

BCO Impact Assessment Study

THE FINAL REPORT



building communication opportunities

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June 2008



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Introduction

DAVID SOUTER

Building Communication Opportunities (BCO) is an alliance of development organisations concerned with information, communications and development issues. It was formed in 2004 with an initial three-year mandate to support activities which make use of information and communications resources and technologies to contribute to sustainable development and poverty alleviation, empowerment and human rights.

BCO agencies have been concerned from the outset to include “impact assessment” in their objectives for the alliance. An initial report describing the activities supported through BCO was published in 2007.¹

This second report includes the outputs from a series of investigations commissioned by BCO in 2007-2008 to look at different aspects of information, communications and development, including but reaching beyond work in which BCO partners were themselves involved. This introductory chapter outlines the BCO programme and impact assessment work as a whole and presents an overview of the outcomes arising from the latter.

The BCO Alliance

The BCO Alliance was brought together in 2004 as a partnership between “like-minded” donors and implementing agencies. Its membership over the following four years has consisted of three bilateral donors:

- UK Department for International Development (DFID)
- Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)
- Directorate-General for Development Cooperation (DGIS) of the government of the Netherlands

together with six international NGOs:

- World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC)
- Association for Progressive Communications (APC)
- Hivos, itself primarily a donor working in partnership with implementing agencies in developing countries
- International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD)
- OneWorld, particularly OneWorld Africa, OneWorld South Asia and UnMundo América Latina

- Two of the global family of Panos Institutes: Panos London and Panos South Asia.

Funding for BCO activities came primarily from DFID and SDC, with the former financing impact assessment work. The alliance was coordinated, during the initial four-year period, successively by IICD and APC.

To a significant extent, the BCO programme followed on from an earlier DFID-led initiative, Building Digital Opportunities (BDO), which was implemented in the period 2000-2003 and involved four of the BCO implementing agency partners (AMARC, IICD, OneWorld and Panos). There were also significant links between BCO and the DFID-led Catalysing Access to ICTs in Africa (CATIA) programme, which was implemented in the period 2002-2006.

The challenge of information, communications and development

The place of information and communications in development has changed markedly since the mid-1990s, as a result of many factors including technological change and the rapid spread of new technologies such as mobile telephones and the internet.

Until the mid-1990s, “communications for development” discourse was more concerned with communications than with technology, focusing on ways in which information and knowledge are disseminated and in which individuals, communities and social groups participate in society and policy development, articulate their needs and express their views. This included significant concern with media, including electronic media (radio and television), but the emphasis was primarily non-technological.

Rapid developments in information and communications technology led to a new emphasis in some development organisations in the later 1990s on the potential of technology to change the economic, social and power dynamics of societies. Much was then written about the potential for an “Information Society”, culminating in the two sessions of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), held in 2003 and 2005.

Debates about the relative importance of technological and human behavioural issues within communications for development continue today. They continue to be affected by ongoing changes in the prevalence of different communications media and devices, and by growing experience with different technologies, regulatory and other enabling instruments,

¹ www.bcoalliance.org/system/files/BCOImpact+Assessment_C1Report.pdf

and development applications. The evidence base of experience with ICD (information and communications for development) and particularly with ICT4D (information and communication technologies for development) is growing – although it is still problematically weak in many areas, as discussed below – and the sharing of experience continues to bring about new thinking about what can be achieved and what mechanisms and applications are likely to be most appropriate.

BCO agencies have sought to play a part in these debates. In particular, they have been concerned to contribute findings from their own experience to the evidence base that is available, and to share learning from this experience amongst themselves and with others in the development and rights communities. They hope that the materials included in this report will have value for all interested parties.

The BCO approach

BCO partners are engaged in different areas of work within ICD and ICT4D (as the terms are used above). DFID, SDC, DGIS and, to a large extent, Hivos are interested in the selection and funding of programmes and projects which address issues of development, poverty alleviation and empowerment through cooperation with a wide range of partners in different developing countries. The different priorities and activities of the implementing agencies within BCO are described in some detail in the report of Component 1 of the Impact Assessment. Any summary is likely to oversimplify, but, in brief, they might be characterised as follows:

- AMARC is primarily concerned with the promotion and development of community radio.
- APC aims to network civil society organisations to increase awareness and undertake advocacy around the relationships between information, communications, ICTs, rights and development.
- IICD specialises in the use of information and communications technologies as tools for development, in particular the instrumental use of ICTs in various development sectors.
- OneWorld is a network of NGOs which principally provides information on development issues through websites, portals and other media.
- Panos Institutes focus on stimulating pluralism, plural participation in policy debate and participatory communication,

with special emphasis on enhancing the awareness and capacity of media.

BCO sought to build on the existing strengths of its partner organisations, with BCO funding being used in most cases to extend the work which implementing agencies could undertake within their core areas of expertise rather than supporting specific projects that could be clearly identified as “BCO activities”. Detailed information of the activities undertaken by BCO agencies, with and without BCO support, is included in the Component 1 report.

From the beginning, BCO partners declared their aspirations for the partnership to be much broader than simply implementing projects, stressing in particular their “like-minded commitment” to the following common sentiments:

- Understanding that consultation and learning add value to ICT4D strategy and effectiveness on the ground.
- Realisation that finding synergies and avoiding duplication increase the levels of success of the work.
- Awareness that as a group, there is a critical mass of civil society and public sector experience and voice that enriches the quality of ICT4D debate and action.
- Recognition that a common framework – with joint goals, mechanisms and meetings – stimulate consultation and thus collaboration and learning.

At the time of its establishment, BCO partners also agreed the following set of “guiding principles”:

- Poverty alleviation is the overall purpose of the programme.
- Development is the priority, not technology.
- Mixed technologies are the target, old and new combined.
- Mainstreamed ICTs are the focus, meaning development sectors (e.g., health) supported by ICTs.
- Networks are an organisational form that must be stimulated.
- Local ownership is a means to sustainable impact on poverty.
- Collaboration among international and national organisations is a means to strengthening impact.
- Learning and accountability for ICT4D are continuous processes.

Finally, BCO partners agreed that they should seek to achieve outcomes – and learn from experience – in three particular areas, which they defined as follows:

- ICT4D mainstreamed in development sectors (mainstreaming).
- Stronger voice of poor and marginalised people and more and better informed debate about development issues, enabled through ICT (voice).
- Demonstrated impact of ICT4D on poverty (poverty impact).

These three priorities formed a key part of subsequent discussion about the purpose and implementation of the BCO Impact Assessment.

The BCO Impact Assessment

The BCO Impact Assessment, which was supported by DFID, was conceived within this framework as a strategic, collaborative outcome of the BCO Alliance designed to reveal and disseminate findings from BCO experience in these three core areas of mainstreaming, voice and poverty impact. The aim of the study was to move beyond the results associated with individual BCO Alliance partners to provide a larger view of the difference that information, communications and ICTs could offer the lives of poor people.

The Impact Assessment was originally conceived as having three components:

- Component 1 would analyse existing materials within the BCO Alliance to make a preliminary identification of lessons learned and identify opportunities for more in-depth impact assessment and evaluation through Components 2 and 3.
- BCO partners would then undertake their own evaluations and research studies – individually or collectively – in Component 2.
- Component 3 would then provide the space for a study or studies of how ICD contributes to mainstreaming, voice and poverty impact, and how best to disseminate resulting knowledge.

The BCO Alliance commissioned a team of three experts, coordinated by *ict Development Associates Ltd.*, to undertake Components 1 and 3 of the Impact Assessment and to support the integration of these with the work undertaken by partners in Component 2.

Overall, BCO partners hoped that the Impact Assessment would have two main outcomes from their point of view. They hoped that it would provide:

- Learning, i.e., better understanding of what has achieved impact and of the tools that can help replicate it in the future.
- Advocacy, i.e., extending the evidence base on ICD in order to increase the commitment of policy-makers and decision-makers in governments and development agencies.

Impact Assessment Component 1

The purpose of Component 1 of the Impact Assessment was “to identify the extent to which BCO partners have established an evidence base of evaluated experience from BCO-related activities” and make use of this to consider options for Components 2 and 3 and for the communication of results.

The Component 1 report was prepared by David Souter, Tina James and Kate Wild, with additional input from James Deane, and was published by BCO in 2007. It includes a description of the BCO-related work of partner agencies, an assessment of their evaluation and impact assessment work, consideration of the overall evidence base from BCO and other ICD initiatives, and recommended options for Components 2 and 3. An annex lists activities and documentation considered during the component.

Impact Assessment Component 2

Activities undertaken by BCO partners in Component 2 of the Impact Assessment can be found on the BCO website at www.bcoalliance.org/node/74. This enables access to four outputs:

- An evaluation report on the strategic partnership between Hivos and IICD between 2003 and 2006.
- The report of a 2004 evaluation of IICD work in Uganda.
- A tracer study of training graduates of Panos South Asia's Media Centre Programme.
- The evaluation report of Panos South Asia's Building ICT Opportunities for Development Communications Project.

Other BCO partner reports are cited in the report of Component 1.

Impact Assessment Component 3

The Component 1 report assessed a great deal of BCO partner work and evaluative material. While considerable work was being undertaken by BCO partners, this covered a wide range

of activity types, reflecting the different styles and objectives of BCO partners. Much of this was too recent for any proper assessment of impact to be made as yet. Evaluation coverage was also variable and had used diverse methodologies and approaches. BCO partners recognised that this posed major challenges for them in consolidating learning across the BCO programme and, in particular, drawing together conclusions for wider dissemination and advocacy work.

The BCO Alliance asked *ict Development Associates Ltd.* to undertake a scoping study of options for Component 3 in the light of these conclusions and of discussions with individual partners. As a result of these discussions, BCO partners agreed to restructure Component 3 into a series of four investigations which would explore different aspects of ICD experience and impact assessment, including inputs from both BCO partners and other ICD agencies. The final structure for Component 3 was agreed at a meeting in Bern in September 2007, as follows:

Four investigations would be undertaken in Component 3. Three of these would investigate hypotheses linked to BCO objectives in terms of voice, poverty reduction and networking, while the fourth would explore issues related to impact assessment for ICD in general. They were organised as follows:

Investigation 1: Voice	The Impact of Radio on Political Change: A Practitioner Perspective	Chris Greene
	Radio and Recent Political Changes in Nepal	Pratyoush Onta
Investigation 2: Poverty impact	ICT, Markets and Development	Richard Duncombe
	ICT, Pro-Poor Markets and Livelihoods	Manuel Acevedo
Investigation 3: Networks	Addressing the Value of Networks in Development Policy Influence	Enrique Mendizabal and Pam Muckosy
	Assessment of a Policy Advocacy Network in Ecuador	Manuel Acevedo
Investigation 4	ICD and Impact Assessment	David Souter
	Report of a Workshop	Workshop report

An additional study of gender networking and advocacy in the context of WSIS was subsequently added to Investigation 3. The reports of all four investigations are brought together in this overall report of Component 3 of the BCO Impact Assessment. Each investigation is introduced with a brief summary of issues raised by the lead consultant for the Impact Assessment, David Souter. The reports themselves have been discussed between their authors and the BCO partners involved in the investigations, but their texts are entirely the work of report authors and reflect those authors' views. They do not necessarily reflect the views of BCO, BCO partners or *ict Development Associates Ltd.*

Summarising the Impact Assessment

As noted earlier, BCO partners had two main objectives in undertaking the Impact Assessment work which is described above.

