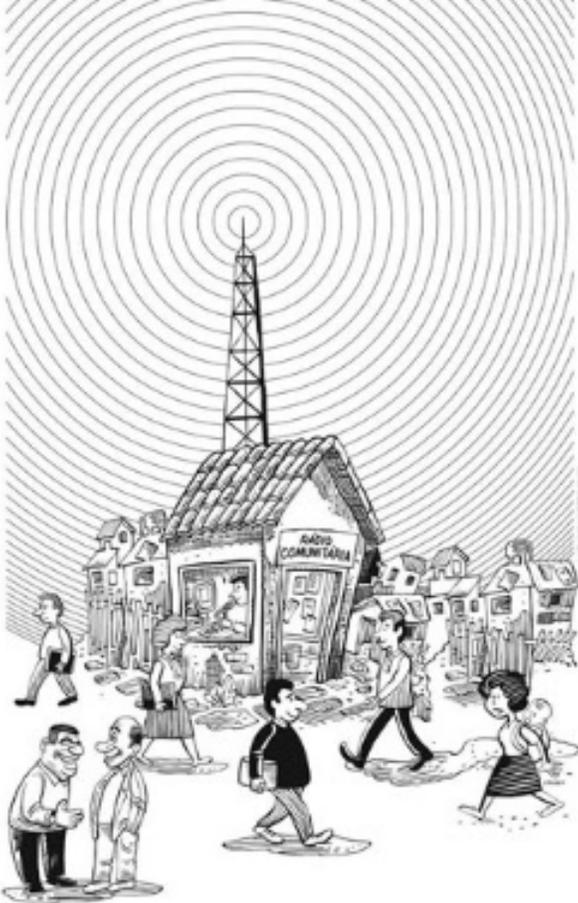


Addressing Communication and Information Poverty in the Context of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)



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2018

Summary

This document² examines the United Nation’s 2030 Agenda and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) from a communication rights perspective. Drawing on learnings from WACC’s in-person consultations with representatives of 92 grassroots and medium-sized civil society organizations and academic institutions from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America working on communication-related issues, this paper is intended to help guide communications rights-based advocacy and community development efforts in an international cooperation context framed by the SDGs.

This paper argues that a rights-based view of communication is central to the achievement of many of the SDGs, primarily because communication and information poverty is closely linked to many of the social and economic poverty issues addressed by the SDGs. The paper highlights areas of commonality between the SDGs and communication rights, particularly under SDGs 5, 9, 16, and 17. It presents a series of examples of ways in which organizations working from a communication rights perspective could align their work with the above-mentioned SDGs. The framework also highlights issues that, despite being central to social change from a communication rights perspective, are absent from Agenda 2030, such as the democratization of media systems, media literacy for the digital age, and addressing the communication and information needs of historically marginalized communities.

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Introduction

Millions of people on every continent lack access to communication platforms, are underrepresented or misrepresented in the media, have low levels of media literacy, have restricted access to relevant and accurate information and knowledge, are excluded from participation in decision-making processes, and live in contexts with limited media freedom. These issues can be encapsulated as **communication and information poverty**, a form of poverty that contributes to people's sense of powerlessness and inability to make themselves heard, one of the most prevalent manifestations of poverty according to a landmark 2000 World Bank study³. As such, *communication and information poverty is a critical dimension of poverty in all its forms*.

WACC and its partners around the world believe that addressing these types of communication and information issues is critical to achieving the vision of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)⁴. This is because these issues impede full participation in development processes, especially for the poorest and most marginalized people in society. This belief echoes the findings of a 2013 report published by the UN Development Group on the post-2015 development agenda, which found that people want to have a public voice in decisions concerning development and calls for "putting people — their rights, aspirations and opportunities — at the centre of development"⁵.

For example, it is difficult to imagine that universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services (SDG 3, Target 3.7) can be achieved unless women and girls have access to accurate knowledge about reproductive health and are able to participate in decision-making processes about healthcare priorities. Similarly, reducing corruption and bribery (SDG 16, Target 5) will be difficult to achieve unless journalists have the necessary freedom and protection to investigate and shed light on cases of bribery.

Unfortunately, tackling communication and information poverty is not always part of development agendas set by donor partners, international institutions, and national governments. Equitable access to communication and information, despite being the backbone of democratic societies, is often taken for granted by those who set development priorities. This can partly be attributed to the fact that communication and information issues are often less tangible than other development priorities, such as food security or access to life-saving medication. Nevertheless, information and communication considerations must be part of development agendas as they help enable the achievement of a range of other development objectives, and can enhance the long-term sustainability of some development outcomes, such as health-related behavioural change⁶.

The United Nations' 2030 Agenda does shed light on a number of communication and information issues, which is very encouraging. For example, SDG 5 highlights the importance of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) as tools for women's empowerment, while SDG 9 promotes universal internet access. ICTs are also mentioned in SDG 4 and SDG 17. SDG 16 calls attention to the importance of access to public information legislation and to the imperative of protecting journalists, trade unionists, and human rights defenders.

Despite this progress, we believe that greater integration of communication and information issues into the SDGs and its targets would have strengthened the vision of Agenda 2030. While it is clearly no longer possible to suggest changes to the SDGs, we believe that it is indeed possible to encourage the integration of communication and information issues into the implementation of programmes aimed at advancing a number of the Goals.

This document is the result of a process that involved face-to-face and online consultations in late 2016 and throughout 2017 with 92 of WACC’s partners and collaborators around the world (See Annex 1 for a list of participants in WACC consultations in Hong Kong, New York, and Costa Rica). It explores the relationship between communication and information issues and the 2030 Agenda. It also presents a series of recommendations for donor governments, international institutions, national governments, and other stakeholders to address communication and information poverty as part of development interventions guided by SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) and SDG 17 (Partnership for Goals), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). The recommendations listed in this document will help guide WACC’s award-winning⁷ programmatic work over the next few years.

Importantly, these recommendations also reflect the position that taking a rights-based approach to communication and information is the most ethical way to address the issues mentioned above. This is because of the existence of widely accepted rights frameworks around communication and information, such as the right to freedom of expression, the right to access to information, and linguistic rights, all of which draw on the principles of equality, accessibility, inclusion, and accountability.

Why Communication?

Communication between human beings is often taken for granted. Greek philosophers described people as “the animal that speaks”, which later became “the animal that thinks”⁸. Arguably, everything that is characteristic of people depends on language. Communication (as a portmanteau word for speech, writing, and now digital media) plays the most essential, though not the only, role in the development and maintenance of the human self, families, communities and nations. The need to communicate is intrinsic to human nature. In this regard, communication is pivotal for individual participation, for communities organizing for change, and for a healthy social fabric. It is precisely because communication is fundamental to human life that control of communication and information is strongly linked to the exercise of power in society.

Communication and Information Poverty

WACC believes that communication and information poverty, a form of poverty that goes hand-in-hand with economic and social poverty, needs to be addressed in order to achieve sustainable development. Communication and information are “essential conditions for development and affect every aspect of life. [Therefore], communication and information poverty, despite being only one dimension of poverty, affects all other dimensions”⁹. The process that led to the drafting of this document was guided by an understanding of communication and information poverty as arising from *structural deficits that prevent people from fully participating in decision-making processes about issues that affect their lives*.

Key Manifestations of Communication and Information Poverty

Lack of access to platforms meaningfully to raise concerns about issues that affect one’s life

Under/misrepresentation in media content

Low levels of media literacy

Limited access to relevant information, including public information

Exclusion from decision-making processes

Restrictions on freedom of association and assembly

Absence of a free, independent, inclusive, and pluralistic media sector

Communication and Development

The relationship between communication and development has taken many forms over the years, though the notion of communication and information poverty has not always been at the centre of this debate. Since the inception of international development as a global project in the 1950’s, development practitioners and researchers have highlighted the potential of communication in supporting development processes¹⁰. This led, over the years, to the emergence of a number of greatly varying practices within the field of communication for development, such as communication strategies for agricultural extension, technology transfer, behavioural change, and participatory communication¹¹. As a result, a plethora of labels have emerged to describe the field, such as communication for social change, development communication, development support communication, communication for development, participatory communication, media development, development media, social communication, and behavioural change communication^{12 13}.

