



Colombia

PUBLIC ACCESS LANDSCAPE STUDY SUMMARY



Overview

Colombia is committed to increasing public access to ICT over the next decade but faces an uphill climb. More public libraries are needed in order to improve non-urban access, along with more training for librarians, more local content, and better use of telecenters and government-backed ICT venues like schools. Colombia also needs to improve its culture of “reading.” Despite their shortcomings, Colombia’s libraries are performing at or above the mean for all 25 countries in this study; telecenters are performing at the mean and cybercafés are slightly below the mean.

PUBLIC ACCES LANDSCAPE	
Challenges ahead	ND
Needs	ND
Needs (rank)	ND
Readiness	ND
Readiness (rank)	ND

*ND = No data

Findings

The government of Colombia has committed to a national plan that seeks to have all Colombians effectively and productively using ICTs by the year 2019. The stated goal of this plan is to improve social inclusion and increase competition. To that end, Internet connectivity has been increasing rapidly in the country, and 70% of Colombians report having easy access to public libraries.

However, the culture of “reading” is very weak in Colombia. Efforts to turn around this situation have not yet been very successful, despite the fact that there are many public libraries, cybercafés, and different types of telecenters in the country. In addition, many government offices also offer public access to ICT.

Public Libraries

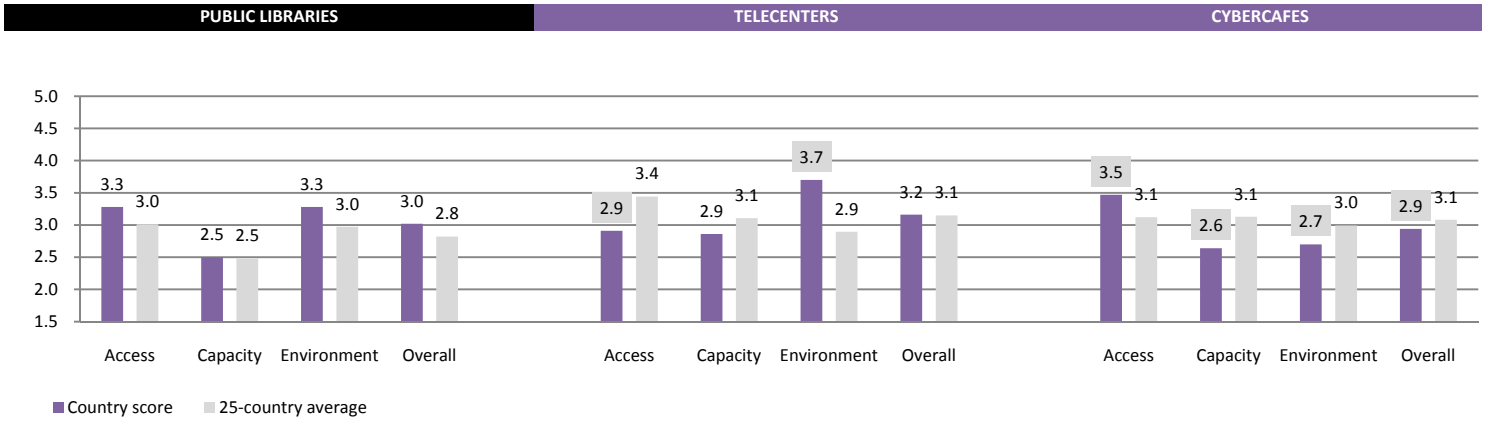
Despite the high visibility and success of some public libraries in the capital city of Bogota, there are many problems facing public libraries in the rest of the country, including:

- Not enough spending on infrastructure (not enough libraries, and not enough adequately updated libraries). The locations of libraries is an important factor in Colombia in choosing whether to use of this type of venue.
- Not enough spending on library services
- Not enough specialized training for libraries
- Understaffing (a single librarian is often the only staff on the premises, and
- Short working periods and inconvenient opening hours for wider use.