- Learning, i.e., better understanding of what has achieved impact and of the tools that can help replicate it in the future.
- Advocacy, i.e., extending the evidence base on ICD in order to increase the commitment of policy-makers and decision-makers in governments and development agencies.

In both contexts, partners recognised that the existing evidence base for the types of work in which they are involved is at present insufficient. This is true both of the evidence base in general and of the evidence accumulated through evaluations and other assessments of BCO partners' own activities.

While partners do use learning from evaluations and assessment of previous work to support the design and implementation of new programmes and projects, they recognise that better-organised and more widespread assessment of more diverse experiences, conducted to rigorous standards, would increase their capacity to enhance further the design and implementation of future work. This would be of direct benefit to them as organisations and, more importantly, add significantly to the contribution they can make to achieving the objectives that they share with their development partners (other NGOs, local communities and individuals).

BCO partners are also concerned about uncertainty, within donor organisations, as to the value of the work that they and others do in ICD. Since the World Summit on the Information Society concluded in 2005, some have a sense that some donors have moved on to other aspects of development and now pay less attention to ICD and ICT4D. (This may not be the case

with donors that are directly involved in BCO.) At the heart of donor uncertainty lie weaknesses in the evidence base for ICD and ICT4D which were identified during Component 1 of the Impact Assessment, and which were listed there as follows:²

- The experience of deploying ICTs in development is relatively new. Insufficient time has elapsed to allow for reliable judgements to be made of the impact of new technologies and the opportunities they offer.
- Much of the assessment which has been undertaken is based on short-term evaluation of pilot projects, and is focused narrowly on these particular experiences and on target beneficiaries. There has been little assessment of the holistic experience of ICT deployment or of outcomes/impact at a national level.
- The starting point for most ICD evaluation has been technological “solutions” rather than the development problems against which they might be deployed. This has led to a concentration within the evidence on technology rather than development, and on inputs rather than outcomes.
- Little has been done to relate evidence to the mainstream development sectors which are the main concern of development policy-makers. ICD experience has largely been assessed from the viewpoint of the potential of ICD rather than the challenges of health, education, poverty, rural development, etc. This has made it appear less relevant to mainstream development managers.
- Integration between ICD strategies and national development strategies, including Poverty Reduction Strategies, has been poor.
- Little has been done to date to gather together the broad range of evidence available from different countries and sectors and to make a cohesive assessment of this. (However, the Communication Initiative does provide a significant amount of raw material; and a number of attempts at cohesive assessment are now underway, including initiatives sponsored by DFID and by *infoDev*.)
- Much ICD advocacy has been overenthusiastic, unresponsive to the concerns of mainstream development managers, naïve about the challenges posed in deploying new technologies in poor communities, and insufficiently concerned by the limitations of the evidence base available.

Development agencies are used to making decisions on the strength of past evidence about what works and what does not. Until the evidence base for ICD and ICT4D is strengthened, donors, in particular, are likely to remain cautious about committing substantial resources to them. Their caution may be exacerbated by increasing pressure to achieve the Millennium Development Goals as the deadline for these approaches. As a result, some of the potential benefits which can derive from ICD and ICT4D as cross-cutting instruments for development activity may not be secured. BCO partners are therefore keen to contribute as much as possible to the evidence base for ICD. That evidence base, it should be said, is also improving naturally as experience with ICD initiatives grows and more time has elapsed to enable more effective assessment of them to be made.

Two important issues arise from these concerns, and are reflected in this report.

The first concerns the diversity of ICD experience. As already noted, while the various BCO agencies are all engaged, in one way or another, with information, communications and ICTs, the work which they undertake is also quite diverse. Some are concerned primarily with using information, communication and ICT resources to influence broad relationships and capabilities within society – to empower the poor and marginalised, to include the voices of the many in policy development and governance, to advocate for policy change, to improve levels of understanding and knowledge within communities. Others are concerned primarily with using these resources instrumentally, to improve the quality of service delivery and enable individuals and communities to maximise opportunities and potential through enhancements to health, education, entrepreneurship and other aspects of their lives.

This diversity is evident across the spectrum of ICD and ICT4D activity, and was well-described by one partner (during the Impact Assessment workshop held as part of Investigation 4) as representing a distinction between work which is designed to affect the enabling environment for both ICTs and social/economic/political relations, on the one hand, and work with direct instrumental purpose on the other. When we speak of ICD, we often include both of these types of activity without necessarily recognising the differences between them. It would be better to acknowledge this duality and build the evidence base in full recognition of its significance.

The second important issue concerns the type of results assessment which can and should be undertaken. Much of the existing evidence base for ICD is built on evaluation reports, which are, by definition, concerned with assessing whether or not (and to

² These points are also made in the report of Investigation 4.

what degree) a particular development intervention succeeded in achieving the objectives that were set out for it at its inception. Evaluation reports, therefore, are largely contained “within the project”. Impact assessment, however, is a much broader investigation into the consequences or results of any intervention, including unexpected impacts, outcomes for those outside the terms of reference of the intervention, and lasting consequences over a significant period of time. It is, in short, concerned with identifying “lasting and sustainable changes in people’s lives” and assessing the extent to which these can be attributed to or associated with particular development interventions.

BCO partners were keen to explore ways in which they could reach beyond evaluation of their work towards impact assessment as it is generally understood within development, and Investigation 4 of the Impact Assessment focused on this question. A number of difficulties were identified by partners in this context during the investigation. The context within which ICD interventions take place is changing rapidly, not least as a result of changes in information and communications technology and markets themselves. It is difficult, in particular, to attribute outcomes to a particular development intervention when the availability and use of other information and communication resources is being transformed, by operation of the market, all around it. Most ICD work is very recent, and impact assessment requires time for “lasting and sustainable changes” to become apparent. Donors are reluctant to fund longitudinal studies after the conclusion of interventions, and implementing agencies for ICD are usually quite small and lack the resources needed to undertake them on their own. The challenge of assessing the impact of interventions concerned with the media, advocacy or the creation of an enabling and empowering environment is particularly difficult because of the multifarious other factors with which they interact.

Impact assessment is, therefore, quite a challenge for BCO partners and ICD agencies in general – but partners recognised its importance for both of their core objectives, of learning and advocacy work. Some of the ways in which they felt it would be possible to move forward on this are included in the report of a workshop held towards the end of the BCO period, which can be found as the final chapter of this report. Partners are considering whether BCO provides a possible framework for further joint work in these areas.

The other three investigations in Component 3 of the Impact Assessment looked at different aspects of the work which BCO partners have undertaken and sought to relate this to the existing general evidence base in these areas. There was no at-

tempt here to seek to be comprehensive in terms of either BCO or ICD.

The evidence available in BCO was described at one point in the Impact Assessment as a patchwork quilt – an accumulation of uncoordinated pieces of evidence which might, if put together carefully, suggest a pattern without providing a complete picture.

The three aspects (or “patches”) of ICD experience selected for Component 3 were chosen because of the levels of interest expressed by partners and the availability of experiences which partners felt were suitable for assessment. These were concerned with:

1. Radio and political change
2. ICTs, markets and the poor
3. Policy networks in the ICD arena

Each investigation included a review of evidence concerning its theme within the ICD and development literature in general. These were undertaken by experts with different backgrounds: in the case of radio and political change, a practicing journalist; in that of ICTs, markets and the poor, an established academic in the field; in that of networks, an authoritative development policy think tank with relevant experience.

Each investigation also included an assessment of particular experience in which BCO partners have been directly involved – the relationship between radio and political change in recent times in Nepal (which has engaged AMARC and Panos South Asia); experience with a number of Hivos and IICD interventions concerned with entrepreneurship, ICTs and market development in Ecuador; and the role of gender/ICT networking during the World Summit on the Information Society.

These individual experiences are, of course, highly specific. It is difficult to draw generalisations from an assessment of radio and political change in Nepal, for example, because of the highly specific social and political context in that country. However, BCO partners hoped that the experiences selected would enable pointers to be identified, and so would help to clarify the issues and questions facing work of a similar nature in other contexts. In particular, partners hoped that assessment of these particular experiences would add to the quantity of evidence which was assessed in the more general studies associated with each investigation, and add insights to their individual and collective thinking about the issues.

The four main sections of this report on Component 3 of the BCO Impact Assessment contain the inquiry reports in these three areas of development experience and the Investigation 4 inquiry into ICD impact assessment itself. Each section begins with an introduction which explores some of the issues raised by the investigation and facing BCO partners and other ICD agencies in its area. The content of these introductions will not be repeated here. A few final thoughts are worth raising, however, about the BCO Impact Assessment as a whole and about the implications of the findings contained in the various investigation reports.

Overall, it would be fair to say that the BCO Impact Assessment has developed BCO partners' appreciation of both the complexity and the importance of impact assessment in their work, and the relationship between the ICD evidence base and the decision-making processes of their major development partners.

There is a growing understanding in the ICD community that much more could and should be done to improve the rigour and sophistication of results assessment in this area. Too much of the current evidence base relies on narrow pilot projects and on evaluations which look only at short-term results for target beneficiaries. A good deal of this has also been written up in enthusiastic language which has encouraged rather than diminished scepticism about ICD in other parts of the development community. Increasing recognition of these problems with the evidence base, together with the more considered and rigorously developed evidence now accumulating, suggests that over the next few years it will become easier to integrate ICTs into the development mainstream.

BCO partners have learnt a great deal from their own experience, including much about the nature of ICD interventions. They reflect, in their own work, the considerable diversity encompassed by the term, including work to do with media, advocacy, empowerment and service delivery. They are highly conscious of the complex ways in which their interventions interact with contextual change in the communities with which they work, including the rapid pace of change in ICT technologies and markets. They recognise the difficulty of attribution, and the need to balance enthusiasm for the potential of ICTs with understanding of the challenges involved in their deployment, management and use.

The three Impact Assessment investigations concerned with particular aspects of ICD demonstrate very well the complexity and level of nuanced understanding required here. Changes in the nature and content of radio broadcasting in Nepal have clearly played a part in recent political change, but the investigation

also raises many questions about the relationship, including the relevance of issues concerning ownership, journalistic standards and listener behaviour. Participants in Hivos/IICD interventions in Ecuador have gained new opportunities in income generation, but the capacity of individuals to take advantage of new opportunities depends on many other factors, of both market dynamics and entrepreneurial behaviour. Gender/ICT networking played a part in raising awareness and developing language in the WSIS process, but it is hard to draw links between this and subsequent change in countries represented.

