Life partners and will join a community of partners, trainers, librarians and end-users. Useful online training modules are already available on the [Research4Life Training Portal](#), not only on search functions, but also on reference management tools, resources on information literacy, like how to develop authorship skills or how to read and write scientific papers. Marketing strategies and plans to educate and inform users about the full potential of Research4Life and its resources were also developed for participating libraries and institutions. Further training courses are regularly organized online (webinars) or on-site through partners, like [Librarians without Borders \(Medical Library Association\)](#) and the [Information Training and Research Centre for Africa \(ITOCA\)](#). Clearly, Research4Life programmes have developed useful capacity building tools for participating librarians on how to offer valuable services for their clients. These existing training tools could be easily adapted to the new legal database, and training partners, like ITOCA will be approached to develop new courses about legal research to meet the needs of local researchers and other professionals.

The ILO also brings to the programme its network of labour law, labour administration, workers’ and employers’ specialists who will incorporate GOALI to their training agenda as part of their development cooperation activities. The International Training Centre of the ILO (ITCILO) is also part of the GOALI team and will offer GOALI as a potential tool to enhance their Digital Library services. GOALI resources will be inserted in the training resources and will be presented to participants in the courses of ITCILO and the Turin School of Development’s master’s degree programmes, both face-to-face and at a distance. In 2016, 11,450 participants from 187 countries or territories attended ITCILO courses at the Centre or

by distance learning, making this an excellent venue to share knowledge on all the Research4Life programmes.⁹

Research4Life has around 7,500 followers on Facebook and 1,800 followers on Twitter. Rather than requiring the set up of new social media channels, GOALI will be promoted on the existing communication channels and networks of Research4Life and the ILO. The ILO network of communication officers, information specialists, technical advisors and country offices in the developing world will be also involved in promotional activities.

While a wide range of online collaborative tools and platforms are available in industrialized countries, the digital divide between the North and the South is still prevalent. Partnerships will be actively sought with local stakeholders, NGOs, universities, and research communities, training institutions in the developing world to ensure the widest possible use of GOALI resources. Publishers producing legal content are most welcome to join the partnership. Opportunities to foster dialogue between local researchers in the South and further facilitate their participation in the global legal research and publication will be actively promoted.

3.4 Access to information promotes the Sustainable Development Goals

Although the ILO is concentrating its Sustainable Development Agenda (SDG) on indicator 8 on Decent Work for all, it is working on other the indicators in a cross cutting effort. In particular, [SDG 16 on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions](#) is at the heart of the ILO mandate to work with social partners to build effective labour institutions. The ILO Library, as part its commitment to providing access to information for ILO member States, decided to join Cornell and Yale university libraries in support of the Organization's work on the SDGs.

Several reports suggest that the lack of legal professionals is a long-standing problem in numerous developing countries.¹⁰ “In Malawi, murder trials were suspended in April this year because the legal-aid board couldn't afford defence lawyers; it has just nine of its own, and four of those are studying abroad.”¹¹ As the former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon stated in his report on the Sustainable Development Goals: “In Southern Asia, for instance, more than 2 out of 3 prisoners remained unsentenced in 2012-2014”¹², mainly due to the lack of available legal defenders. An OECD survey of legal professionals revealed that “Nearly 40 per cent of respondents had never heard of the major international instruments that make up the

⁹ (Hara, 2017)

¹⁰ (Himalayan Times, 2016)

¹¹ (Economist, 2016)

¹² (Report of the Secretary-General, 2016, p. 21)

international anticorruption regulatory framework, such as the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention and the UN Convention against Corruption.”¹³

We are convinced therefore that the better education of new legal professionals is a critical step in promoting equal access to justice for all. Beneficiary institutions with access to online legal resources and the skills to use them, will be able to more effectively participate in policy-making process, formulating and enforcing non-discriminatory policies in line with Goal 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals. Providing access to both comparative and international law will also help strengthen domestic legal frameworks and institutions in developing countries, and further the rule of law.

Libraries and information specialists have a key role to play in the promotion of sustainable development. As set out in the Lyon Declaration of 2014: “Increased access to information and knowledge, underpinned by universal literacy, is an essential pillar of sustainable development. Greater availability of quality information and data and the involvement of communities in its creation will provide a fuller, more transparent allocation of resources.”¹⁴ And while access to information is recognized as essential to sustainable development, libraries, archives and civil society organizations are committed to providing the training and skills necessary to help people understand and use the information they need.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the members of the GOALI programme in Research4Life for their support and suggestions that helped improve this paper: Liesbeth Kanis (Brill Publishers), Kimberly Parker (WHO), Daniel Dollar (Yale University Library), Teresa Miguel-Stearns (Lillian Goldman Law Library, Yale University), Femi Cadmus (Cornell University Law Library), Amy Emerson (Cornell University Law Library) and Minori Hara (International Training Centre of the ILO). We also thank Susana Cardoso from ILO Library for her feedback on the first draft.

¹³ (OECD, 2010, p. 6)

¹⁴ (International Federation of Library Associations, 2014)

References

- Anderson, M. R. (1999). Access to Justice and Legal Process: Making Legal Institutions Responsive to Poor People in LDCs. Retrieved June 6, 2017, from <http://www.ids.ac.uk/publication/access-to-justice-and-legal-process-making-legal-institutions-responsive-to-poor-people-in-ldcs>
- Chung, P., Greenleaf, G., & Mowbray, A. (2016). *Models for a Global System for Free Access to Legal Information: The WorldLII Approach* (SSRN Scholarly Paper No. ID 2893576). Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network. Retrieved from <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=2893576>
- Economist, T. (2016, October 22). Poor law; Justice in Africa. *The Economist; London*, 421(9012), 42.
- Free Access to Law Movement (FALM). (n.d.). Retrieved May 12, 2017, from <http://www.fatlm.org/members/current/>
- Greenleaf, G., Mowbray, A., & Chung, P. (2013). The Meaning of “Free Access to Legal Information”: A Twenty Year Evolution. *Journal of Open Access to Law*, 1(1). Retrieved from <https://ojs.law.cornell.edu/index.php/joal/article/view/11>
- Hara, M. (2017). *Internal Communication*. International Training Centre of the ILO.
- Himalayan Times, T. (2016, July 18). Lack of legal professionals hits justice delivery. *The Himalayan Times*. Retrieved from <https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/lack-legal-professionals-hits-justice-delivery/>
- International Federation of Library Associations, T. (2014). The Lyon Declaration. Retrieved June 6, 2017, from <http://www.lyondeclaration.org/>
- Kanis, L. (2014). Global Online Access to Law (GOAL) to Further Sustainable Development. Presented at the IFLA WLIC 2014, Lyon, France. Retrieved from <http://library.ifla.org/1045/>
- OECD. (2010). Corruption: New Survey of Legal Professionals on Awareness and Impact of Bribery and Corruption - OECD. Retrieved May 31, 2017, from <http://www.oecd.org/daf/anti-bribery/corruptionnewsurveyoflegalprofessionalsonawarenessandimpactofbriberyandcorruption.htm>
- Report of the Secretary-General. (2016). *Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals* (Economic and environmental questions: sustainable development No. E/2016/75*). New York: Economic and Social Council, United Nations. Retrieved from http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=E/2016/75
- Research4Life. (2015). Our Vision for 2020 and Beyond: Research4Life New Strategic Plan. Retrieved June 6, 2017, from <http://www.research4life.org/strategic-plan-beyond-2020/>
- Research4Life. (2017). About Research4Life. Retrieved June 13, 2017, from <http://www.research4life.org/about/>