Two main approaches have historically shaped the role of communication in development. On the one hand is an understanding of communication as “a linear process of information **transmission** that causes social change in terms of knowledge, attitudes and behaviours”. This understanding is typically connected to the view of development as modernization, which emphasizes the replication of Western paths to progress. An example would be early models of agricultural extension, which provided farmers

in the Global South with information about new farming practices often without taking into account the local context. The transmission approach generally tends to overlook issues such as local culture, local access to media, and farmers' ability to participate in decision-making, all of which are related to communication and information poverty.

On the other hand, there is the view that "communication is a complex *process* that is linked to culture, and that is connected to global and local economic, political, and ideological structures". This idea is conceptually linked to views of development as the empowerment of marginalized communities and challenging unequal power relationships¹⁴¹⁵. An example is the use of community-based theatre as a mechanism to generate debate, explore cultural identities, and build consensus around common problems. This approach tends to understand communication and information from a rights-based perspective, and addresses key communication and information poverty issues such as the existence of platforms for genuine participation, media literacy, and cultural and linguistic relevance.

The field has also been shaped by regional concepts of communication, with some regions of the world having a strong tradition in participatory dialogue-based communication and others having historically focused on media structures or on media content for development¹⁶.

Today, there is growing consensus that communication-based development interventions should abide by principles such as inclusion, locally driven development, gender equality, community empowerment, participation, and respect for human rights. There is also an increased recognition that all of the approaches to communication for development can contribute to processes of social change, depending on the local context, the issue at hand, and the appropriateness of tools used (mass media, community media, community dialogue, public art, etc.).

The notion of communication as a cyclical or two-way process of exchange that is embedded in culture is also a defining feature of interventions that view communication as one of the building blocks of sustainable development.

This changing understanding of communication reaffirms the idea that integrating communication and information issues into development is more about a holistic approach that addresses communication and information poverty than about merely simply providing people with information or access to communication technologies.

Some approaches to integrating communication into development processes include:

Communication for Social Change: "a process of public and private dialogue through which people define who they are, what they want, what they need and how they can act collectively to meet those needs and improve their lives"¹⁷;

Communication for Development: "a social process based on dialogue using a broad range of tools and methods. 'ComDev' [or C4D] is about seeking change at different levels including listening, building trust, sharing knowledge and skills, building policies, debating, and learning for sustained and meaningful change. It is not public relations or corporate communications"¹⁸;

A slightly different definition is: "Communication for Development goes beyond providing information: it involves understanding people, their beliefs and values, the social and cultural norms that shape their lives. It involves engaging communities and listening to adults and children as they identify problems, propose solutions and act upon them. Communication for development is a two-way process for sharing

ideas and knowledge using a range of communication tools and approaches that empower individuals and communities to take actions to improve their lives”¹⁹;

Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC): “the use of communication to change behaviours, including service utilization, by positively influencing knowledge, attitudes, and social norms”²⁰;

Media Development: “efforts to build media or ICTs infrastructures, media and communication policies, and journalists’ capacities... The aim is to consolidate good governance, free speech, political citizenship, and sustainable development”²¹. UNESCO’s Media Development Indicators are widely accepted as the main framework to assess media development²² ;

Communication rights and media-related advocacy: initiatives to modify or establish laws, policies and/or practices related to issues such as access to information, freedom of expression, media governance, or media democracy;

ICTs for Development: the use of digital information and communication technologies (ICTs) and “big data” to enable and to “fast forward”²³ progress on development. The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Action Lines²⁴ provide a comprehensive framework to guide this work.

It should be underlined that that these are only some approaches to integrating communication into development. Other approaches, such as “edu-communication”, “edutainment”, health communication, and social marketing are also important parts of the field.

A Rights-Based View of Communication

WACC and its partners believe that addressing communication and information poverty through development interventions should be done from a rights-based perspective. This is because, in addition to drawing on existing and widely accepted rights frameworks, a rights-based approach provides development practitioners with a common lens with which to view, understand and address communication and information issues.

The right to freedom of expression, enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights²⁵, is the starting point for taking a rights based approach to communication and information. “It is regarded as a central pillar of democracy, protecting the right to call our rulers to account, vital to preventing censorship, an indispensable condition of effective and free media”²⁶.

However, power among people in any given society both enables and limits access to information and communication, which may in some cases undermine freedom of expression. For example:

*A poor person seeking to highlight injustice in their lives and a powerful media mogul each have, before the law, precisely the same protection for their right to freely express their views. In practice, however, the former lacks a means to have her/his voice heard, while the latter can powerfully amplify her/his message and ensure it is widely heard.*²⁷

As a result, the right to freedom of expression is best guaranteed when promoted *alongside* a number of other rights. This is particularly important today, as communication ecosystems are becoming increasingly complex due to rapid technological change, different levels of access to platforms, multi-layered and often transnational media governance processes, growing dependence on digital technology, and the emergence of media as a key space to advance inclusion and social change.²⁸

Other rights that help “construct the environment in which freedom of expression may be fully consummated” include “a right to participate in one’s own culture and language, to enjoy the benefits of science, to information, to education, to participation in governance, to privacy, to peaceful assembly, to the protection of one’s reputation”²⁹ all of which are part of the International Bill of Rights.³⁰ Other crucial elements include diversity of media content and ownership, press freedom, diverse and independent media, and democratic access to media³¹. WACC has produced several freely accessible resources on a rights-based approach to communication, including a No-Nonsense Guide to Communication Rights³².

The following are some of the key rights already recognized in international human rights documents that help enable access to information, communication, and participation at all levels:

- Freedom of expression, including the right of the media to operate freely (Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) 18, 19, 21, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) 19);
- Access information from public and private sources that pertains to the public interest (UDHR 19, ICCPR 19);
- A diverse and plural media, in terms of sources, content, views and means of transmission (UDHR 19, ICCPR 19);
- Universal access to the media necessary to engage with the public sphere, including direct communication and a right to assembly (UDHR 19, ICCPR 19, 21, 22).
- The right to literacy and to a basic education (UDHR 26, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) 13).
- Affordable and equitable access to the means and media for knowledge-sharing (UDHR 19, 27, ICCPR 19, 27);
- Communicate in one’s mother tongue in key spheres such as politics and media (ICCPR 10f, 27); and
- Privacy of personal communication (ICCPR 17).³³

How Communication and Information Poverty Undermines the Vision of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Transforming our World: Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development is the United Nations framework for development between 2015 and 2030. It is a universal agenda, including both developed and developing countries, that seeks to balance economic growth, environmental sustainability, peace, and human development in order to achieve meaningful change. Agenda 2030 is grounded in human rights frameworks and reaffirms the outcomes of other global processes, such as the Declaration on the Right to Development, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, the Beijing Platform for Action, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, among others.

Agenda 2030 sets 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are “integrated and indivisible, global in nature and universally applicable, taking into account different national realities, capacities and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities”. Each Goal contains several Targets in order to guide implementation, though these targets remain “aspirational and global”³⁴.

While the implementation of the SDGs is the responsibility of national governments, Agenda 2030 envisions a Global Partnership between governments, civil society, the private sector, UN agencies, and other stakeholders in order to mobilize the resources and knowledge needed to implement the vision of Agenda 2030.



Image Credit: United Nations

WACC and its partners maintain that the vision of Agenda 2030 cannot be fully realised unless communication and information ecosystems enable people to participate in decision-making related to sustainable development. During the consultation process that led to the drafting of this document, WACC and its partners identified SDGs 5 (Gender Equality), 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), and 17 (Partnership for the Goals) as the SDGs where the intersection with communication and information poverty is most evident. Our thinking and recommendations around these SDGs are explored in the sections below.

SDG 5- Gender Equality

Agenda 2030 recognizes the importance of addressing gender inequality as a central component of achieving sustainable development. Goal 5 seeks to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls; its 9 Targets and 14 indicators address critical gender issues such as discrimination against women and girls, violence against women and girls, harmful practices such as early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation(FGM), women’s unpaid work, women’s access to economic resources, and access to sexual and reproductive health, among others³⁵.