While the reports included in this volume cannot resolve many questions about the impact of ICD, it is hoped that they do shed some new light and suggest some new directions for BCO partners and others to pursue. ■

Introduction

DAVID SOUTER

Two different approaches can sometimes be observed in discussions about information, communications and development. Some in this field of development focus primarily on the role of communications – on the ways in which information is transferred between people and organisations, how the views and needs of individuals and communities are articulated (particularly to those in authority), the relationship between information, knowledge and empowerment. Others have focused much more on the role of technology – in particular, on the potential of new technologies to enable activities which were previously impossible, too expensive or too complex to deliver.

In many ways, broadcasting lies at the confluence of these two approaches. From the “communications for development” perspective, it enables the transfer of information to take place with greater immediacy, over greater distances and to larger groups of people. It also provides vehicles for the articulation of diverse views and citizens’ needs, where ownership and regulation so permit. This communication is, however, mediated through technology – requiring networks which need capital and management, and terminal equipment which citizens must obtain and use. As a result, broadcasting is sometimes included in discussions of ICTs within development, but sometimes not. It was, for example, little covered during the World Summit on the Information Society. (There is also increasing interest in the interaction between broadcasting and other ICTs, such as the use of internet as both journalistic resource and broadcasting medium.)

The fact is, however, that radio receivers are by far the most widely available ICT devices and have very high levels of use in most low-income communities. The content of radio broadcasting is, therefore, potentially highly influential in social, political and developmental change. In particular, radio broadcasting has the capacity to bring a new and wider range of ideas, voices and opinions into public discussion of any issue – from technical aspects of farm management to the norms of sexual behaviour in the age of HIV, from the rights of children to the wrongs of political mismanagement and corruption. Its ability to do this is more accessible and more flexible even than print media, which require literacy and have more costly distribution networks. Radio’s role as an entertainment medium also makes it highly attractive in almost all social groups.

Until recently, however, in most jurisdictions, broadcasting was tightly controlled by governments – often through state ownership of broadcasting stations and/or controls on technical resources such as spectrum and on programming. Most countries have now seen diversification of broadcasting ownership and content, with the emergence of commercial radio and of non-

profit radio stations which may seek to serve a community mandate or be supported by (for example) confessional or political interests. The range of new broadcasting models is quite wide, including intersecting relationships between different types of radio station in different communities.

One BCO partner, AMARC – the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters – has played a leading role in supporting and promoting community radio stations, which community radio activists would define (broadly speaking) as stations that include some form of community ownership and participation in a non-profit-making context.

The potential impact of radio stations is believed to be highly significant – not least because of past experience, both positive (e.g., the use of radio programmes as information and campaigning tools; or as vehicles for the expression of public opinion), and negative (e.g., where they have been used to promote ethnic hostility).

The implications of the changing range of radio broadcasting in society have received a good deal of attention from development agencies. There has been strong support from some agencies, including DFID and SDC, for independent and community stations, with two main objectives in mind: to convey information with developmental value; and to provide spaces in which previously under-represented groups – the poor and marginalised, women and minorities – can express their views and articulate their needs.

Discussions about the impact of radio in developing countries have focused on two main areas: impact on social and economic conditions of life (e.g., on poverty reduction); and impact on engagement on political and social change (e.g., on participation and empowerment). While most civil society organisations and NGOs concerned with communications would see these as quite strongly linked, there have been significant differences of emphasis in the focus of different NGOs and in the evaluation and analytical literature that has resulted from their work.

BCO partners decided to take the opportunity of the BCO Impact Assessment to include an investigation into the relationship between radio and change in developing countries. After internal discussion within BCO, it was decided to focus this investigation on political change rather than poverty reduction, and in particular on the hypothesis that *Information and communication resources and capabilities among the poor and marginalised deepen people’s ability to influence their circumstances and participate in democratic processes/political*

change. Two pieces of work were commissioned as part of this investigation:

- Journalist Chris Greene was commissioned to give a personal practitioner's perspective on the issues, based on his own experience in a number of countries and on the literature discussed within the professional journalist community.
- A specific study of the relationship between radio and political change in Nepal was commissioned from Pratyoush Onta, who has observed both political and broadcasting issues in Nepal for many years.

The authors of both studies were particularly asked to include within their studies:

- An overall view of the extent to which radio has played and can play a significant part in influencing the nature of political debate or political outcomes.
- Aspects of radio, including community radio, which distinguish it from other media in influencing political change.
- Aspects of the regulation of radio, and of the style and content of radio, which affect its capacity to influence political change.
- Relevant issues concerning the relationship between radio and other stakeholders, including government agencies, communications businesses, civil society actors and political organisations.

In the case of Nepal, the terms of reference specifically asked for the study to consider:

- The development of radio, including community radio, as a medium for public engagement in issues concerning poverty, development and political change.
- The changing relationship in this context between radio and other media (and the significance of changes in the regulatory and business environment for radio).
- Ways in which the changing availability and character of radio have changed the availability of media of expression for individual citizens, civil society organisations and political actors.
- Assessments of the impact that radio, other media, and participation in radio and other media have had on political change in Nepal during the past two years.

Two BCO partners – AMARC and Panos South Asia – engaged directly with this work, particularly the study of Nepal. In addition, but outside the BCO Impact Assessment, OneWorld South Asia has been engaged on work concerned with its experience of the impact of radio on poverty reduction. Also outside the BCO Impact Assessment, but within its overall timeframe, AMARC has undertaken and published its own Community Radio Social Impact Assessment,¹ built around AMARC members' perceptions of their experience.

Two overarching challenges seem important in the impact assessment of media on development and political change, particularly of media interventions which are undertaken with developmental aims.

The first is the difficulty of separating out the impact of particular interventions from that of change within the media in general. Most countries have seen extensive changes in the way in which media interact with society – changes in the extent of access to different media, particularly radio; in the balance of information and communication channels used by citizens, including increased exposure to diaspora influence; in the ownership, style, content and diversity of broadcast channels; in the contexts in which different media are used.

Both reports for this investigation raise a number of important issues about these contextual questions in considering what it is about radio that can facilitate empowerment and participation and can influence political change. In doing so they reflect the different emphases evident in broader discussions, for example between those who emphasise the importance of ownership (e.g., state versus commercial versus community radio) and those who emphasise the importance of ethos (e.g., non-partisanship, open access and “public service” concepts). Many factors clearly influence the level and nature of the impact which radio stations may have, including levels of access (both geographical and household); the licensing and regulatory environment which influences stations' behaviour, independence and sustainability; attitudes to pluralism within and between competing radio stations; openness to “vox pop” or public access programming; funding models (e.g., advertising, political or confessional sponsorship, development agency support); and the quality of journalism and editorial integrity. These factors are likely to be highly contextual, and suggest the need for much more research that looks at the relationship between media and political change in the light of local circumstances.

The second challenge results from the way in which media interact with social change. Development interventions which are concerned with service delivery are essentially instrumental: their purpose is to secure specific changes in people's lives which can be readily identified and causally linked to the intervention itself. Interventions which seek to influence the media are much more indirectly linked with specific outcomes, because they are concerned more with the enabling environment in which development or political change takes place. They aim to improve the quality of information that is available to people, or to widen the range of participatory opportunities. How these qualitative changes then impact on society is much less easy to predict; how they have impacted, much more difficult to discern. Impact is likely to be more nebulous and more gradual where media are concerned than it is in instrumental development activity, though that does not make it less influential in the longer term – indeed, it may make it more so. The challenge of impact assessment in this area was also taken up by BCO partners in Investigation 4. ■

¹ evaluation.amarc.org/evaluation.php

The Impact of Radio on Political Change: A Practitioner Perspective¹

CHRIS GREENE

Introduction

For anyone working in media who has the questioning mind essential for good journalism, there is a rarely silent nagging voice asking if what one is doing is of any use.

For those lucky enough to work in mainstream media there are awards and the professional encouragement of colleagues and editors, not to mention audience feedback – whether in the form of letters from listeners/readers/viewers or an angry call from a politician's press minder.

But for those working in what can loosely be termed media for development, the possibilities for affirmation are fewer and more tenuous. There is huge satisfaction to be gained from getting a radio station up and running where no media existed before, but if the station stumbles and fails, has one done any good? Thousands of training programmes have sought to reinforce good standards of journalism in countries in crisis; but if an "outcome" is a good trainee ending up imprisoned, beaten or killed, what is the point?

Less dramatically, funders of projects with a media component want proof that their money is having at least some of the desired impact. But how to measure success when social change is often so intangible and multifaceted?

This paper is written from the perspective of someone who has worked for almost two decades as a programme-maker, editor, trainer, project manager and evaluator working mostly in radio at every level from community stations to international broadcasters. A media practitioner's focus is unashamedly practical and is centred on the audience; the key is to find what works for those who listen/read/watch/click on a link/open their SMS inbox....

And if it works, then can we work out why and whether lessons can be drawn for use in other contexts? And if it seems to work, can we prove that what we did really was the reason that it worked?

Many of the examples used in this paper come from the author's own experience, and these are supplemented by reports from others working in the field. No single theoretical model is proposed or followed. Rather, the approach is more akin to journalism – what are the different versions of the story and can we draw from these to get at something near a truth?

Media impact

There is no doubt that there is a strong and pervasive view that media in general, and radio in particular in poor communities, play an influential role in promoting political, social and economic outcomes – though not always desirable ones.

To cite just one recent example, this is the opening paragraph of a newly published report for the Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA):

Independent media play a critical role in building and sustaining democracies, societies, and economies around the world. They provide citizens with the information necessary to make informed political and economic choices. Independent media give voice to women, youth, and minorities, along with dissident political opinions. They also improve communities by providing citizens with important information on health, the environment, and rural development, and help people prevent and respond to disasters (Graves 2007).

At first sight this seems logical to those who live in media-rich societies. Of course we are influenced by what we read online, what we watch on TV, what we find in our newspapers or hear on the radio: we copy the clothes, habits and make-up of celebrities; we decide what film to see based on the reviews we have read; and so on.

Our rulers certainly believe we are influenced by media. The gradual erosion of dissenting voices from Russian TV stations in the Putin years, the beatings and bombings suffered by the independent press in Zimbabwe, the emphasis on spin of the Labour government in the UK all demonstrate in their different ways the importance governments put on getting their message across. Nor is this anything new: in the later years of her reign Queen Elizabeth I of England banned portraits of herself as an old woman, fearing these could convey the idea that she was weakening (Shapiro 2006).

The problem comes when we try to pin down the effect of any one type of medium or even a single programme or article on a particular population. After all, human societies were developing long before the advent of anything that resembles mass media, though one can certainly make the case that there has been an acceleration since the invention of printing. In looking at broadcast media in particular we should bear in mind that they have yet to reach their first century, and

¹ The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the BCO Alliance, individual partners of BCO or *ict Development Associates Ltd*.

revolutionary change was certainly possible before such media existed. Indeed the written word may have been as powerful as anything we see today. The opening up of religious freedom in Reformation Europe following the availability of vernacular bibles; the role of Thomas Paine's pamphleteering in the French and American revolutions; the political outcry about the condition of the urban poor in England that was, at least in part, stirred by the novels of Charles Dickens serialised in popular print media of the day – all these examples suggest that media can be a part of major social or political change.