Telecentres

There are two types of telecenters in the country: those promoted by the program “Compartel” and those promoted by local government or non-governmental organizations. Community telecenters have helped bring ICTs into the daily life of many Colombians who previously had no access to ICT. The key findings with regard to telecenters in Colombia include:

ACE Scores



Shaded data points are outside standard deviation for 25-country set
 See the last page for country-specific definitions of these venues
 See the last page for a definition of the ACE scoring framework

Venue Distributions

	ALL PUBLIC ACCESS			PUBLIC LIBRARIES			TELECENTERS			CYBERCAFES			OTHER VENUES*		
	Total urban & non-urban	25-country average	25-country median	Total urban & non-urban	25-country average	25-country median	Total urban & non-urban	25-country average	25-country median	Total urban & non-urban	25-country average	25-country median	Total urban & non-urban	25-country average	25-country median
VENUES	4,867	10,017	5,489	1,588	1,111	1,062	1,490	1,273	366	1,501	8,693	3,225	288	398	46
number with ICT	3,251	9,802	5,122	254	349	96	1,490	1,149	257	1,501	8,507	3,251	6	146	13
% with ICT	67%	98%	87%	16%	31%	20%	100%	90%	100%	100%	98%	100%	2%	37%	92%
% OF PUBLIC VENUES	100%	100%	100%	33%	11%	20%	31%	12%	11%	31%	73%	67%	6%	4%	1%
POP. PER VENUE ('000)	9	8	5	29	93	37	31	205	68	30	52	9	158	419	103
with ICT ('000)	14	15	6	179	2,093	208	31	242	119	30	62	10	7,892	1,354	198

*See the last page for country-specific definitions of venues. For this country, "other venues" refers to other decentralized centers. All venues are urban due to municipal zoning classifications. Data points are missing for some measures in some countries, which can result in oddities when comparing rows of data (for instance, the average number of venues with ICT appears high compared to the average number of venues). For a complete overview of comparative country data, please see the summary paper for this study.

User Profiles

		PUBLIC LIBRARIES				TELECENTERS				CYBERCAFES			
		Urban	25-country average	Non-urban	25-country average	Urban	25-country average	Non-urban	25-country average	Urban	25-country average	Non-urban	25-country average
INCOME	Low income	76%	28%	NA	35%	87%	26%	NA	24%	43%	26%	NA	24%
	Medium income	24%	54%	NA	46%	6%	56%	NA	45%	53%	56%	NA	45%
	High income	0%	7%	NA	6%	7%	9%	NA	4%	4%	9%	NA	4%
EDUCATION	No formal education	4%	3%	NA	2%	16%	5%	NA	6%	0%	5%	NA	6%
	Only elementary	13%	16%	NA	21%	15%	14%	NA	13%	23%	14%	NA	13%
	Up to high school	56%	50%	NA	36%	54%	37%	NA	32%	62%	37%	NA	32%
	College or university	27%	28%	NA	19%	15%	40%	NA	28%	15%	40%	NA	28%
AGE	14 and under	32%	12%	NA	15%	21%	9%	NA	14%	17%	9%	NA	14%
	15-35	53%	72%	NA	51%	65%	74%	NA	57%	72%	74%	NA	57%
	36-60	14%	12%	NA	23%	12%	12%	NA	8%	10%	12%	NA	8%
	61 and over	1%	2%	NA	2%	2%	0%	NA	1%	1%	0%	NA	1%
GENDER	% female	51%	53%	NA	49%	55%	39%	NA	39%	49%	39%	NA	39%

NA=Not applicable: All venues are considered urban due to municipal zoning classifications

Percentages may not add up to 100% in all cases

See the last page for country-specific definitions of these venues

Data collected through interviews conducted by research teams. See country reports for details with regard to methodology, locations, timing, and data collection issues.

- Many venues are unsuitable for adequate service
- Operators are frequently untrained and unqualified
- Most users do not have basic training with computers, and
- Understaffing: the telecenter operator is often the only staff member and is also responsible for administration of the venue.