Gender inequality is a key dimension of Communication and Information Poverty because gender issues affect how women and girls are represented in the media, have access to media platforms, and gain information and knowledge. Gender inequality also undermines the ability of women and girls to exercise their right to freedom of expression, which in turn prevents them from fully participating in decision-making processes about matters that affect their lives. In this sense, Communication and Information Poverty perpetuates gender inequality in a broader sense and undermines sustainable development.

Four targets in particular under Goal 5 highlight the relationship between communication and information poverty and gender equality. The first is *Target 5.1. End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere*. As WACC’s own research has shown³⁶, women are under and misrepresented in media content, a form of discrimination that exacerbates, perpetuates, and normalizes other forms of discrimination against women and girls.

The second target under Goal 5 is *Target 5.2. Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public sphere, including trafficking and other types of exploitation*. Many women and girls around the world face violence when exercising their right to freedom of expression. This is particularly the case for women journalists, as many face gender-based violence at work according to a 2017 survey from the International Federation of Journalists³⁷.

The third target under Goal 5 is *Target 5.5: Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life*. The link to communication and information issues is evident as women need to have access to communication platforms and to relevant information in order to enjoy full and effective participation. The reference to equal opportunities for leadership, also reflected in indicator 5.5.2, is also important as it reinforces the need to promote women’s leadership within the media sector.

The fourth target under goal 5 is *Target 5.B: Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women*. As mentioned earlier, one of the key manifestations of communication and information poverty is limited access to communication platforms and resources. Having greater access to a mobile phone, as Indicator 5.B.1 for this Target states, would certainly help address a number of communication and information needs for many women.

Working towards the achievement of these targets is critical to helping address communication and information poverty as experienced by women and girls. Nevertheless, as the 2015 Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) report argues, there is significant work to be done to promote gender equality in the media and communication. Despite considerable effort by activists, allies in the media, media training institutions and others, achieving gender equality in and through the media remains a formidable task. The GMMP’s statistical evidence points to a loss of traction in narrowing media gender disparities over the past decade and regression on some indicators³⁸.

At the same time, public awareness about the relationship between communication, gender, and development has grown in recent years, as have the number of initiatives by UN agencies, stakeholder networks, and civil society organizations. For example, the UNESCO-led Global Alliance for Media and Gender (GAMAG) – of which WACC is currently serving as General Secretariat – was founded in 2013 to accelerate the implementation of recommendations on “Women and the Media” contained in “Section J” of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. Similarly, in order to help advance these objectives, in 2016 UN Women launched the Step It Up for Gender Equality Media Compact to urge media organizations to play their part in advancing gender equality and women’s rights within the framework of the Post-2015 Development Framework.

Building on this momentum and on the results of the GMMP 2015, in December 2016 WACC launched a global advocacy campaign entitled End News Media Sexism by 2020. The campaign seeks to increase action towards news media accountability for gender equality. WACC was also very active at the [62nd session of the Commission on the Status of Women](#), whose review theme was “Participation in and access

of women to the media, and information and communications technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women”. These developments reaffirm the imperative of considering communication issues both from a gender justice and from a human rights perspective.

Recommendations to Address Communication and Information Poverty from a Gender Perspective in the Context of Agenda 2030

WACC and its partners applaud the inclusion of Targets related to communication and information issues within Sustainable Development Goal 5. However, WACC calls on donor governments, national governments, international institutions, and civil society, to

- Recognize that gender inequality has an impact on the way people access communication and information, which in turn limits their ability to improve their lives. For example, while gender disparities in relation to communication and information vary widely depending on context, men tend to have greater access to information than women, which in turn excludes many women and girls from participating in decision-making;
- Support initiatives to enable and enhance women and girls’ ability to participate in development processes, including access to media platforms where they can raise concerns about issues that affect their lives and opportunities for women’s groups to establish their own media;
- Strengthen research and advocacy related to the representation of women and girls in media content;
- Promote women and girls’ access to learning opportunities about media literacy, particularly in relation SDG 4 (Quality Education);
- Promote wide access to public information, particularly in ways that take into account the gendered dimension of access to information;
- Support efforts to make all media outlets “safe spaces” for women and girls. This can take the form of internal dialogue, the development of ethical standards, awareness raising, and specially crafted content. Community media, a form of media that is supposed to reflect values such as inclusion, diversity, and equality, should take the lead in guiding commercial and public media towards greater gender equality;
- Promote and strengthen networks of media professionals working for gender equality;
- Encourage and recognize the work of women through public communication via traditional and digital media platforms. This can take the form of advocacy, awareness raising, and specialized content;
- Support efforts to tackle patriarchal cultural practices and social norms at all levels, particularly at the grassroots level. Moreover, support communication and education processes that can help to raise awareness about the impact of patriarchy on society and help change behaviours in matters related to gender issues. This should also include working with community and religious leaders that reinforce patriarchy;

- Build the capacity of women and women’s rights organizations at all levels, particularly at the grassroots level to articulate the ways in which women experience gender inequality;
- Support media training of women to help enable their participation in the media sector as journalists, editors, and managers.

WACC’s project partners also issued a Declaration³⁹ following the WACC New York Consultation in 2017, which provided additional recommendations, some of which are:

- Help eliminate gender stereotypes and hate speech from public media, and continually promote gender equality in the media;
- Incorporate gender-sensitivity, local history and cultural diversity in the education and training of professionals in the field of communications in order to increase gender sensitivity of reporting and to eliminate sexist and misogynist media content;
- Ensure freedom of expression for women and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender groups;
- Strengthen the visibility of women and girls from minority and marginalized groups, rural women, women with disabilities, migrants, refugees, displaced women, and their equal access to media to be part of media content production, news making and speaking about their experiences.
- Developing and promoting media tools for gender sensitive reporting (gender sensitive language, databases of experts, journalist codes) but also continually monitoring their implementation in media content, in the community of journalists and their associations.

The full text of the New York Declaration can be accessed [here](#).

Examples of Interventions to Address Communication and Information Poverty in the Context of SDG 5

SDG and relevant Target	Key Communication and Information Poverty Issues	How WACC Partners Have Addressed this Issue
<p>SDG 5- Gender Equality</p> <p>Target 5.1 - End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere</p> <p>Target 5.5 -Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life</p>	<p>Lack of platforms for Indigenous women and girls to share ideas and raise concerns about issues that affect their lives</p> <p>Under/misrepresentation of Indigenous women and girls and the issues that affect them in media content</p> <p>Low levels of media literacy among Indigenous women and girls</p>	<p>WACC Partner <i>Ixchel Estereo</i> in Guatemala (www.radioixchel.com/) works to create spaces for local Indigenous women and girls to learn about their rights, develop public communication skills, and raise their concerns through community radio. <i>Ixchel Estereo</i> also seeks to enable women to participate in decision-making processes and to reach managerial positions, both within the station and in local institutions.</p>

<p>Target 5.b- Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women</p>	<p>Limited access to information among Indigenous women and girls</p>	
<p>SDG 5- Gender Equality</p> <p>Target 5.1 - End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere</p> <p>Target 5.2 - Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation</p>	<p>Under/misrepresentation of women and girls and the issues that affect them, such as Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in media content</p> <p>Low levels of media literacy among Indigenous women and girls that prevent them critically assessing media content and denouncing discriminatory content</p> <p>Absence of an inclusive media sector that contributes to the promotion of human rights, including women’s human rights</p>	<p>WACC Partner <i>Centro Ecuatoriano para la Promocion y Accion de la Mujer –CEPAM</i> in Ecuador (www.cepamgye.org) works to advance the rights of women and girls, particularly those from low-income urban areas. CEPAM has over the years carried out extensive media monitoring focusing on media content that perpetuates and normalizes violence and discrimination against women. Research findings have been used to advocate for a more responsible and inclusive media sector.</p>
<p>SDG 5- Gender Equality</p> <p>Target 5.1 - End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere</p> <p>Target 5.5 - Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life</p> <p>Target 5.b- Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women</p>	<p>Lack of access to platforms for women and girls in parts of Palestine to raise concerns about issues that affect them</p> <p>Under/misrepresentation of women and girls in Palestine in media content</p> <p>Low levels of media literacy among women and girls in Palestine</p> <p>Absence of a free, independent, inclusive, and pluralistic media</p>	<p>WACC Partner <i>Community Media Centre</i> (www.cmcgaza.ps) in Palestine works to equip women and girls with practical communication skills, knowledge about their rights, and tools to document human rights violations. A key focus has been on enabling women to exercise their right to freedom of expression. This has contributed to a cohort of women and girls who actively participate in public life by engaging with local officials and using media to create dialogue about community issues.</p>