The key phrase in the preceding sentence is "at least in part". It seems to be the case that media can reinforce trends for good or ill that are already present. Media certainly are not sufficient on their own to lead to desired political outcomes; they may not even be necessary, but they probably are helpful if other conditions are propitious.

Evaluation

A properly sceptical summary of the literature is bound to use terms such as "probably", because as the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC)'s recent overview of community radio experience puts it, "systematic impact assessment is rare" (AMARC 2007, 23). A further problem in assessing impact is that changes in human behaviour rarely happen overnight or even in the evaluation periods relevant to funders of projects aiming to use media to effect change. It is more than special pleading when AMARC reports:

In terms of how to evaluate, the time of measurement is vital; the real measurements of community radio impact assessment should be longer than months or years (AMARC 2007, 37).

Effective evaluation of media impact on communities is very difficult – and rare. In an article on her work in Mozambique, Danish academic Birgitte Jallof (2005) comments:

It has long been debated how – in any way that makes sense – to clearly present qualitative, long term effects and impacts of media interventions. A vast body of experience exists, usually covering quantitative, immediate effects on an audience. These are, however, usually far from demonstrating longer-term community change.

Jallof proposes a participatory methodology involving explicit research into community perceptions of the station. While this is certainly of value, it is hard to see how it can clearly differentiate the unique role of the radio station in bringing about whatever change is observed in the community or the behaviour of individuals within it.

Conflict

Political debate is one form of human behaviour. Those who seek to change the behaviour of a certain population – whether they be genocidal politicians, well-meaning development agencies or businesses advertising their products or services – all use media in similar ways to promote the end they seek. The media appear to be neutral to the message.

Thus in Rwanda in 1994, Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines notoriously urged on those who were turning on their neighbours in such murderous fashion. But the same broadcasts in, say, Sweden would have had no effect. It was because the tensions over land and perceived ethnicity already existed, and because those contending for state power had succeeded in establishing a discourse in which the normally unimaginable became thinkable, that the broadcasts seem to have contributed to encouraging people to participate in the extreme events that followed. And for the same reasons, a station broadcasting a message of "steady on chaps, let's not be too hasty" would perhaps have had negligible impact. Two of the founders of the station were given long prison sentences by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda for their roles in using media to stir up genocidal hatred – which suggests that evidence of media's impact on behaviour meets criminal justice standards of proof.

That conflict does not depend on the presence of inflammatory media is perhaps harder to show in the modern world, since the latter will almost inevitably be present in times of conflict. One possible example may be found in Southern Sudan, which until very recently has been a remarkably media-free zone, at least in terms of what we think of as modern media: virtually no newspapers and none beyond a couple of urban centres, no local broadcast media and extreme poverty contributed to an environment where few had shortwave radios let alone the electricity to run a television. Yet, long before civil wars or even the colonial era exacerbated the situation, tensions between various groups would fester and from time to time erupt in violence.

A conflict region where media, particularly radio, have been more salient is the Somali-speaking Horn of Africa. Somalia and Somaliland also provide an interesting illustration of the effects of the presence and absence of state control.

Somalia has had no functioning state since 1991 when rebel factions forced out the government of Siad Barre but then turned against each other. From then until 2006 Somalia was a collection of fiefdoms under the loose control of various warlords. Prior to the ousting of the Siad Barre government the state media had a monopoly on broadcasting. Following the collapse of central authority, a number of partisan radio stations appeared but none established any credibility. Then, starting in the late 1990s, two independent FM stations were set up in Mogadishu: the first in 1999, HornAfrik, by exiles returning from Canada, and the second in 2003, Shabelle, by lo-

cal media professionals. The success of these stations showed there was a market for media that sought to be independent of the warring factions and clans that then dominated Mogadishu. Other stations such as Radio Banadir and IQK, an Islamic station, followed this trend.

In early 2006 a coalition of warlords (with USA encouragement at least) tried to attack the militia of the Islamic Courts that had been set up in many districts of the capital. These courts were largely funded by businessmen fed up with the lawlessness that prevailed in the capital. Since the Islamic militia were trained and motivated and had widespread public support, they succeeded in defeating the warlords and chasing them out of Mogadishu, which came under unified control for the first time since the departure of international forces in 1993. The fighting provided a grim example of the power of real-time reporting on radio – artillery gunners reportedly used the reports of local radio stations about where shells had landed to correct their aim. The Islamic Courts authorities had an uneasy relationship with the local media but by and large let them operate until the Ethiopian invasion in December 2006/January 2007 chased them out.

Given the complete mess that characterises Mogadishu at the time of writing – 600,000 people have fled the daily bombings and shootings – is it possible to say that these stations had any impact on the political process? Whilst on their own they could not stop the disastrous outcome of the attempts in 2007 to impose the squabbling and ineffective Transitional Federal Government (TFG), prior to the Ethiopian invasion they did have some influence on the political debate.

For example, during the years of talks in Kenya that led to the establishment of the TFG, HornAfrik often carried live coverage and debates around what was happening, along with significant audience participation, including from diaspora communities. At the same time Radio Shabelle had, among other political discussion programming, a very popular daily drama which mercilessly mocked the warlords.

Programmes like these may have played a (small) part in undermining the position of the warlords who were so easily defeated when they tried to oust the Islamic Courts militias in early 2006. The subsequent unified control of the city for the only time since 1991 clearly had popular acquiescence – in several districts local people had fed the fighters as they fought against the warlords. It is noteworthy that the Islamic Courts authorities, despite their authoritarian stance, allowed the radio stations to continue with political programming with relatively little interference. In contrast, since the TFG was imposed on the city there have been a string of assassinations of prominent journalists (by persons unknown) and armed attacks on stations (by TFG forces).

In other words, while there was some space for pluralist media the stations were able to contribute to a climate where civil

society and business communities could debate the situation. However, this climate was never strong enough to survive once key political players opted for a purely military solution. The TFG has set up a tame radio station but there is no evidence it has any impact or even audience. For now the independent stations are managing to survive despite frequent closures and appalling violence, but their room for manoeuvre and thus potential impact is severely circumscribed.

Behaviour change

In contrast, the government of the self-declared independent Republic of Somaliland in the former British Somaliland territory in the northwest has steadfastly failed to implement the provisions of its own constitution, which allows for private radio. Somaliland politicians justify this by pointing to the chaos in Mogadishu as an example of what happens if free media are allowed. The only station permitted is the government-owned Radio Hargeisa. To the extent that it has any political programming it is not widely heard and is mostly mistrusted.

However, it does not follow that what Radio Hargeisa broadcasts has no impact whatsoever. A health education drama, *Saxan Saxo*, funded by the British NGO Health Unlimited, has been on the air intermittently since 1997 and has regularly tackled one of the key issues in gender politics: the extremely high incidence in Somali culture of female genital mutilation. There is some evidence that over the same period there has been a marked decline in the incidence of the more extreme forms of mutilation. An evaluation in 2006 found that it was not possible to ascribe this drop solely to the drama despite its seeming popularity. Rather, what seemed to be happening was that because people were hearing similar messages from their doctors and religious leaders as well as from the radio they were beginning to take note.²

Survey data in Somaliland is poor, but to the extent that female genital mutilation has declined over the period the drama has been on air, this cannot plausibly be adduced as evidence of the radio drama's unique impact. The correlation is interesting, however, and suggests a weaker interpretation of impact may have observational validity. Nevertheless, one should not discount the possibility that the drama's popularity stems at least in part from people recognising debates already taking place in their families and communities. In other words, it can be suggested that we have here another example of media reinforcing an existing process.

2 Saxan Saxo evaluation report for Health Unlimited by A. Sharma and C. Greene, December 2006.

Cause or symptom?

This correlation of media activity with certain outcomes has been seen elsewhere and in very different cultures. Besley et al. (2002) note a strong correlation in Indian states between the responsiveness of government to need for public food distribution and the per capita newspaper circulation in contrast to the poor correlation between responsiveness and per capita income. The correlation is interesting, particularly given Amartya Sen's (1984) oft-cited observation that

India has not had a famine since independence, and given the nature of Indian politics and society, it is not likely that India can have a famine even in years of great food problems. The government cannot afford to fail to take prompt action when large-scale starvation threatens. Newspapers play an important part in this, in making the facts known and forcing the challenge to be faced.

Nevertheless, it is hard not to suspect that a population with the literacy and means to sustain a flourishing press may in any case be better at agitating for its share of resources. Again, the correlation may only show that the media are a symptom of a community able to impact on a political process.

Assessment of the impact of radio on rural communities in the rich world is rare, as TV and press get more attention and seem to be thought to have more influence. But one interesting study (Stromberg 2002) has looked at whether allocation of funds in a large, early New Deal programme in the USA was affected by the increasing use of radio. It so happened that the Federal Emergency Relief Administration programme was implemented just as radio ownership was becoming widespread in the USA. Stromberg found that there was a strong association between the share of households in a county that had a radio and levels of relief spending. He further notes an association between higher radio ownership and higher voter turnout.

Stromberg is careful to use terms like "association" and, again, it is all too easy to question the direction of causality. Did radio use spread more quickly in communities that already had a level of political engagement demonstrated both by higher turnout and by better skills at agitating for resources?

Claims for the effectiveness of community radio stations quite often assume what might be described as mono-causality. To take one example among many, the above-mentioned social impact assessment by AMARC (2007) states that "the organizing power of community radio is demonstrated clearly by case stories of Bolivian miners' radio."

Yet it is equally plausible to argue that the success of Bolivian mining communities in establishing and sustaining community radio stations was the product of an already highly organised community. In other words, once again this can be seen as an

example of radio reinforcing what is already present. It should be stressed that this is not a negligible achievement.

Ownership

Does it make a difference whether the media in question are state-owned, privately owned or community-owned? Djankov et al. (2002) examined the interrelationship between media ownership patterns and political, economic and social outcomes across the globe. Unfortunately, they limited themselves to major television stations and daily newspapers, but their findings still show some interesting pointers.

In a survey of 97 countries they found that state and family ownership accounted for the overwhelming proportion of the top five television stations and daily newspapers in each country. Widely dispersed shareholding and cooperative models are rare. They further found that:

...government ownership of the media is higher in countries that are poorer, that have more autocratic regimes, and where overall state ownership of the economy is higher. These results cast doubt on the proposition that state ownership of the media serves benevolent ends.

In particular, they noted, "Government ownership of the press typically has a negative effect on citizens' rights and corruption." Less predictably they also found that "higher state ownership of the media is associated with weaker security of property... Countries with higher state ownership of the media also exhibit lower quality of regulation."

Social outcomes show even stronger associations of poor outcomes with state ownership:

Health outcomes, such as life expectancy, infant mortality, and malnutrition, are also worse in countries where the government owns more media outlets. Media ownership structures that are associated with better economic and political variables are also beneficial for social outcomes.