Citizen's services offices

Government offices that offer public access to ICT have strong potential to increase use of ICT, especially when located in poor neighborhoods and small cities and towns. While many experiences are relatively new, they appear to be successful as they have local government support, and their operators are trained and offer good customer service. Citizens tend to like them because they meet different needs in a single location. Thanks to the availability of ICT in these venues, users can experience some of the advantages of ICT to conduct business (licenses, permits, etc.) with the local government. In this way, their first encounter with ICT is done inside a local government office and with the help of a public servant as a facilitator. This is a model that appears to be successful where it is being implemented.

Cybercafés

Information about cybercafés is very scattered and difficult to find. Available information is not reliable. It would be of great interest to promote a network or association of cybercafés, to promote interaction among them, and to gather information to develop a strategy to include the cybercafés as important venues to access information and develop skill for ICTs. The development of a strategy or program with the cybercafés is important due to the strong and permanent impact of this type of venues in the daily life of many people, mainly in small towns and poor communities.

Recommendations

- **More public library coverage is needed in non-urban areas:** Most of Colombia's public libraries are located in urban areas and in small towns. The service for rural communities is very limited. Options for increasing coverage include creating libraries in NGO-based telecenters or creating smaller public library branches.
- **Increase training to librarians:** There is insufficient information about the operators of public libraries, especially in non-urban areas. In many cases, they do not have specific training as librarians, and they frequently are the sole staff in the library.
- **Develop more local content:** Generally, there is no local development of contents at public access venues. There have been some limited efforts in this regard in community telecentres, but more work is needed.
- **Tailor services to local populations:** Public access ICT venues need to be more community-oriented by tailoring their activities to local populations.
- **Make better use of telecenters:** Create module-based ICT courses to be offered by cybercafés or telecenters. Cybercafés could offer the courses as a paid service, and courses in cybercafés would help free them of their association with gaming and increase sustainability by attracting more young people, as well as adults searching for information or qualification.
- **Assess impacts of telecenters:** It is important to conduct an assessment of the impact of publicly-funded telecenter programs, to understand the real impact on community development and on users' daily lifestyles.
- **Make better use of government-backed ICT venues:** Given the government's emphasis on IT laboratories in schools, opening up access to these venues during non-school hours would greatly enhance their social benefit. All urban schools in the country are projected to have a broadband equipped laboratory by 2010, and there is an opportunity to dramatically expand ICT access to underserved populations without investing in additional programs.

Geography & Economy

Colombia is one of the world's most geographically diverse countries. Located in the northwest corner of South America, it has both Caribbean and Pacific coastlines. The country also has the Andes mountain range (with altitudes of over 17,000 feet), the Amazon Rainforest, swamplands, and rolling grasslands. Colombia is the third most populated country in Latin America, after Mexico and Brazil. Most of the population is concentrated in the Andean highlands and along the Caribbean coast.

Colombia's geographic and climatic variations have combined to produce relatively well-defined groups in different regions of the country. Each has distinctive characteristics, accents, customs, social patterns, and forms of cultural adaptation to climate and topography that differentiates it from other groups.

Colombia has an extensive natural resource base. Deforestation is a major issue, however. Some of this has been brought about by groups involved in the drug trade. Conflict with armed drug gangs, as well as with guerilla insurgencies and other paramilitary groups, has ravaged the country in recent years and displaced over two million people so far. Displaced people constitute important underserved populations whose needs are not currently being well met by public access venues in the country.

COUNTRY PROFILE	
Total population* (millions)	45.5
Urban population* (millions)	33.3
Literacy (%)	90%
E-readiness	4.41
Gini	0.55

*World Bank 2006 data
ND = No data

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About this study

CIS's Public Access Landscape Study examined how people around the world access and use information and computers in public settings such as libraries, telecenters, and cybercafes. Understanding public access is particularly important in developing countries where there is often limited private access to information and communication technologies (ICTs).