SDG 9- Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure & SDG 17- Partnership for the Goals

In the United Nation’s 2030 Agenda, SDGs 9 and 17 recognize the need to enable people everywhere to benefit from access to the internet and to mobile telephony. This represents undeniable progress from a communication and information perspective as increased access to relevant technology and platforms can help equip people with the tools to participate in the information society, have their voices heard, and contribute to the production and dissemination of knowledge. This is especially relevant as it is estimated that about 3 billion people today lack access to the internet and about 2 billion do not have access to a mobile phone.⁴⁰

Goal 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) highlights the issue of access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and the Internet under Target 9.C *Significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020*.⁴¹ For national governments, this Goal reinforces their obligation to provide universal access to basic telecommunication services to their citizens, including to those living in remote areas. It also creates an opportunity to promote more democratic models for the development and ownership of communication infrastructure, as exemplified by community-managed telecommunication company *Telecomunicaciones Indigenas Comunitarias* (TIC) in Oaxaca, Mexico^{42 43}.

Goal 17 (Partnership for the Goals) focuses on the finance, technology, capacity, trade, effectiveness, monitoring issues related to the implementation of Agenda 2030⁴⁴. Under the “technology” Target area of this SDG, two Targets focus on internet access. Target 17.6 *Enhance North-South, South-South and triangular regional and international cooperation on and access to science, technology and innovation*, Indicator 17.6.2 *Fixed Internet broadband subscriptions per 100 inhabitants, by speed*; and Target 17.8 *Fully operationalize the technology bank and science, technology and innovation capacity-building mechanism for least developed countries by 2017 and enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology*, Indicator 17.8.1 *Proportion of individuals using the Internet*. Increased access to the internet can have a significant impact on communication and information needs, especially at the grassroots level⁴⁵, particularly as access to services in many parts of the world is increasingly internet-mediated.

WACC applauds the focus on access to ICTs and Internet services in Agenda 2030. Nevertheless, WACC and its partners believe that at a time when digital communication is becoming increasingly prevalent and policymakers in many countries are developing the digital infrastructure and governance models of the future, it is critical to move beyond the mere celebration of access in order to address more structural issues. Questions about ownership, regulation, privacy, and illegal surveillance of civil society actors must be central elements of the conversation about ICTs in development. Some of these issues have been raised by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Mr. David Kaye, in his office’s 2015, 2016, and 2017 reports⁴⁶.

Agenda 2030 creates an opportunity to advance transparency and accountability in relation to the digital infrastructure of the 21st century. Failure to address these issues will raise political and ethical concerns ranging from the subversion of democracy to intrusion into and control over peoples’ lives. This may ultimately undermine the credibility and legitimacy of digital platforms, as the scandal around privacy practices at Facebook in 2018 demonstrates⁴⁷.

WACC and its partners acknowledge that greater access to the internet and digital platforms alone will not be sufficient to contribute to sustainable development. It is essential to promote the use of these new tools in such a way that those communities most often excluded achieve greater participation and in a way that helps create the political will to implement public policies that contribute to greater equity and inclusion. This use of digital platforms must occur within a framework of rights that help generate genuine opportunities for free and informed participation to promote true sustainable development.

Recommendations to Leverage Increased Access to ICTs and to the Internet in order to Address Communication and Information Poverty

Despite the existence of several problematic aspects in the field of digital communication, such platforms continue to be vital tools for marginalized communities in that they help influence the media

and public policy agendas in favour of their interests, help their communities organize for change, and encourage active citizenship. WACC and its partners call on donor governments, national governments, international institutions, and civil society, to

- Support community-initiated efforts to develop and/or manage telecommunications infrastructure in order to increase access to mobile telephony and internet services
- Promote initiatives that link established community media platforms to ICTs, especially in ways that promote interactivity and participation. The community media sector has a wealth of expertise and experience in participatory and democratic participation. Combining community with ICT can serve to turn increased access to ICTs into community-level participation;
- Facilitate the formation of networks of citizen communicators and journalists belonging to marginalized communities and social movements so that they can use digital communication platforms in their advocacy work on issues that affect their communities;
- Advance research about the relationship between access to ICTs, community participation, and development;
- Promote inter-sectoral partnerships to address violations of human rights online, such as online violence and illegal surveillance;
- Build digital media production training for marginalized and excluded communities, including women and girls;
- Support digital media literacy among marginalized and excluded communities, including women and girls;
- Build the capacity of marginalized and excluded communities, including women and girls, to develop and use open-source software;
- Build the capacity of civil society organizations to participate in policy making processes related to communication infrastructure, policy, and digital rights; and
- Promote digital solutions that help enable community participation in decision-making.

These recommendations should be implemented based on the following principles:

- Communication is a fundamental human right;
- Freedom of expression is a central element of communication seen from a rights perspective;
- The contents disseminated by digital platforms must reflect ethics, respect, pluralism and responsibility;
- The inclusion of traditionally excluded groups, for example people living with disabilities, in the use of digital platforms is essential to foster pluralism;

- Networks of citizen communicators and journalists should be horizontal, inclusive, multicultural, and democratic;
- Advocacy using digital tools must be carried out without endangering the security or the rights of the people involved; the use of encryption technologies is critical to achieve this; and
- Collaboration and networking are fundamental elements for the success of any digital advocacy effort.

Examples of Interventions to Address Communication and Information Poverty in the Context of SDG 9 and 17, esp. in relation to access to the internet and digital technologies

<p>SDG 9- Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure</p> <p>Target 9.C- Significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020</p> <p>SDG 17- Partnership for the Goals</p> <p>Target 17.8- Fully operationalize the technology bank and science, technology and innovation capacity-building mechanism for least developed countries by 2017 and enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology</p>	<p>Limited affordable, reliable, and secure access to digital communication platforms and to the internet</p> <p>Low levels of digital media literacy</p> <p>Limited or reduced access to information, including public information, via digital communication channels</p> <p>Restrictions to freedom of expression and freedom of association online</p>	<p>WACC’s Communication Rights Schools are annual week-long seminars organized in partnership with local academic or civil society organizations that seek to foster knowledge exchange on the ethical dimensions of communication in today’s world. Communication Rights Schools bring together academics and communication practitioners from around the world to interrogate and generate ideas in relation to structural communication issues, such as the ownership and regulation of digital platforms, privacy, illegal surveillance in digital spaces, and gender-based violence on the internet. Past Communication Rights schools have been held in Nairobi (Kenya), Wittenberg (Germany), Mandeville (Jamaica), Toronto (Canada), and Geneva (Switzerland).</p>
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SDG 16- Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions

The 2030 Agenda, within the framework of Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) recognizes that democracy, good governance and the rule of law play a fundamental role in achieving sustainable development⁴⁸. Open and democratic access to communication and information underpins the achievement of all these objectives as it can help promote social inclusion, peaceful conflict resolution, advance the rule of law, shed light on corruption, promote trust in institutions, and enable participation. It is also directly linked to fundamental freedoms such as freedom of expression and freedom of association: A number of Targets within this goal have a direct link to communication and information issues.

Target 16.1 *Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere* is strongly linked to media and communication issues. Open and trust-based communication has the potential to

help ameliorate conflict situations, promote a culture of dialogue, and advance non-violent conflict resolution. Peace-oriented media can also create spaces for meaningful exchange among perceived adversaries. Responsible and ethical media coverage of conflict can help counter hate speech, change perceptions and behaviours, and ensure access to information on conflict prevention.