In a sense, this positive correlation of better social outcomes with non-state ownership is less predictable given the predominance of (presumably elite) family ownership within the private sector.

However, once again it is not clear that we are seeing cause and effect here (and the authors are careful not to claim it). Negligible state ownership of media may just be one sign of a state that prioritises positive social and economic outcomes.

Nevertheless, as Joseph Stiglitz (2002) points out, "There is a natural asymmetry of information between those who govern and those whom they are supposed to serve."

Legal framework

Broadcast media have often been more intrusively regulated than print. To an extent, this is a hang-over from the days of spectrum scarcity, but it also probably reflects the concern of authoritarian regimes that broadcast media can reach far beyond the educated urban elite. Even outside media can be controlled to a certain degree. Shortwave radio signals can be jammed, though at considerable cost, especially if the broadcaster is able to multiply frequencies. Satellite TV is harder to stop – traditional roof architecture in parts of the Middle East is particularly well-suited to concealing illicit satellite dishes, and decoders can usually be hacked.

The wider legal system in a country has a clear effect on the ability of media to do their job of informing people. This is not just in terms of actual laws but also how governments and judicial systems interact. An extreme example is that of Somalia, described above. When there was no central authority, independent FM radio stations were able to emerge in Mogadishu. Since Ethiopian troops imposed the Transitional Federal Government in early 2007, the latter, without any judicial oversight, have sought to dominate the independent media using powerful means, including armed attacks on media premises. In Somaliland the government has been able to ignore its own constitution and forbid independent radio.

Elsewhere, the balance of power between different arms of the state can be crucial to the media. In Zimbabwe, the government has consistently overridden court rulings and introduced legislation that contravenes the country's constitution (Chavunduka 2002).

Community radio is particularly vulnerable to regulatory difficulties. In Indonesia, for example, the narrow range of spectrum allocated to community radio is very close to the frequencies used by the military – which gives an excuse to claim spectrum interference as the grounds for closing down a station. Additionally, commercial radio stations often edge – deliberately or otherwise – into the part of the spectrum supposedly off limits to non-community stations.³

Indonesia provides a good example of how powerful commercial media houses may work together with government to hinder the development of community radio. The owners of big chains of media houses perceive a common interest with government to maintain a strict centrally regulated media environment as a buttress to the barriers to entry they can already erect by effectively cornering national advertising markets.

Indonesia's lack of legislative clarity about community radio's right to exist and raise revenue to ensure sustainability has hampered the growth of the sector. In provinces where the provincial regulatory authority is sympathetic to the sector, permits are ob-

tainable – though the bureaucratic process is cumbersome for a small community-based organisation to work through. In other areas stations face the choice between illegality or giving up.

The rapid democratisation of the former USSR satellites in Eastern Europe provided an interesting test-bed for analysing differences between legal frameworks and ownership patterns. Hrvatin and Petkovic (2004) summarised extensive research from 18 countries which demonstrates how hard it is to get the right balance between enabling freedom of expression and limiting ownership rights in order to ensure plurality.

Hrvatin and Petkovic point out that initially there was a reluctance to regulate at all:

Public debates were based on the assumption that media legislation was not necessary at all, that is to say, that the media should be left to be freely regulated by an ideologically and politically “neutral” market (as the media market was seen at that time).

This laissez-faire approach left the state in many places playing ineffective catch-up in a media market already dominated by powerful interests. Hrvatin and Petkovic note that in some countries politicians revisited these issues with remarkable frequency: Bulgaria amended its Radio and Television Law nine times between 1998 and 2003, and Croatia did so eleven times in a decade.

They exemplify tellingly the view of some media owners in a quotation from the owner of a Latvian radio station who said he could “do whatever he wants” unless it scared away the audience.

Hrvatin and Petkovic also point out that the weak position of journalists in many countries stems not only from over-powerful owners but also from their own inadequate education and lack of professionalism.

That ownership and legal regulation are not the whole story is a point developed by the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) in its Media Sustainability Index (MSI). This index is based on five objectives which, IREX suggests, contribute to shaping a successful media system:⁴

- Legal and social norms protect and promote free speech and access to public information.
- Journalism meets professional standards of quality.
- Multiple news sources provide citizens with reliable and objective news.
- Independent media are well-managed businesses, allowing editorial independence.
- Supporting institutions function in the professional interests of independent media.

³ Evaluation of Internews Network project “Community Radio: Assisting Indonesia's New Media Expansion” by C. Greene, 2007.

⁴ www.irex.org/msi

Note that the actual structure of ownership is not regarded as crucial here. Rather, the key criterion proposed is good management within a propitious legal and social framework.

Community radio

Much of the discussion above has focused on state and commercial media. Does community radio have a different role?

As AMARC (2007) points out:

The main impact on social change, identifiable in community radio stations that are truly participatory and democratic, is on *voices*. The fact itself of being able to communicate is a qualitative indicator of the highest relevance. Communities that never had the opportunity to express themselves, or social sectors within a particular community that were placed under the shadow of silence, now have voices of their own. The importance of having a voice that is heard through a community radio station indicates social change underway within that community and in relation to any external stakeholders. Communities that seize their right to communicate and not just their right to access information are taking a great step forward in acting together for the betterment of their lives.

Note the word “indicates”: the implication is that a “truly participatory and democratic” community station is a symptom – not of itself a cause – of “social change underway within that community.”

As with the differences between various media, so with the differences between types of radio station: the key factor is audience-related, not medium-related. Community radio is by definition closer to its audience than national and international media can ever hope to be, but it may only succeed in holding that audience if it offers something that more distant but often more influential media cannot. That “something” is most likely to be the voices of the community it serves, but there are community stations that act mostly as jukeboxes catering to local tastes. In the UK, for example, before the authorities succeed in locating their source of transmission, London’s plethora of pirate stations are often successful in garnering a sizable audience, especially among young people in ethnic minority communities who may feel poorly served by mainstream media.

The term “community radio” is applied to a variety of station types, from one-person outlets, to donor-funded stations that are placed in a community usually to deliver a “worthy” message, to stations that emerge from and are supported by a particular geographical or social community. A 2007 report from the Center for International Media Assistance emphasised that:

The most important aspects of community radio... include broad participation by community members – often on a volunteer basis – and the ownership and control

of the station by the community through a board of governors that is representative of the community and responsive to the diversity of its needs.

The same report notes that “community radio stations often serve as the most trusted agent in town that brings change.” This question of trust is crucial to the ability of any medium to effect change.

International media

Where a government seeks to preserve the asymmetry of information cited by Stiglitz above, it is instructive to look at examples of how mass popular protest movements seek to subvert the state’s monopoly of information.

Outside media are one method; the institutional memories of BBC, VOA, RFE/RL and their like all have a host of anecdotal evidence of their effectiveness in reaching audiences behind the Iron Curtain during the forty years of the Cold War.

Shortwave radio did not “win” the Cold War on its own. Its effect for four decades was marginal other than as a morale booster for those who hoped for change – until in the late 1980s the social movements in Eastern Europe achieved enough strength and momentum to pose a threat to the regimes. At that point media did play a role in spreading information about what was happening, though by then TV was probably more powerful. Images of Solidarnosc leaders negotiating with a weak Polish government, then of the Berlin Wall being breached, may well have reinforced the momentum towards change – but they did not cause it.

Nor have broadcast media been the only way popular movements have spread the word. News of the burgeoning protests in 1993 that led to the downfall of Hastings Banda after almost three decades in power in Malawi was spread (including to foreign media) by the then new technology of the fax machine. In the Philippines – where there are also vibrant independent media – the message of widespread protest against Joseph Estrada was spread by SMS. During the wave of monk-led protests in 2007 the opposition in Burma made effective use of the internet for several days before the government closed down the country’s external links.

This last example shows an interesting interaction between different media that suggests it can be hard to tease out the individual impact of particular media. The internet was a channel to outside broadcasters who were then able to broadcast information back into the country on more traditional media such as shortwave radio to reach the great majority of people with no access to the internet.

Corruption

One area of poor governance where independent media might be expected to have demonstrable impact is corruption.

In principle, media could help reduce corruption, both by exposing it when they have the resources to uncover it and by acting as a deterrent. In fact, the record is not so clear-cut, as the example of Kenya shows. A report for the World Bank Institute (Stapenhurst 2000) recalls that in 1996:

The independent Kenyan press shed light on the malaria control-chemicals deal organized by the Minister of Health, Mr. Donald Kimutai. The press reported that non-approved malaria chemicals were going to be bought through a foreign firm, Equip Agencies Ltd., at a price far higher than the price necessary to buy the goods locally. Also, a side payment of 400,000,000 Kenya Shillings was made to Equip Agencies Ltd. by the Health Ministry while no goods were delivered. This scandal burst out during the visit of an IMF team in Nairobi. That team put pressure on the government to clear the scandal. Mr. Kimutai was first transferred to the position of chairman of the Industry Commerce Development Corporation (ICDC) and only in a second stage, under the insistence of the IMF, he was fired.

Given that Kenya at that time was ruled by the well-entrenched regime of President Daniel arap Moi, this might seem a strong example of the power of independent media to expose wrongdoing and spur action. However, a decade later, under the much more open regime of President Mwai Kibaki, the same independent media failed to force government action on a series of other corruption cases. For example, despite a barrage of media criticism, no prosecutions have followed the uncovering of a fake contracts scam known as Anglo-Leasing. Of three ministers forced to stand aside, two returned to the cabinet a year later.

In other words, once again we see that media alone is not able to effect change; it is how the media interact with other forces that provokes the change.⁵

The World Bank (1997, cited in Stapenhurst 2000) has stated that:

Civil society and the media are crucial to creating and maintaining an atmosphere in public life that discourages fraud and corruption. Indeed, they are arguably the two most important factors in eliminating systemic corruption in public institutions.

It looks as if these are not factors whose impact can be teased out and analysed separately. Rather, it is how they work together and reinforce each other that is crucial.

Stapenhurst also examines in passing the effect of media ownership on the media's ability to expose corruption. He notes that while state-owned media will find it hard in most

cases to expose government failings, privatisation is not of itself sufficient. On the one hand there is the example of Uganda's New Vision newspaper: government-owned but with a good record in the past of publishing hard-hitting reports. On the other hand there is the sad example of the Russian media which have mostly come to depend on powerful financial interests that have their own relations with the state and discourage reporting which might threaten lucrative relationships with government.

It should also be pointed out that even where a government-owned media outlet is kept on a strict leash it may still expose wrongdoing in government, at the behest of one faction or another within the elite. In the early 1990s editors of government-owned newspapers in Syria would, unconvincingly, claim the fact that ministers had been fired after adverse press coverage as proof of media freedom.⁶

Disaster

The experience of community radio in Indonesia, described earlier, has also been informed by its role in helping communities after disasters such as the 2004 tsunami and the Jogjakarta earthquake in 2006. In such situations of extreme need for information, local radio rooted in its community is particularly well-suited to providing information and articulating the community's needs. Nor is such need limited to developing nations. AMARC (2007) cites a recent example from the United States:

Following Hurricane Katrina, in the USA, community radio practitioners petitioned the FCC [Federal Communications Commission] for and received Low Power FM licenses to be used at locations where evacuees were housed. They set up transmitters and began broadcasting. FM radios were distributed to evacuees and emergency announcements as well as simple logistics information needed to reconnect families were broadcast.