This study covered a carefully-selected sample of 25 developing countries containing over 250,000 public access settings. Local research teams surveyed over 25,000 people and conducted interviews and focus groups in order to develop a detailed picture of the public access ICT landscape in each country. CIS collected, interpreted, and analyzed these detailed county-level results, and also conducted cross-country comparative analyses to uncover common themes, challenges and opportunities.

The goal of this work is to help strengthen public access to information and ICTs around the world.

This project was conducted in two phases. During the first phase, country-based research teams prepared draft reports describing the information access landscape, presented a national assessment, and compiled a preliminary set of recommendations. In the second phase, teams identified the principal locations where people seek information: public libraries, cybercafés, telecenters, and other locations (such as private and religious libraries).

Local research teams used a combination of research methods to: (1) observe how people access information; (2) conduct surveys in information venues where they interviewed operators and users; and (3) perform secondary research and analysis of existing reports and documents using both local and international sources. Teams combined site visits and interviews to review the physical infrastructure and human resources of a variety of venues, and to determine the information content, service usage patterns, communication, and knowledge development. Additionally, teams examined the effects of environmental factors such as government policies, geography, and ethnic and linguistic differences.

Definitions

ACE scoring framework: Developed by CIS based on a modified bridges.org Real Access framework. The scale goes from zero to five, with 5 being the best possible score. ACE scores are calculated by evaluating dozens of variables having to do with ICT access, capacity and environment in public access ICT venues. "Access" includes variables such as accessibility, suitability, affordability, and the availability of technology; "capacity" includes training, relevant content and services, social appropriation, and collaboration capacity; and "environment" includes socio-cultural factors, popular support, political will, and a country's legal and regulatory framework.

Challenges ahead (from table on front page): Estimates based on combinations of ACE scores indicating difficulty in improving country's public access to ICT. From the fewest challenges to most, categories are: quick wins, steady gains, slow gains, and significant.

CIS: University of Washington Center for Information & Society (CIS)

Cybercafés: No organization or network of cybercafés in the country. Access in these establishments is limited by access times and cost. Establishments depend on private interest and do not prioritize community service.

E-readiness: The ability to use ICT for economic development, as determined by measures of connectivity and technology infrastructure, business environment, social and cultural environment, legal environment, government policy and vision, and consumer and business adoption. E-readiness is scored on a scale from 1 to 10. In 2008, the global e-readiness score was 6.4, with the highest levels in North America and the lowest in Africa and Asia.

Gini coefficient: Measures the inequality of income distribution. A low coefficient indicates more equal income distribution, while a high Gini coefficient indicates more unequal distribution. The global average is around 0.6; the US gini is around 0.45.

Government Offices for Social Services: Municipal establishments in charge of building bridges between citizens and public information and services, with an important emphasis on services and user needs. Access to these establishments is universal, with no restrictions to any population group.

ICTs: Information and communication technologies (especially computers and the Internet).

Needs & Readiness indexes (from table on front page): The needs index is comprised of three indicators: inequality, ICT usage and ICT cost. The readiness index is also comprised of three indicators: politics, skills and ICT infrastructure. Proxies are used for all indicators. See "Information Needs & Watering Holes" on the CIS Landscape Study website (www.cis.washington.edu/landscape) for a more detailed discussion of these indexes and proxies.

NGO: Non-governmental organization

Non-urban: A "rural" area. Urban vs. non-urban classifications vary by country.

Public libraries: Originally established by national governments, with local governments responsible for sustaining venues and assuring resources for their operation.

Telecenters: At least two types: those promoted by the national program Compartel, and by local government or social organizations. Compartel telecenters emphasize universal ICT access with resources for digital training. Community telecenters emphasize incorporating ICTs into daily life, and broadening community development opportunities.

Front photo: Community Telecentre in La Calera, hosted by a rural women's association. Photo by Yves Beaulieu, © IDRC.