Target 16.3 *Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all* is intimately linked to information and communication issues. Media freedom, access to information, and freedom of expression is essential to keep institutions, including justice institutions, in check, as well as to promote trust in the justice system.

Target 16.5 *Substantially reduce corruption and bribery in all their forms* has a strong relationship to media freedom issues, as media outlets and investigative journalists need the necessary protection and safeguards to ensure they can carry out their work effectively. It would be difficult to reduce corruption when the media is concentrated in a few hands and journalists do not have the freedom to investigate cases of corruption.

In relation to Target 16.6 *Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels*, it is clear that freedom of information and other communication rights are essential to promote transparency and accountability within public institutions. The media ought to reflect the views of all sectors of society, especially the views of the most disadvantaged people in society, in order to achieve greater transparency and effectiveness within public institutions.

Target 16.7 *Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels* has multiple connections to communication and information issues. An essential element of exercising communication rights is the opportunity for people to participate in decision-making, especially in relation to issues that directly affect their lives. This requires access to information, particularly public information. People must also be able to exercise their right to freedom of expression, have access to relevant means of communication and be guaranteed their right of reply and redress. People also have the right to participate in the “formulation and governance of the communication sphere... at the national level, but also in the context of international relations”⁴⁹.

Target 16.10 *Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements* has numerous connections to communication and information issues. The two Indicators under this Target reflect that: Indicator 16.10.1 *Number of verified cases of killing, kidnapping, enforced disappearance, arbitrary detention and torture of journalists, associated media personnel, trade unionists and human rights advocates in the previous 12 months* and Indicator 16.10.2 *Number of countries that adopt and implement constitutional, statutory and/or policy guarantees for public access to information*. The inclusion of this Target and Indicators in Agenda 2030 is commendable. While an indicator related to freedom of expression would have strengthened this Target, especially in relation to the reference to “fundamental freedoms”, this Target is still central for all those working on addressing communication and information poverty.

Target 16.B. *Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development* can also be examined from a communication and information perspective. Numerous groups in society face discrimination and other barriers in relation to communication and information. For example, many indigenous people are unable to access public information in their language, preventing them from participating in society.

In sum, the explicit references to communication and information issues within Goal 16 are limited to access to public information and to the protection of journalists and other human rights defenders. In this sense, the Goal fails to reference pivotal issues such as freedom of expression, linguistic rights, digital convergence, and media ownership and control that are firmly related to peace, justice, and strong democratic institutions. Nevertheless, the many instances in which communication and information issues implicitly intersect with the Targets of SDG 16, as listed above, represent valuable opportunities for those tackling communication and information poverty. These intersections allow groups working in fields such as community media, media monitoring, advocacy on access to information, participatory communication, and citizen journalism to make direct links to specific SDGs in order to highlight the importance of their work and to gain broader support for it.

Recommendations to address communication and information poverty in the context of SDG 16

WACC and its partners call on donors, national governments, international institutions, and civil society:

- At the national level, to support an audit of existing communication and information laws and regulations in order to identify systemic policy and legal issues that undermine the rule of law, the struggle against corruption, trust-based relationships between citizens and institutions, participatory decision-making, fundamental freedoms, and the fight against discrimination;
- At the national level, to convene a summit of key stakeholders (civil society, public sector, media and communication organizations) to discuss communication and information poverty issues based on the national audit described above;
- To develop awareness-raising campaigns about the ways in which communication and information poverty undermines peace, justice, and strong institutions;
- To work towards a Communication Rights Charter as a way to galvanize support around the need to address communication and information poverty;
- To support community media, particularly community radio, as it can be an effective communication platform to enable individuals and communities to participate in decision-making and access relevant information, particularly when strategically linked to social media platforms or SMS systems. Community media outlets that actively facilitate listeners' groups and are linked to people's organizations should be prioritized. This support should include extensive capacity building and efforts to link community stations with one another in order to share knowledge and technical expertise;
- To protect journalists and media workers linked to community media outlets, most of whom lack the support of established media organizations;
- To support and strengthen the role of independent public service media as one of the cornerstones of diverse and pluralistic media systems;
- To support the integration of media literacy into education systems, including adult education initiatives, in order to equip people with the knowledge and skills to demand transparent and accountable institutions and to participate in decision-making;

- To support interpersonal communication efforts. Peace, access to justice, and more productive relationships between citizens and institutions can be greatly advanced through interpersonal communication processes, such as community dialogue, public forums, public art, etc. These are spaces where ideas can be discussed and shared. Communication processes must be consultative and non-hierarchical in order to lead to meaningful change;
- To highlight the experience of marginalized communities in public communication from a pluralistic perspective. This can help to strengthen institutions and to create spaces for new issues to be discussed. This can take the form of media content, especially when produced by communities themselves, which sheds light on the stories of those communities in order to promote awareness and international solidarity. This can help to address under- and misrepresentation, a phenomenon that undermines peaceful coexistence, fair treatment, and social cohesion;
- To build the strategic communications capacity of civil society organizations in order to enable them better to effect change. This also entails access to communication technologies and resources;
- To promote a diverse, open, free, accountable, and democratic media system;
- To defend the rights of freedom of assembly and association, including in online spaces, in order to enable people to participate in decision-making, hold institutions and decision-makers to account, and guarantee human rights; and
- To build the capacity of civil society organizations to participate in policy-making processes, particularly in relation to communication and information issues.

Examples of Interventions to Address Communication and Information Poverty in the Context of SDG 16

<p>SDG 16- Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions</p> <p>Target 16.1 Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere</p>	<p>Lack of platforms for youth affected by conflict to engage in dialogue, build a sense of collective identity, develop communication skills, and raise concerns about their issues</p> <p>Under/misrepresentation of youth affected by conflict in media content</p> <p>Low levels of media literacy among youth affected by conflict prevents them from critically engaging with media content that normalizes or glamorizes conflict</p>	<p>WACC Partner <i>Grupo Comunicarte</i> (www.grupocomunicarte.org) in Colombia works with a community radio station and students from 12 public schools in the town of Arauquita, close to Colombia’s border with Venezuela, to create spaces for dialogue, active citizenship, and the construction of a culture of peaceful conflict resolution. The project also helped to create a sense of belonging among youth affected by the armed conflict as a way to prevent them from being recruited by criminal groups. The project took place in a post-conflict context following the historic 2016 peace agreements in Colombia.</p>
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<p>SDG 16- Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions</p> <p>Target 16.3 Promote the rule of law at the national and international levels and ensure equal access to justice for all</p>	<p>Lack of platforms for people denied access to justice following the atrocities committed during the Argentinian military dictatorship to raise their concerns</p> <p>Under/misrepresentation of people affected by the crimes committed during the dictatorship in media content, which contributes to a deterioration of historical memory among the public</p> <p>Limited access to information, including public information, about the crimes committed during the dictatorship and about justice and/or reparations for victims and their families</p>	<p>WACC Partner Asamblea Permanente por los Derechos Humanos-APDH in Argentina (www.apdh-argentina.org.ar) has been working to ensure that the process of Memory, Truth, and Justice launched to address the systematic human rights violations committed during Argentina’s military dictatorship continues. The process is at risk due to limited political will, which means that there is a real risk that the achievements of the past few years could be reversed. APDH is working to build the capacity of community and mainstream media journalists to report on the process and encourage media houses to shed light on the issue.</p>
<p>SDG 16- Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions</p> <p>Target 16.10- Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements</p>	<p>Lack of access to platforms at the grassroots level to meaningfully raise concerns</p> <p>Under/misrepresentation of grassroots communities in media</p> <p>Limited access to relevant information among people not reached by other forms of media</p> <p>Exclusion from decision-making processes for many communities who lack information and platforms to advance their agendas</p> <p>Absence of a free, independent, inclusive, and pluralistic media</p>	<p>WACC Partner Swaziland Community Multimedia Network-SCMN (www.facebook.com/communityMultimediaNetwork) in Swaziland (eSwatini) works to change media legislation and policy to allow for community media to operate freely and independently. The Network is comprised of a several web-based community communication initiatives that voice local concerns and represent essential spaces for community participation. The Network plays a crucial role is advancing freedom of expression and other fundamental freedoms in the country.</p>

How Communication and Information Poverty Relates to Other SDGs

In addition to focusing on the four SDGs examined above, WACC and its partners explored the link between communication and information and the rest of the SDGs. The chart below provides examples of key communication and information poverty issues that need to be addressed in order to help achieve the goals and targets of Agenda 2030. Where available, the chart provides examples of specific projects carried out by WACC partners over the past 5 years that have sought to address issues highlighted by specific SDGs.