The lesson here once again is that in crisis, people will turn for information to a trusted media source.

Post-conflict

There is a special case where media under the control of those in power are expected to contribute to political change – the radio stations set up by United Nations transitional administrations in post-conflict situations in places such as Cambodia, Sierra Leone or Burundi. Although the UN in some ways retains a counterfactual attachment to the idea that having media under its control is an effective way to build credibility, in some special situations the UN-owned media do appear to have contributed positively to getting across messages such as the possibility of voting being fair.

⁵ At the time of writing President Kibaki is facing a tough re-election battle and one reason he may not reap the benefit of strong economic growth during his term is the widespread perception that his government has tolerated corruption.

⁶ Private conversations with author in Damascus in 1993.

An anonymous UN background report describes the impact of the UN station in Cambodia in the run up to the first elections there in May 1993:

The second major success of the mission was the UN radio station. Many people, including some within UNTAC [United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia], were patronizing about the average Cambodian's ability to comprehend the range of choices that the election offered. In fact, Cambodians knew very well that they had a choice; the question in their minds was whether or not they could vote their conscience without retaliation. The UN emphasized that the choice was real and the ballot would be secret; officials spread that message by radio, which remains the key source of information in Cambodia due to minimal literacy, limited print circulation, and the very small area reached by television transmissions.

Over 12 years of civil war, the propaganda machines of the different factions had presented the population with diametrically opposed versions of reality. Khmer Rouge radio had depicted its army as the only force protecting a country overrun by millions of Vietnamese, not just soldiers but settlers as well – a falsehood that was accepted as fact by hundreds of thousands of listening refugees in camps along the Thai border and in other countries. From the government established by Vietnam in 1979, people heard largely stock phrases on the glories of the revolution and assurances that the government was the only force standing against the return of the murderous Khmer Rouge.

UNTAC radio provided information without any of these political biases, playing the messages of all registered political parties and telling people that they had the right to choose which candidates to elect. Most importantly, UNTAC convinced Cambodians that their vote would be secret. The broadcasts spoke openly about political intimidation and violence, getting across the message that the UN was not as blind as it appeared despite its inability to disarm the factions or stop political intimidation and human right abuses.⁷

There are two particular points here that are worth emphasising. One is that it was by being open and honest about the problems that the UNTAC radio station gained trust and thus appeared to have an effect on the people who heard it. The second is that it was radio rather than other media that worked.

The point about accuracy and openness engendering trust in media has been well known for decades but is a lesson that escapes most politicians who seek to control media. During the

Second World War it was called (with commendable honesty) "white propaganda". It was the justification used by the BBC German Service for broadcasting honestly about British and Allied losses when they occurred. This established a listenership in Germany which preferred the BBC's more truthful accounts to the bombastic, exaggerated claims of the German media. When the tide turned and there were Allied victories to report, listeners in Germany knew that they could place little trust in their own media's continued claims of victories. The (unproven) conclusion would be that this contributed to a decline in morale.⁸

An interesting take on this approach concerns another of the BBC World Service's language services in a different war: this time what the Vietnamese call the American War. Leaders of the defeated South Vietnamese side unequivocally blamed (and continued to blame) the sudden, rapid collapse of the regime on the BBC's Vietnamese Service.⁹ The BBC's "crime" was to broadcast (accurate) descriptions of army officers at the front line loading their families and possessions onto trucks to escape the war zone. Hearing this, the ordinary people did likewise, clogging the roads and preventing reinforcements from reaching the front.

Radio

A second lesson from the Cambodian experience cited above is that it was radio that got the message across rather than any other medium. Most of the other research discussed so far has focused on media more familiar to rich world audiences – TV and newspapers. Is there something different about radio?

From a media practitioner's perspective, the crucial difference lies not in the medium itself and not in the message being transmitted. Rather, the difference lies in the community into which the message is being disseminated. In more developed economies there are high literacy rates, good transport infrastructure and sufficient disposable income for newspapers to reach a good proportion of the population including, but not limited to, opinion formers. Similarly, TV depends for audience reach on the ability of potential viewers not only to afford a set (and perhaps a satellite dish) but also to have access to a reliable source of electricity even if it is only a generator. Similar considerations limit the reach of the internet into the least developed communities.

Radio on the other hand requires only a cheap set (less than USD 5 for a small FM radio on a rural market stand in many places) and batteries – though the latter can be costly for many of the poorest people. No literacy is required. Radio is also the medium that is most easy to use while doing something else so it will often be heard in a workplace, at a market stall, in a tea

⁷ UN Backgrounder 3: "Conflict and Collective Identity in Cambodia" www.tcd.ie/ise/postgraduate/UNBACKGROUNDER3.doc

⁸ Author's private conversations with wartime head of BBC German Service, Hugh Greene.

⁹ Private conversations.

shop, in a minibus-taxi. As these are public spaces there is then a useful knock-on impact – from the point of view of effecting change – that people will naturally discuss what they hear with those around them.

An example of this is a popular health-oriented radio soap opera in Rwanda, *Urunana*. An evaluation in 2005 pointed to repeated anecdotes about passengers in public transport demanding to hear the programme if it was on while they were travelling and then discussing quite intimate health matters with their fellow travellers.¹⁰

The point here is not that radio is uniquely effective. Rather, the implication is that anyone seeking to impact political processes through media needs to examine actual media usage among the target audience.

Such examination also needs to explore not only ownership of, for example, radios but also who makes the choices about what is listened to. There are many communities where a large majority of households have a radio but the (male) head of household decides when it is switched on and what is listened to. In many parts of Africa it is common to see people carrying their radios as they go about their daily routines – but this is almost exclusively men, indicating that women are left without access to media for much of the day.

Diasporas

What then about cases where extremes of conflict have led to widespread dispersal of populations as refugees with consequent disruption of normal patterns of media use?

The Somali diaspora since the collapse of central government in 1991 has greatly boosted numbers in already existing Somali communities in Canada, the UK, Scandinavia and elsewhere. These refugees came from a society with a strong oral tradition where the exchange of news has always been an important part of social interaction. TV and newspapers never spread beyond a couple of major urban areas, but there was a strong culture of shortwave radio listening in Somali society and among men in tea shops this became a communal activity. After 1991 this was particularly true of listening to the BBC Somali Service. Even in 1991 the author saw large crowds at tea shops in remote towns listening to these broadcasts and hotly debating the news afterwards.

This service was not easily available to those in the diaspora. However, the rise of the internet provided an opportunity for the diaspora to keep in touch and the Somali diaspora became notably well-wired. So much so that despite having few resources available for keeping the site updated, the BBC Somali Service was by the early part of this decade one of the most used of the BBC's non-English sites in terms of users as a pro-

portion of global speakers of the language. A large number of Somali-language websites continue to target the diaspora, but there is little evidence yet of any impact on the political process back in Somalia.

The flood of refugees in recent years from the Darfur region of Sudan came from a background where media use was at much lower levels than in Somalia, and for wider political reasons the Darfuris have had less success in getting settled out of their home region. They have thus congregated in camps. One attempt to provide information for some of these refugees has been Radio Absoum, set up by the Internews Network in Chad and broadcasting to camps there. Evidence for impact is still circumstantial, but one anecdote shows high impact on a group often hard to reach for NGOs seeking to effect behavioural change. Doctors noted a sudden and precipitous drop in the numbers of pregnant women coming to the clinic. Enquiries found that there was a widespread belief in the camps that Western women always gave birth by being cut open and that this was being imposed on pregnant refugee women by the Western doctors at camp clinics. A small number of emergency caesarean sections had provided “evidence” for this belief. Over a number of programmes on Radio Absoum medical workers were able to explain why operations were sometimes necessary and provide reassurance that in the majority of cases such surgical intervention was not needed or carried out. Attendance at prenatal clinics quickly went back to previous levels.¹¹

Given the lack of alternative sources of information, it is likely that this was indeed due to the broadcasts. However, it is also likely that the impact would have been less if the station had not already achieved a level of trust among its audience and if a similar message was not also being put out through camp leaders and others in positions of influence. Although this example is relatively benign it is not hard to see how the same channel could be used to spread a directly political message for good or ill.

Formats

Many in the mainstream media, in the community radio movements and among NGO activists have been dismissive of popularity as a goal for media outlets, preferring to concentrate on “worthy” programming that carries messages deemed “appropriate” or “necessary” for particular “deprived” audiences. This is certainly a counter-productive approach. As Search for Common Ground put it in its evaluation of its work in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Church et al. 2003): “Popularity is the required first step in radio shows’ ability to effect change.”

Popularity does not equate necessarily to mass audience. A programme can have an impact provided it is reaching a good proportion of its intended audience. This is why it is necessary to

10 Evaluation for Health Unlimited by C. Greene and H. Odido.

11 Private discussion with Mark Frohardt, Internews Network director for Africa.

take different formats into consideration when assessing how/whether to use media as part of trying to achieve a certain political, social or economic impact.

It is important to remember, however, a point well expressed in a 2007 Development Communications Evidence Research Network (DCERN) policy paper: “Generally, the media has powerful effects only indirectly by stimulating peer communication.”¹²

In other words, media themselves are unlikely to effect change in a vacuum; it is whether people then discuss what they have heard that is crucial in determining whether any behaviour change follows.

It would be hard to devise a research project to compare the effectiveness of different formats; isolating two groups within the same community and exposing one only to, say, episodes of a radio soap and the other to a weekly phone-in is logically impossible.

Phone-in programmes are often very popular and provide an effective way of getting ordinary people’s voices on air, but there would be little point in using this format to provide veterinary advice to nomadic pastoralists who spend most of their time out of reach of mobile networks. However, phone-in formats where an expert is in the studio to answer audience questions can be quite effective in conveying information. Nonetheless, this is a format to be used with care: giving personal health advice, for example, can be dangerous where a doctor or nurse cannot examine the patient.

Drama is a commonly used format and, where it resonates with its audience, has seemed to have success in conveying ideas. The *Urunana* drama in Rwanda mentioned earlier is a good example. The BBC World Service Trust used a TV detective thriller featuring a popular actor as part of a campaign to reduce HIV/AIDS stigma in India. Because drama is fictional and, if well done, engages its audience in the lives of its characters it can be an effective way to raise difficult, even taboo, issues in ways that make it possible for audiences to discuss them.

Nevertheless, drama is not a magic bullet, as several failures (such as a UNESCO project for Somalia) have shown. Using radio drama for conveying information is often described as having been pioneered by the long-running BBC soap opera *The Archers*, which began as a way of trying to get farming communities to adopt new methods after the Second World War. But the technique is at least as old as the medieval mystery plays in Europe which were a popular way of teaching bible stories to illiterate people.

