Nepal

Findings

Regarded as one of the poorest and least developed nations of the world, Nepal has a very bleak economic environment that directly affects the use of information venues. In a nation where majority of the population lives on the threshold of poverty, few people use the venues on a regular basis.
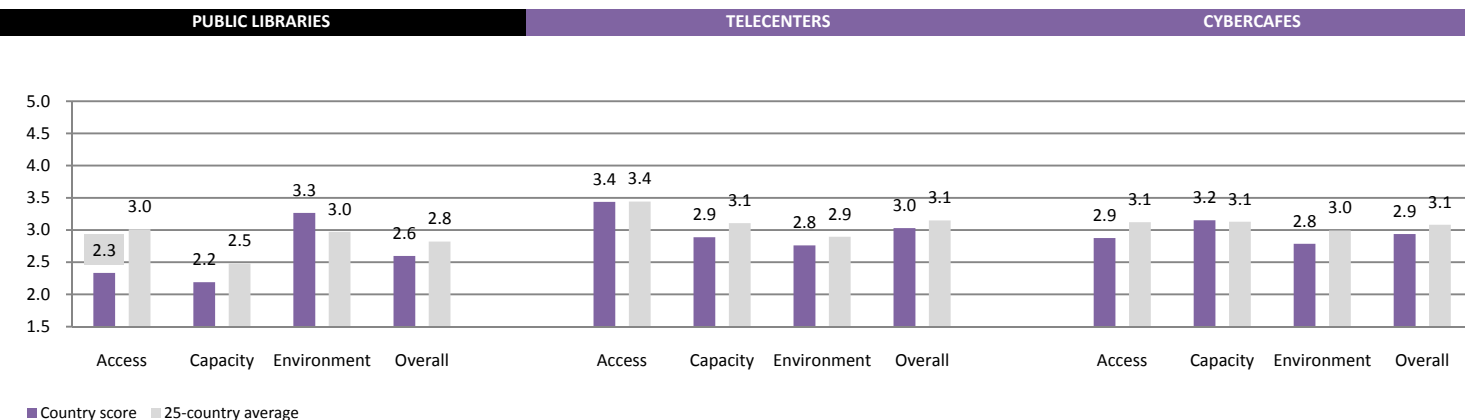
Information access in Nepal is centralized around the capital city of Kathmandu, and access to information in other areas, especially the rural areas, is difficult. Public access venues do not exist in much of the country. In some cases, remote regions lack public access to ICTs because of the geographic conditions, and overall, Nepal has a limited ICT infrastructure. Landline telephone services are inadequate nationwide and are concentrated in cities and district headquarters, but mobile telephony is established in most of the country.

In Nepal, discrimination based on caste, class, and gender heavily influence access to information and ICTs. Discrimination is more entrenched in the country's less-developed areas, especially in the mid-western and far-western regions, but caste continues to influence inter-personal behavior throughout the country. The underserved groups have been assimilated in some venues, but much improvement is needed and culturally accepted to make information accessible to all.

Most of the public access venues that exist in Nepal are open to the general public, are located in convenient places, and are affordable to most people. The technologies and services are moderately appropriate in most venues, but they need to be updated and expanded. Venue operators often are nonchalant when it comes to making services available to physically and visually impaired people. Although venues themselves do not actively discourage use by underserved people, little effort is made to assimilate them.

The capacity within most public venues generally is serviceable and has been able to serve both the operators and the average users moderately well. However, capacity building and ICT training is needed, and there is an urgent need to provide the development to the operators and to librarians. There is very little locally relevant content in any of the venues.

Overview

Nepal has the second-highest needs ranking of any country examined in this study and the second-lowest readiness ranking. Literacy is low, poverty is high, the government is unstable, cultural barriers exist with regards to women's rights, public access ICT venues are few and far between, and the country's ICT infrastructure is inadequate. Still, while the challenges ahead are significant, slow gains are possible. There is an understanding and appreciation among the population of the potential benefits of improving ICT access, and good work is being done in this regard.

PUBLIC ACCES LANDSCAPE	
Challenges ahead	Slow gains
Needs	High
Needs (rank)	2/25
Readiness	Low
Readiness (rank)	24/25

ACE Scores

Country score   25-country average

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	5,990	10,017	5,489	100	1,111	1,062	240	1,273	366	5,000	8,693	3,225	650	398	46
number with ICT	5,358	9,802	5,122	33	349	96	240	1,149	257	5,000	8,507	3,251	85	146	13
% with ICT	89%	98%	87%	33%	31%	20%	100%	90%	100%	100%	98%	100%	13%	37%	92%
% OF PUBLIC VENUES	100%	100%	100%	2%	11%	20%	4%	12%	11%	83%	73%	67%	11%	4%	1%
POP. PER VENUE ('000)	5	8	5	276	93	37	115	205	68	6	52	9	43	419	103
with ICT ('000)	5	15	6	838	2,093	208	115	242	119	6	62	10	327	1,354	198