SDG and relevant Target	Examples of Key Communication and Information Poverty Issues	How WACC Partners Have Addressed these Issues
SDG 1- No Poverty	Under/misrepresentation of rural poverty issues in media coverage	WACC Partner SAMWAKI in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

<p>Target 1.1- By 2030, eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere, currently measured as people living on less than \$1.25 a day</p> <p>Target 1.2- By 2030, reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions</p> <p>Target 1.4 By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance</p>	<p>Limited access to information about rural poverty, its causes, consequences, and potential solutions among the general public, as well as among people in rural areas</p> <p>Lack of platforms where people from rural communities can raise their concerns</p>	<p>(www.samwaki.org/) addresses the lack of media coverage of rural poverty in local media in the province of South Kivu. SAMWAKI monitored media coverage and used the findings to engage media houses, local government, and civil society organizations in joint work. Limited coverage contributes to a lack of understanding of the underlying issues that perpetuate this form of poverty, such as access to land or gender dynamics, among the public. It also means that many rural communities do not see their needs reflected in media coverage.</p>
<p>SDG 2- Zero Hunger</p> <p>Target 2.3 By 2030, end hunger and ensure access by all people, in particular the poor and people in vulnerable situations, including infants, to safe, nutritious and sufficient food all year round</p>	<p>Lack platforms form rural women to raise their concerns about food security issues</p> <p>Underrepresentation of food security issues, especially as experienced by rural women, in media content</p> <p>Exclusion of rural women from decision-making processes around food and agricultural policy</p>	<p>WACC Partner <i>People’s Coalition on Food Sovereignty</i> (www.foodsov.org) in the Philippines builds the capacity of rural women to advocate for their right to food, especially in a context marked by increasingly technical language around food security. The organization also work sought to increase media coverage of food security issues. It documented and disseminated materials describing food-related issues and solutions proposed by rural communities, such as cooperative systems and support for family farming.</p>
<p>SDG 3- Good Health and Well-Being</p> <p>Target 3.3 Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health-care services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all</p>	<p>Lack of platforms for people affected by low-income high-cost chronic diseases raise their concerns about the health system and advocate for their right to health</p> <p>Low levels of media literacy among low-income people living with high-cost chronic diseases, which prevents them from accessing information</p> <p>Limited access to information about health services and legal mechanisms among low-income people living with high-cost chronic diseases</p>	<p>WACC Partner <i>Fundación Comunicación Positiva</i> (www.comunicacionpositiva.org) in Colombia strengthened the capacity of groups of low-income people living with high-cost chronic diseases to use citizen journalism to advocate for their right to healthcare. Patients were supported in the creation of a series of podcasts sharing their stories, received training on advocacy and on navigating the health system, and were connected to broader health advocacy networks</p>

<p>SDG 4- Quality Education</p> <p>Target 4.1- By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes</p> <p>Target 4.5 By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations</p>	<p>Unavailability of education in Indigenous languages contributes to many forms of communication and information poverty, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Under/misrepresentation of Indigenous people in media content - Low levels of literacy and media literacy among Indigenous people - Limited access to information among Indigenous people - Exclusion of Indigenous people from decision making processes 	<p>WACC Partner Radio Likhu (www.soundcloud.com/uttamkumar-sunuwar) in Nepal works to ensure that children of the Sunuwar (Koits) Indigenous community are able to access education in their mother tongue, as mandated by the country’s constitution. Radio Likhu works towards this goal by informing Sunuwar communities about their education rights and is helping to build a movement to call for change. Access to culturally and linguistically relevant education is crucial in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning.</p>
<p>SDG 5- Gender Equality</p>	<p>Please see section above on SDG 5</p>	
<p>SDG 8- Decent Work and Economic Growth</p> <p>Target 8.8 Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment</p>	<p>Lack of platforms for women migrants to connect with one another and to raise concerns about labour conditions</p> <p>Limited access to information about immigration processes and labour standards among women migrants, especially as a result of language barriers</p> <p>Restrictions to freedom of association and assembly for migrant workers</p>	<p>WACC Partner Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants – APMM (www.apmigrants.org) in Hong Kong, China, engaged women migrant workers from the Philippines and Indonesia living in Hong Kong, South Korea, and Taiwan in the production of short podcasts in mp3 format about their personal stories, labour rights, access to services, and denouncing abuse. The content was disseminated through digital platforms so women could easily download it, share it, and listen to it during their work day. The content helped to create a sense of belonging among women with very limited opportunities to socialize.</p>
<p>SDG 9- Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure</p> <p>Target 9.C- Significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020</p>	<p>Limited access to the internet and other communication platforms among low-income communities, especially women</p>	<p>WACC Partner Community Media Network of Uganda- COMNETU (www.comnetu.org) works to address the digital gender divide by providing affordable internet access to low income women. COMNETU has combined internet access with capacity building on business development and access to community radio advertising airtime. This has resulted in the establishment of new income-generation opportunities in some communities.</p>
<p>SDG 10- Reduced Inequalities</p>	<p>Lack of platforms for members of the LGBTQ community in the Balkans to</p>	<p>WACC Partner LGBT*IQ Association Okvir (http://www.okvir.org/) in</p>

<p>Target 10.2- By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status</p> <p>Target 13.3- Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard</p>	<p>freely discuss their experiences during the years of armed conflict and to raise their concerns</p> <p>Under/Misrepresentation of LGBTQA people in media content, often involving hate speech</p> <p>Limited access among the LGBTQ community and among the general public of the impact that LGBTQ activism has had in helping to build a more inclusive society</p>	<p>Bosnia and Herzegovina uses storytelling, multimedia content, and ICTs to document and raise the visibility of the impact of LGBTQA activism in relation to security policies, political change, and gender diversity issues during the armed conflict and transitional justice period (1990 to 2016). Despite a social climate that allows hate speech and discrimination against the LGBTQ community, which contributes to their institutional, economic, and social marginalization, Okvir's Queer Archive has opened up safe spaces for community members to raise their voices.</p>
<p>SDG 11- Sustainable Cities and Communities</p> <p>Target 11.1- By 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums</p> <p>Target 11.3- By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries</p>	<p>Lack of platforms for those affected by lack of housing to raise their concerns</p> <p>Under/misrepresentation of the urban poor in media</p> <p>Exclusion of marginalized communities from decision-making about urban development and housing policies</p>	<p>WACC Partner <i>AlterMidya Network</i> in the Philippines (www.altermidya.net/) works to provide urban poor communities seeking access to housing with communication platforms to facilitate organizing and demand change, to explain their views in digital and traditional media, and counter negative stereotypes about urban poverty issues.</p>
<p>SDG 13- Climate Action</p> <p>Target 13.1- Strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-related hazards and natural disasters in all countries</p> <p>Target 13.3- Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning</p>	<p>Lack of platforms for marginalized rural communities to raise their concerns about the ways climate change affect their livelihoods</p> <p>Limited access among marginalized rural communities to information about climate change</p> <p>Limited access among the general public and policy makers about the ways Indigenous and traditional knowledge can help with mitigation, adaptation, and risk reduction</p> <p>Exclusion of marginalized rural communities from decision-making processes about climate policy</p>	<p>WACC Partner Getjenge Community Radio in Zimbabwe (www.pdt.co.zw) engages community members in dialogue about Indigenous and traditional knowledge that can help with climate change mitigation, adaptation, and risk reduction. Getjenge believes that marginalized rural communities who are typically excluded from conversations about climate change (as materials are usually in English and use technical language) should be at the centre of this conversation, especially as their livelihoods are the most likely to be affected by changes in climate patterns. Getjenge works towards this goal by helping to mainstream indigenous knowledge and culture</p>