A common third format for conveying messages is the “spot” – essentially copying the techniques of advertising to get a message across through constant repetition of a very short message.

Discussion programmes and magazine formats are also sometimes favoured by donors and implementing NGOs who feel that a complex issue needs to be examined in more depth than is possible in a spot or drama. This approach needs to be handled with considerable care as there is a strong risk of becoming message-focused rather than audience-focused. A clear example is, once again, the *Urunana* drama in Rwanda. The drama had a sister programme, *Umuhoza*, which aimed to provide more detailed supplementary information through a magazine format. In contrast to the very high popularity of the drama, almost none of the beneficiaries interviewed could recall listening to the magazine.

The lesson is that there is no single format that is better than others. Rather, project designers need to consider what format or combination of formats will most appeal to the specific target audience.

Conclusions

Perhaps the key lesson from this look at media impact is that it is a *sine qua non* that a message will only achieve impact if the medium through which it is disseminated is trusted by those targeted.

A second lesson is that those promoting a message must have a very clear understanding of the target audience and their media usage habits.

From these two points we can further conclude that media in general and radio in particular can have an impact on behaviour, including political processes, so long as certain conditions are present. These conditions include:

- A regulatory and general legal environment conducive to development of media.
- The ability of media outlets to develop trust among their target audiences.
- A congruity of message between what the media say and what other trusted sources (political, religious, medical, educational, etc.) are saying.
- A pre-existing degree of social cohesion in the community that is targeted.
- Sufficient popularity of relevant output to attract a sizeable audience and generate debate among the target community.

There is nothing about radio *per se* as compared with other media that makes it particularly effective (or ineffective) at instigat-

¹² DCERN policy note summary of the paper “Impact of Media Interventions: Factors and Evidence” by Tim Grout-Smith and Lily Poberezhska, Media Players International (2007). The full paper can be found on www.dcern.org.

ing political or other behaviour change. However, for communities with low levels of literacy, disposable income or access to electricity, radio may well be the best choice.

Though pirate radio can flourish for a time, for longer-term impact radio needs a clear regulatory framework with low barriers to entry.

While there is no guaranteed formula, formats that include the voices of target communities and which reflect those communities' own culture (drama, songs, etc.) are more likely to achieve the popularity necessary to achieve an impact.

Different players in a country's media sector may have conflicting interests. Powerful commercial media networks may have an interest in supporting state authorities against small-scale media such as community radio. We have further seen that ownership structure is less important than the presence of a managerial as well as social and legal environment that is conducive to building audience trust. ■

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Radio and Recent Political Changes in Nepal¹

PRATYOUSH ONTA

Introduction

This report investigates the following hypothesis for the case of Nepal: *Information and communication resources and capabilities among the poor and marginalised deepen people's ability to influence their circumstances and participate in democratic processes/political change.* For the purposes of this report, the enhancement of the capabilities and increased access of the poor and marginalised to information and communication resources will be mainly investigated with reference to the decade-old growth of non-state-owned radio in Nepal.

This report will assess the recent experience in Nepal concerning:

- The development of radio, including community radio, as a medium for public engagement in issues concerning poverty, development and political change.
- The changing relationship in this context between radio and other media (and the significance of changes in the regulatory and business environment for radio).
- Ways in which the changing availability and character of radio have changed the availability of media of expression for individual citizens, civil society organisations and political actors.
- Assessments of the impact that radio, other media, and participation in radio and other media have had on political change in Nepal during the past two years.

This study is also concerned with identifying:

- An overall view of the extent to which radio has played and can play a significant part in influencing the nature of political debate or political outcomes.
- Aspects of radio, including community radio, which distinguish it from other media in influencing political change.
- Aspects of the regulation of radio, and of the style and content of radio, which affect its capacity to influence political change.

- Relevant issues concerning the relationship between radio and other stakeholders, including government agencies, communications businesses, civil society actors and political organisations.

This study is based on:

- The writer's previous experiential and research-based knowledge of the radio landscape in Nepal.
- Fresh desk and library research.
- Interviews and interactions with various actors related to the growth and operation of non-state-owned radio in Nepal. Interviews and interactions have been held with several radio promoters, managers, journalists, activists and representatives of the general public. Some have been held in a one-to-one manner whereas others have been held as part of workshops, consultations and seminars.²

This report hopefully reflects the diversity of views that exists on the above-mentioned issues. As the political scenario in Nepal continues to change and the radio landscape is also experiencing interesting growth and changes, it is emphasised that the conclusions reached in this report are preliminary.

The main body of this report consists of three major sections. The first deals, in broad terms, with the development of the non-state-owned radio sector in Nepal. The second deals with radio as a medium for public engagement. The third and final section discusses the recent relationship between radio and political debate/change in Nepal. There are several sub-sections in each of these three sections.

¹ The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the BCO Alliance, individual partners of BCO or *ict Development Associates Ltd.*

² These include a workshop session on broadcast regulation organised by the Alliance for Social Dialogue (ASD) on 27 November 2007 in Nagarkot (just outside of Kathmandu); a national consultation to review community radio in Nepal organised by the Ministry of Information and Communication, UNESCO and the Association of Community Radio Broadcasters of Nepal (ACORAB) on 3 December 2007 in Kathmandu; a seminar on independent radios in far-western Nepal organized by Martin Chautari on 6 December 2007 in Kathmandu; and a conference on journalism on FM radio organised by Martin Chautari and ASD on 29 March 2008 in Kathmandu.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF NON-STATE-OWNED RADIO IN NEPAL

Radio: From state monopoly to ownership by various non-state entities

The history of radio programming in Nepal is a mere 56 years old. State-owned Radio Nepal was established in the capital city Kathmandu only in 1951 after pro-democratic forces put an end to the century-old rule of the Rana oligarchy, notorious for its dislike for mass media. During the 1950s, only ad hoc increases were made to Radio Nepal's transmission capacity, as radio seems not to have fired the imagination of the first generation of democratic politicians. However, Radio Nepal became a crucial site for the consolidation of Nepali identity after December 1960, when late King Mahendra put an end to Nepal's first experiment with multi-party democracy and assumed direct charge of the country under the (subsequently) so-called "Partyless Panchayat Democracy". Under the active leadership of the monarch, state Hinduism, Nepali language and a national history steeped in an ethos of bravery provided the ideological cultural matrix for the Nepali state in which modernising projects of development were to be launched. State-owned media, both press and radio, were instrumentally used to reify the above-mentioned ideological cultural matrix.

Given the high illiteracy rate of the Nepali population and the difficulties of transporting newspapers over an unforgiving terrain, Radio Nepal was by far the most attractive among the media used by the Panchayati state for its own purposes. It was used to serve both the state's ideological needs and its nation-building imperatives. On the one hand, gate-keeping practices that were consistent with the ideological underpinnings of the Panchayat regime meant that only programmes consistent with the overall ideological cultural matrix of the Panchayat regime were broadcast and only the Nepali language was allowed over Radio Nepal after 1965 in its current affairs and educational programming.

The policing of the Panchayat-inspired Nepali identity also influenced its entertainment programmes. Even though songs in other languages of Nepal and in Hindi and English were broadcast, in the main only certain kinds of music and songs were promoted in the name of serving "Nepali-ness". On the other hand, as part of its role in what one Panchayat publicist (Khatri 1976, 38) described as "arousing development consciousness among the masses," Radio Nepal broadcast programmes related to farming, education, family planning, health and a whole host of other development themes. Access to Radio Nepal for non-governmental entities meant buying slots in the national broadcast schedule at an exorbitant rate. The complete monopoly of radio by the Nepali state remained a fact of life throughout the three-decade-long Panchayat system that ended in 1990. Two generations

of Nepalis who grew up in post-Rana Nepal (namely, post-1951) experienced state-owned Radio Nepal as the only radio broadcast from within Nepal.³

After the People's Movement of spring 1990, Nepal entered a new political era with the introduction of a competitive multi-party political system and guarantees of fundamental rights as described in the new constitution of Nepal, 1990. This historic transformation eventually paved the way for the entry of non-state players in the radio landscape in Nepal in the FM band.

The first licence to an independent FM radio station was issued in May 1997. That licence was given to Radio Sagarmatha 102.4 in Kathmandu, owned and operated by the NGO Nepal Forum of Environmental Journalists (NEFEJ). Since that moment of recognition that a radio station could be operated by a non-state-owned entity, there has been a phenomenal growth in the independent radio sector in Nepal. By the end of 2003, 56 independent radio stations had been issued licences, and almost 50 had already gone on air in more than 20 districts of the country by spring 2006. By mid-April 2008, a total of 272 licences had been issued. Among them, 161 had gone on air from 136 separate radio stations and the rest were in various stages of operational preparation.⁴ According to Narayan Regmi, a high-level official at the Ministry of Information and Communication, these radio stations were located in more than 70 of the 75 districts of the country.⁵

Significance of changes in the political, regulatory and business environment for radio

The plural and dispersed structure of the FM radio landscape has been made possible by major political changes, a legislative framework that recognised the need for plurality in the radio landscape in Nepal and a financially hybrid environment for radio. However, occasional authoritarian tendency within the political leadership, confusion created by silences in some aspects of the legislative framework and a lack of bold initiatives to try to make local radio sustainable have also stunted the full possibilities of using radio for the larger public good in Nepal.

Political changes

After the end of the Panchayat system in 1990, the new constitution of Nepal (1990) was promulgated. This constitution guaran-

3 More details about the history of Radio Nepal can be found in Onta et al. (2004). A sample of people's history of growing up with radio can be found in Parajulee and Onta (2005).

4 This is based on information provided by the most comprehensive website related to radio broadcasting in Nepal: www.nepalradio.org/p2_information.htm. More details can be obtained from this site. Among the licensees, there are some that relay their transmissions from their primary radio stations using transmitters for which they have obtained separate licences.

5 Information provided during a national consultation on community radio in Kathmandu, 3 December 2007.

teed several fundamental rights of the citizens of Nepal. These include the right to freedom of thought and expression, the right to establish organisations, the right to information, and the right to protection from censorship. These are fundamental legal guarantees without which the growth in Nepali media including radio, non-governmental organisations and social movements since 1990 would not have been possible.

The National Communication Policy announced in October 1992 by the first post-Panchayat elected government envisaged the entry of non-state entities in the radio sector in the FM band. The National Broadcasting Act was passed shortly thereafter and became a law in mid-June 1993. This Act put an end to state monopoly in radio and opened the way for independent FM radio stations to be owned and operated by a variety of institutional entities.