*See the last page for country-specific definitions of these venues. For this country, other venues refers to community libraries.
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 to be greater than 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	14%	28%	67%	35%	33%	26%	0%	24%	9%	26%	ND	24%
	Medium income	71%	54%	33%	46%	67%	56%	50%	45%	51%	56%	ND	45%
	High income	0%	7%	0%	6%	0%	9%	0%	4%	0%	9%	ND	4%
EDUCATION	No formal education	3%	3%	0%	2%	0%	5%	0%	6%	0%	5%	20%	6%
	Only elementary	21%	16%	0%	21%	0%	14%	25%	13%	0%	14%	0%	13%
	Up to high school	15%	50%	100%	36%	80%	37%	25%	32%	0%	37%	50%	32%
	College or university	61%	28%	0%	19%	20%	40%	50%	28%	100%	40%	30%	28%
AGE	14 and under	6%	12%	0%	15%	0%	9%	0%	14%	4%	9%	ND	14%
	15-35	76%	72%	67%	51%	100%	74%	63%	57%	88%	74%	ND	57%
	36-60	12%	12%	33%	23%	0%	12%	0%	8%	4%	12%	ND	8%
	61 and over	6%	2%	0%	2%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	ND	1%
GENDER	% female	21%	53%	ND	49%	40%	39%	13%	39%	33%	39%	ND	39%

ND=No data
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.

Recommendations

In general, people who use the venue services even on an irregular basis were believed to understand the value offered by ICTs. Overall, a minimally serviceable technological landscape is in place, and much of the population has learned how to take advantage of the benefits and apply them on a day-to-day basis within their households. However, except for community libraries, the social appropriation aspect is missing in most of the venues. Private information venues such as cybercafés are on the rise and provide immediate access to information.

In Nepal, discrimination based on caste, class, and gender heavily influence access to information and ICTs, and while this is not expected to change in the foreseeable future, it will need to be altered significantly before information is accessible to all.

Nepal's geography also contributes to limiting access and is seen in the urban/rural differences in access to ICT services. Because of the geographic variations in Nepal, people in remote and complex terrains do not have ready access to modern technologies that can improve socio-economic development.

Government policies are only beginning to encourage investment in ICTs and have had little significant impact. The government has been unstable in recent years, and information is not readily provided to the public. Freedom of the press is curtailed, and civil liberties have eroded during recent government turmoil, but the political scenario appears to be slowly changing in a slightly positive direction.

Most of the public perceives access to information and ICTs as important to some degree, but training and capacity building is an urgent need. Several initiatives have been undertaken to decrease this gap, and the telecenter movement is an excellent example. The success or failure of these initiatives depends heavily on the support from the government.

Geography & Economy

Nepal is a landlocked country in South Asia bordered by China to the north and India to the south. The diverse landscape ranges from the humid Terai plains in the south to the Himalaya Mountains in the north. Most of the country's 28.3 million people live in the central highlands.

Nepal is one of the poorest countries in Asia, with one-third of the population living on an estimated US$1 per day. Some of this poverty is a direct result of the country's Hindu caste system. Women suffer from gender inequity in general; in most communities, their access to education is limited, and they have very few opportunities to engage in activities that would provide them with a greater degree of economic freedom. Youth are also marginalized.

Nepal has a diverse combination of cultures, languages, and religions. The 2001 census listed 103 distinct castes and ethnic groups in the country. Most of the country practices Hinduism, but there is a strong Buddhist tradition here as well. Nepali is the official language, and is spoken by almost 60 percent of the population.

Until 1990, Nepal was an absolute monarchy. In 2006, an interim constitution was written that established a popularly elected government with the king as head of state.

COUNTRY PROFILE	
Total population* (millions)	27.6
Urban population* (millions)	4.5
Literacy (%)	53.7
E-readiness	1.73
Gini coefficient	0.47

*World Bank 2006 data

Research Team

Rohit Nepali
SAP International
Phone: 94-11-2502153
97-71-5522234
E-mail: sapeid@sapi.org.np

CIS Contact

Prof. Ricardo Gomez
Center for Information & Society (CIS)
University of Washington
4311 11th Avenue NE, Suite 400
Box 354985
Seattle, WA 98195
cisinfo@u.washington.edu
www.cis.washington.edu

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)

Community libraries: The distinction between community and public library is obscure, but for this study, community libraries have been defined as those venues that serve the people of a particular community and cater to the information needs of that particular community.

Cybercafés: No specific definition, but researchers note that cyber crime is attributed to the lack of standards for cybercafés

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.

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: Commonly labeled a rural area, but definitions of rural or periurban vary by country

Public libraries: Do not receive regular funds from the government ministry, but are provided with some financial support from the local ministries such as the District Development Committee (DDC) and District Education Office (DEO)

Telecenters: Many telecenters, ranging from government centers to private and NGO centers

Front photo: An Internet café in Beni, Nepal. Photo courtesy of Andrew Purdam.