		into climate policy in Matabeleland province.
<p>SDG 15- Life on Land</p> <p>Target 15.1- By 2020, ensure the conservation, restoration and sustainable use of terrestrial and inland freshwater ecosystems and their services, in particular forests, wetlands, mountains and drylands, in line with obligations under international agreements</p> <p>Target 15.2- By 2020, promote the implementation of sustainable management of all types of forests, halt deforestation, restore degraded forests and substantially increase afforestation and reforestation globally</p> <p>Target 15.4- By 2030, ensure the conservation of mountain ecosystems, including their biodiversity, in order to enhance their capacity to provide benefits that are essential for sustainable development</p>	<p>Lack of platforms for communities affected by deforestation and the destruction of ecosystems to engage in dialogue and raise their concerns</p> <p>Under/misrepresentation of people working to protect forests and water systems</p> <p>Limited access to information, including public information, among the general public about deforestation and its consequences</p> <p>Exclusion of communities affected by deforestation from decision-making processes about development</p> <p>Absence of a free and independent media sector that sheds light on environmental issues</p>	<p>WACC Partner La Sandia Digital (www.lasandiadigital.org.mx/) in Mexico works to build the capacity of rural communities (many of whom are peasants and Indigenous communities) to use media to defend water systems and forests from extractive projects (such as mining, agro-industry) that put biodiversity, livelihoods, and people’s lives at risk while also undermining the role that forests play as carbon sinks. La Sandia Digital creates opportunities for communities to engage in dialogue and organize for change, helps provide platforms for those affected to share their views, and trains journalists about coverage of environmental issues.</p>
SDG 16- Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions	Please see section above on SDG 16	
SDG 17- Partnerships for the Goals	Please see section above on SDG 17	

Beyond Agenda 2030

As part of the process that led to the drafting of this document, WACC and its partners identified a number of key areas that are essential to advancing sustainable development from a communication and information perspective but which are absent from Agenda 2030.

Democratizing Communication and Information Ecosystems by Bolstering Civil Society Participation in Communication and Information Policy Making

Many of the structural issues that perpetuate information and communication poverty are linked to the legislative and policy frameworks that govern media and information systems, many of which in turn reflect power dynamics in society that exclude certain groups from media landscapes. UNESCO’s Media Development Indicators, which are widely accepted around the world as the main framework to assess media development⁵⁰, exemplify the work needed to make media systems more inclusive, transparent, and pluralistic from a policy perspective. Current work by UNESCO to develop Internet Universality Indicators⁵¹ in order to promote a more open, rights-based, and inclusive internet is also critical, and promises to become more significant as digital and internet-based communication innovations emerge.

WACC and its partners around the world believe that civil society should be an active participant in the development of legislative and policy frameworks to democratize communication, media, and information ecosystems. We believe that civil society around the world has much to learn from the experience of a number of civil society organizations from Latin America which over the past 15 years have advocated for more democratic communication, media, and information ecosystems in their national contexts.

[Latin American Civil Society Engagement in Communication Policymaking](#)

During the first two decades of the 21st century, governments of several Latin American countries, in most cases with the support of civil society actors, developed new laws and public policy frameworks that sought to democratize access to the media. Some examples among others are the Organic Law of Communication in Ecuador; the General Law of Telecommunications, Information and Communication Technologies in Bolivia; the Audiovisual Communication Services Law in Argentina; the Media Law in Uruguay.

These new policies have generally had elements in common. For example, these policies promoted the equitable distribution of licenses between clearly defined sectors: public, private or commercial, and community. In some cases there is also a fourth sector: the indigenous communication sector. Another element in common is the existence of rules to prevent and/or discourage the concentration of media in a few hands, especially in the hands of foreign or domestic capital conglomerates whose influence in other sectors of the country's economy is too great. In general, these policies have also included the establishment of regulatory agencies with the ability to impose sanctions to enforce the new rules.

Many of the new media regulation frameworks have faced numerous obstacles. On the one hand, the private and commercial sectors, accustomed to a much more favourable regime, have opposed the implementation of new policies, arguing that they constitute attacks on press freedom and freedom of expression. On the other hand, in many cases these new regulations have occurred in highly politicized environments and have been seen as tools for the governments of the day to promote their political agendas. This politicization in many cases has reduced the legitimacy of these processes and has made them vulnerable to electoral change, as in the case of Argentina.

In addition, there have been many failures in the implementation of these new frameworks, such as a lack of concrete and sustainable mechanisms to strengthen the community broadcasting sector, a sector on which production quotas were often imposed that were difficult to meet. However, despite such problems, it is undeniable that these processes of democratization of the media represent a step forward for communication rights.

Civil society played a central role in the development of these new media regulation frameworks, in many cases openly supporting and promoting them. Many civil society actors have tried to maintain an independent position, especially in contexts where the issue of media regulation has been politicized, while other actors have decided to align themselves more closely with clearer political positions. In some cases, this dynamic led to deep divisions within civil society in those countries.

New models for the media regulation seen in places such as Uruguay and Ecuador contrast with the models of countries such as Mexico, Colombia, Brazil, Chile and Peru, and most countries of Central America and the Caribbean, which have not undergone major changes in recent years. Most of these countries have legal frameworks for the regulation of media that in one way or another try to discourage the concentration of media, but the reality is that a market logic prevails in the field of

communication in these countries. In some cases, the community media sector is recognized, as in Colombia and El Salvador, but in others, such as Mexico, Costa Rica, Guatemala and Peru, the sector is either not recognized or faces great difficulties in order to operate legally. Cuba is an exception to the rule, because although the private sector does not play any role in the country's media, the state sector covers most of the media, in many cases excluding the community sector.

In addition to public advocacy to democratize access to the media, coalitions of civil society organizations in several Latin American countries have also contributed to the development of legal frameworks and public policies on other issues related to communication. For example, during the past 15 years several coalitions have emerged that contributed to changes in access to public information, as in the case of Brazil and Mexico, and to changes in legal frameworks that criminalized contempt and certain forms of public expression, such as in the case of Chile and Guatemala⁵².

Recommendations to Promote Civil Society Participation in Policy Making About Communication and Information

Bearing in mind that the path towards more democratic legal and public communication policies are long-term processes and that their success depends in part on the political will of the government at the time, and that private sector actors can resist any change, the central recommendation from WACC partners to development stakeholders was *to support the development of civil society coalitions at the national level interested in promoting concrete changes to communication and information legislation and policy, related to issues such as access to information, internet governance, and media regulation*. This recommendation is based on the belief that civil society is a crucial actor in the struggle for more open, inclusive, and democratic media ecosystems.

Such coalitions must be diverse, inclusive and open spaces for dialogue with different actors, but they must also have the capacity to develop clear common agendas and objectives. This type of coalition must also have the tools to produce and disseminate knowledge, interact with state agencies, establish alliances with sectors of civil society that have not traditionally been involved in communication activism, and influence public opinion in favour of the democratization of communication. It is also essential that they be participatory coalitions so that they are truly legitimate

Support for the development of these coalitions on the part of external development stakeholders should be a medium-term project in order to lay the foundations of movements that can monitor the implementation of any communication policy, and that can be mobilized when there are setbacks.

These coalitions must start from the following common principles:

- Communication is a human right that allows for the defence and promotion of other rights;
- The right to freedom of expression is an essential part of the right to communication;
- Cultural diversity is fundamental to achieve a more democratic communication system. The existence of a regulatory framework that promotes cultural expression, including those of marginalized groups, is necessary to guarantee cultural diversity;
- The electromagnetic spectrum is a common good and must be democratized. For this, there must be clear and equitable rules on the ownership and concentration of the means of communication to avoid the concentration of power in a few hands;

- Citizens have the right to participate in governance processes and decision-making on communication policies;
- Community and citizen media are expressions of the right to communication and should be supported; and
- Efficient and equitable access to public information must be guaranteed

Donors, governments, international institutions, and other development stakeholders are called to support the formation of these coalitions through capacity building, technical expertise, access to financial resources, and opportunities to advance their agendas at regional and international forums.

Investing in Media Literacy for the Digital Age

The emergence of numerous digital communication platforms such as social networks and smartphones over the last decade has been accompanied by the hope that these platforms would help democratize communication ecosystems and help bring about social change. For instance, citizen journalism offered great potential as a counterweight to mainstream news media as it represented an opportunity for the mobilization of marginalized communities in addition to broadening access to information and knowledge.

However, despite the fact that in many cases these digital platforms have helped generate greater awareness of various social problems, there is a growing sense of caution concerning the risks that these new platforms present to society. For instance, the explosion of “fake news” has shown that digital platforms can be used to manipulate and influence media agendas unscrupulously and to attack democratic processes.

Today, media ecosystems are characterized by a convergence of digital and traditional media, a fragmentation of audiences, issues of privacy, and a lack of transparency about how decisions governing communication and information flows are made.

Despite these new realities, in their curricula most educational systems have failed to reflect the need for students to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to navigate a world that is increasingly mediated and digitized. This need is especially relevant in the context of SDG 4 – Quality Education.

Donors, governments, international institutions, and other development stakeholders are called to support the inclusion of comprehensive and information and media literacy programmes in the education systems of countries around the world.

Addressing the Communication and Information Needs of Marginalized and Historically Excluded Communities

WACC and its partners believe that *social inclusion* has to be at the heart of efforts to address communication and information poverty. This entails recognizing that there are groups in society whose communication and information needs are routinely ignored in the context of development. This can be the result of issues such as language barriers, prejudice, geographical distance, or differences in access to media platforms. Some of the groups whose communication and information needs are rarely addressed include people living with disabilities, migrants, ethno-cultural minorities, and people from the LGBTQ communities, among others.

Over the years, WACC has been a staunch supporter of the communication rights of Indigenous peoples, one of the groups whose communication and information needs have most often been overlooked around the world by policymakers and decision makers. WACC has reaffirmed its commitment to the communication rights of Indigenous people over the past five years, supporting and accompanying several Indigenous communication initiatives in places such as Mexico, Peru, Guatemala, Nepal, and the Philippines. As a result, the consultation process that led to the drafting of this document included spaces to discuss the relationship between the rights of Indigenous people and communication rights.

[Communication, the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and Agenda 2030](#)

Today, among the world's current population of 6.7 billion people, there are more than 370 million Indigenous people in over 72 countries. Practicing unique traditions, they retain social, cultural, economic and political characteristics that distinguish them from those of the dominant societies in which they live. From the Arctic to the South Pacific, they are the descendants – according to a commonly accepted definition – of those who inhabited a country or a geographical region at a time when other people of different cultures or ethnic origins arrived.

Indigenous peoples are distinctive through their particular way of life, beliefs, and relationship to the environment. Many have left their traditional life for towns and cities, or work for wages part of the time and return to the land at other times. Indigenous people often practice mixed livelihoods, but in most cases, a subsistence economy is the basis of how they make their living. For indigenous peoples, “traditional environmental knowledge” is at the heart of their identity and culture – understood as the actual living of life rather than just the knowledge of how to live. Indigenous peoples are the custodians of unique languages, knowledge systems and beliefs and they possess invaluable knowledge of practices in the sustainable management of natural resources.

Many indigenous groups have faced multiple waves of assimilation, colonization, and in some cases, genocide. Today, Indigenous peoples often suffer from poor political representation and participation, economic marginalization and poverty and lack access to social services and cultural discrimination.

On 13 September 2007 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), reflecting global concern that Indigenous peoples continue to suffer from historical injustices that prevent them from exercising their rights. The Declaration acknowledged the fact that Indigenous peoples are organizing for political, economic, social and cultural development, and that they have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions. The UNDRIP is one the key framework for addressing some of the global issues that undermine the rights of indigenous peoples, such as climate change, threats to biological and cultural diversity, land grabbing, inequitable food production and distribution, and the curtailment of public services

The UNDRIP highlights a number of communication issues such as access to information, media representation, intellectual property rights, ownership and control of the media, and cultural diversity.

WACC and its partners believe that the communication dimension of indigenous rights is critical to realizing such rights. Without a rights-based approach to decision-making, media platforms, and culture, the rights of indigenous people cannot be fully guaranteed. This belief has been echoed by numerous gatherings of Indigenous communicators, such as the International Encounter on Indigenous Peoples' Communication and Development, held in Bolivia in 2006, which reaffirmed the importance of

communication as a fundamental element in the liberation, transformation and development of society and the validation of the rights of Indigenous peoples.⁵³

According to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Rights, “Indigenous peoples participated from the start in the global consultation process towards the 2030 Agenda, and their advocacy resulted in a framework that makes explicit references to Indigenous peoples’ development concerns and is founded on principles of universality, human rights, equality and environmental sustainability – core priorities for indigenous peoples... Many of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and targets are relevant to indigenous peoples and have direct linkages to the human rights commitments in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. There are six direct references to indigenous peoples in the 2030 Agenda, including in Goal 2 related to agricultural output of indigenous small-scale farmers, and Goal 4 on equal access to education for indigenous children”.⁵⁴

Despite these positive developments, a number of Indigenous groups were disappointed with the lack of attention to issues such as the right to self-determination; the principle of free, prior and informed consent; and collective rights.⁵⁵

[Recommendations to Address the Communication and Information Needs of Indigenous Peoples](#) Participants in WACC’s consultations reaffirmed their belief that communication can be a transformative factor for many Indigenous peoples because it can help strengthen their social fabric, improve governance processes, promote culture in all its diversity, and build bridges with other communities and social actors. These changes can help reinforce the vision enshrined in the UNDRIP and the Goals promoted by Agenda 2030.

Key recommendations for development stakeholders are:

- Promote local processes of Indigenous community communication, and the development of networks of indigenous communicators, through training, accompaniment, visibility, and access to resources;
- Provide legal and technical advice to Indigenous communities involved in communication processes, such as the establishment of community radio stations; and
- Provide support to the development of national knowledge exchange networks between communicators (both from the community sector and from state and private sectors), Indigenous leaders, and researchers to achieve alliances;

These recommendations should be implemented based on the following principles:

- Indigenous peoples have the right to have their voices be part of the communicative ecosystem of the society in which they live. They have the human right to communication;
- Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain their independence and autonomy in the field of communication;
- Cultural diversity, participation, inclusion, and pluralism are essential elements of any Indigenous communication process that aspires to promote the rights of Indigenous peoples;

- Indigenous communication takes many forms. Orality and ancestral stories are central elements of indigenous communication;
- Indigenous communication should contribute to the empowerment of Indigenous peoples and strengthen their participation in decision-making processes;
- Indigenous communication must contribute to gender equality;
- Indigenous communication is a process based on respect that seeks, among other things, the recovery and/or promotion of the customs, traditions, and beliefs of indigenous peoples; and
- The promotion of the communication rights of indigenous peoples should take as a starting point the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization (ILO).

Donors, governments, international institutions, and other development stakeholders are called to take these recommendations into account in order to help address the communication and information needs of indigenous people in the context of advancing the objectives of Agenda 2030.

About WACC

The World Association for Christian Communication (WACC), as a pioneer of the communication rights movement since its foundation in 1968, has been among the few global organizations working to advance the communication rights of marginalized communities around the world. Over the past 50 years, WACC has partnered with thousands of grassroots communities, from Indigenous groups to women's groups to youth groups, to advance communication rights in their local contexts while also advocating for systemic changes in terms of communication-related legislation and policy at the national, regional, and international levels.

WACC is uniquely placed to promote the concept and practice of communication rights in order to advance social justice by challenging discriminatory political, sociocultural, and economic structures. This is because WACC has extensive networks of partners in countries around the world, particularly at the grassroots level, and because WACC is widely recognized as an organization with an unwavering commitment to supporting the rights of those who lack a voice to make themselves heard. For more about WACC, please visit www.waccglobal.org.

Annex 1-List of Participants in WACC Consultations on the SDGs Hong Kong Consultation (December 2017)



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18. Gbenga Osinaike, Journalists for Christ, Nigeria
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Costa Rica Consultation (October 2017)



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¹ Anonymous. *Radio Comunitaria*.

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