Even as the political change of 1990 was fundamental to the possibility of the growth of non-state-owned radio in Nepal, it is also the case that democratically elected governments prior to October 2002 slowed down the growth of non-state-owned radio by making the licence application process opaque. They first did so by delaying the issuance of National Broadcasting Regulation 2052 until June 1995, two years after passing the National Broadcasting Act. Even after the Regulation was put in place, promoters of Radio Sagarmatha and other radio stations had to fight a prolonged battle over the course of several years to obtain their radio licences. This kind of bureaucratic obduracy was compounded by confusion in the political leaders who had passed a very democratic broadcasting act but seemed to lack the political will to implement it.⁶ Lack of transparency and deliberate delays in the issuance of licences meant that the process of obtaining a licence was made unnecessarily more costly for those without reach in the higher echelons of party and government bureaucracy. These factors also meant that promoters of city-based and commercial radio stations, who had better influence over the politicians and bureaucrats in Kathmandu, had an undue advantage over their counterparts promoting rural-based and non-commercial radio stations.

Despite these political and bureaucratic hindrances, the independent radio sector grew slowly. Unable to reverse this growth, various governments have tried to influence its contents through bureaucratic means and executive orders. They have done this by attaching additional conditions while issuing licences to define and limit content that can be broadcast. They started this practice when issuing the first licence to Radio Sagarmatha in May 1997 and repeated it until very recently when issuing subsequent licences.

Among the executive orders issued by democratically elected governments, the one issued in January 2001 by a Girija Prasad Koirala-led government achieved the most notoriety. In that or-

der, the government first tried to establish veto power through its (ministerial) representative in the proposed board overseeing each radio station and said that any programme not approved by its representative could not be aired. Moreover, this directive also specified that radio stations could not broadcast news based on their own sources.

This directive was challenged in the Supreme Court of Nepal. In delivering a very important judgment regarding the operation of independent radios, the Supreme Court ruled on 26 July 2001 that the government's directive was a move to create a state monopoly in the gathering and broadcast of news. The Supreme Court ruled that such a monopoly eventually restricts citizens' right to obtain information about matters of public importance in an independent and impartial manner and the rights of freedom of thought and expression, and consequently rejected the government's directive. While the freedom of the print media had been explicitly recognised by Article 13 of the 1990 Constitution of Nepal, the status of broadcast media on the same issue had been left unspecified in that Constitution. This Supreme Court decision, invoking both Article 12 2(a) (freedom of thought and expression) and Article 16 (right to information) of the 1990 Constitution, made up for that inadequacy. In essence, broadcast media were assured the same freedoms as those available to print media through this ruling.

But before radio stations could take advantage of this landmark decision, the Sher Bahadru Deuba-led government imposed a state of emergency in November 2001, saying that this was required to tackle the Maoist insurgency. Given the long list of fundamental rights that were suspended during the state of emergency, the environment in Nepal for freedom of thought and expression deteriorated abruptly. During the state of emergency, restrictions on the media with respect to its possible coverage of Maoist activities were imposed in the name of protecting the national interests of Nepal. There was confusion regarding the legal bases of these restrictions as well as a lack of substance in proving their necessity.⁷ Although the legality of the various orders that emanated from different wings of the state was questionable, their purpose was to tame the critical edge of the Nepali public and the media. The overwhelming nature of these restrictions and the subsequent executive orders had a chilling effect on the work of Nepali radio journalists and others engaged in public commentary at that point in time.

State interference in FM content reached its height during King Gyanendra's direct rule (February 2005 to April 2006). As has been discussed at great length by several analysts elsewhere, this started with the presence of security personnel in FM stations on 1 February 2005.⁸ It continued with many executive orders, the undermining of the financial viability of various ra-

⁶ Accounts of these struggles and of the early days of independent FM radios in Nepal can be found in Onta and Mainali (2002).

⁷ This would be expected from Nepal's obligations under Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The impact of the 2001-2002 state of emergency on the Nepali media is described at length in, among others, Onta (2005).

⁸ See, for instance, Bhattarai (2005), Dhungel (2007), and Mainali (2007).

radio stations through the withdrawal of government-provided public service advertisements, and an ordinance that revised some articles of the National Broadcast Act. Attempts were also made to shut down FM stations that did not follow the executive orders. While transmission equipment was seized from some stations, others faced continuous harassment from state officers. The opening of some new stations was delayed due to objections raised by the army in the name of national security. As if this was not bad enough, during the same period, some FM stations were also ransacked by the Maoist insurgents who were then bent on capturing the Nepali state through an armed uprising. As a result of these acts of high-handedness, some radio stations faced temporary closures.

The king's regime tried its best to stop news and current affairs programmes in independent radio stations. Some stations responded by sacking their entire news teams and others cut their staff significantly. Radio journalists took to the streets in protest while their lawyers took the fight to the Supreme Court. The Court's many decisions kept independent radio alive through this period of Nepali history.

The second People's Movement of the spring of 2006 put an end to the direct rule of King Gyanendra. The political repression of the independent FM radio sector by the state ended with a change in regime, and the decisions made during the royal regime were reversed. The parliament was restored and was designated as an interim legislature. The Maoists agreed to a comprehensive peace treaty and the process to hold elections to a Constituent Assembly was launched by late 2006. After April 2006, the political and bureaucratic leaders of Nepal have speeded up the licensing process of independent radio stations. More licences have been issued since mid-2006 than in the nine-year period between May 1997 (when the first licence was issued) and April 2006. As if to make up for its earlier obduracy, the licensing bureaucracy has not used excuses (as was the case earlier) to delay the processing of the applications of new applicants. More than a recognition that radio empowers people, it is procedural expediency that has resulted in the issuance of more than 200 licences since April 2006.

Regulatory regime

The variety in ownership pattern and the spatial distribution of radio stations over many districts of the country are the two biggest assets of the independent radio sector in Nepal. As mentioned earlier, the National Broadcasting Act passed in 1993 provided the legal foundation for this plural and distributed growth of radio. While opening the radio sector to new players, this Act guaranteed that legally recognisable Nepali citizens and organisational entities could get licences to run radio stations. This meant that a certain degree of institutional plurality was built into the Act. As a result of this, NGOs, cooperatives, locally elected bodies, educational institutions and for-profit private commercial companies – registered as organisational entities under various Nepali laws – own and manage FM radio

stations with their own transmission sets.⁹ Of the 161 licensees on air, 78 are private companies, 47 are NGOs, 22 are cooperatives and 14 are educational institutions, locally elected bodies and Radio Nepal.¹⁰ In passing the Act to assure such diversity in ownership, the then people's representatives recognised that the people's right to information and their right to freedom of expression and thought could only be assured by a pluralistic radio ownership model that could not be monopolised by the wealthy companies or urban-based and powerful elements of Nepali society. This plurality in radio ownership is clear evidence of the democratisation, however partial, of Nepali society that has taken place during the last decade.

Further evidence of the same process is the spatial distribution of the radio stations in different parts of Nepal. From a pre-1990 scenario of centralised radio production based in Kathmandu, Nepal now has a scene in which a third of the districts have a radio station of their own and that number is growing by the day. When all the radio stations that already have licences go on air, there will be at least one independent radio station in all but a handful of the 75 districts of Nepal. While many of the radio stations that have already gone on air are urban-based, many of those waiting to go on air will be based in rural areas. This shows how the erstwhile Kathmandu-centric country is slowly changing and power relations between the capital and other regions of the country are being increasingly negotiated and managed by media and other types of intermediate organisations located in various parts of Nepal.

However, there are many weaknesses in the legislative framework and regulatory regime that govern the independent radio sector in Nepal that could put these achievements in jeopardy.¹¹ First, as a by-product of the mechanism that guarantees plurality of radio ownership as discussed above, Nepal now has a situation where each radio station that has received an operating licence comes into existence as a result of at least two legal acts passed by the Nepal government. For instance, in the case of an NGO running a radio station, the NGO would have been registered under a thirty-year old Act that governs the legal registration and existence of such organisations. The NGO then receives the radio operating licence under the National Broadcasting Act. It is a similar case for private sector companies (registered under the Company Act), cooperatives (registered under the Cooperatives Act) and local governments (registered under the Local Self-Government Act). As has been recently remarked by radio activist Raghu Mainali, the coordinator of the Community Radio Support Centre in Kathmandu and the former chairman of the Association of Community Radio Broadcasters of Nepal (ACORAB), this introduces an anomaly in the radio landscape

9 With the recent passing of a new Company Act that has a provision for non-profit companies, we are likely to see the emergence of radios run by non-profit companies within the near future.

10 Based on information provided at www.nepalradio.org/p2_information.htm

11 The most extensive account of the efforts made in the policy and regulatory aspects of FM radios can be found in Humagain (2005).

whereby the fruit is constitutionally protected but not the plant. In other words, according to him, radio content falls within the fundamental guarantees of the Constitution of Nepal, whereas the organisational entities that receive the licences to operate radio stations are not similarly covered but are governed by individual Acts which reserve the right to liquidate those organisations under specified conditions.¹²

Second, as long as radio licence holders renew their licences as per the terms and conditions described in the Act and Regulation, there is no time limit to their licences. They are, one could say, given for ever. This means that once an FM frequency has been allocated to a particular licence holder, it obviates the possibility of that frequency being available, some years down the road, to another, possibly better, player in the market. In many local radio markets in different parts of the world, licences have a fixed duration after which the assigned frequency again becomes available in a fresh bid open to new applicants. In the absence of such an arrangement, the current licensing process acts as a serious barrier for entry into the market for new players.

Third, the lack of any comprehensive policy regarding the basis on which the number of radio stations to be given licences in any given broadcast territory is determined has also introduced confusion and created a barrier for new entrants in the market. For instance, once 34 independent radios had been given licences to broadcast within the Kathmandu Valley, the government suddenly said it would not give out more licences for other radios in Kathmandu. The government has not cited any scientific basis regarding frequency distribution and its limits for Kathmandu or any other broadcast territory. "Where did this number 34 come from and when and why it came, no one knows...What is the system that lets 34 licences represent the two million residents of Kathmandu?" asks radio activist Raghu Mainali.¹³

Fourth, the Act implicitly highlights the local radio concept behind radio in the FM band. Apart from a few mobile radio licences for educational and demonstration purposes, each licence allows the radio station to operate in a specific locality only. Thus even when one media institution has been given licences to broadcast in multiple territories, it has had to apply for and receive a separate licence for each of the broadcast territories. However, the Act is silent on the phenomenon of radio relaying. Hence commercial media houses such as Kantipur FM and Image FM with headquarters in Kathmandu have each established radio stations that are mostly relay stations in various locations of the country for which they have received licences. They link their broadcast from their Kathmandu stations with their other stations and reach a much bigger audience. While their production costs remain the same they derive much larger advertisement revenues by showing larger audience numbers to their

advertisers. According to many advocates of truly spatially local radio, this phenomenon has introduced distortions in many local radio markets, as such radios can not compete with nationally dominant commercial media houses.

Fifth, the National Broadcasting Act does not differentiate between different types of radio station; it solely recognises one type of radio station and legally does not make any distinction between commercial stations and community stations. In terms of legal precision, one would then have to say that there are no community radio stations in Nepal. In fact, however, there are differences amongst radio stations and many of them emanate from the set of laws that govern the registration of the mother entities that have received radio operating licences. In other words, if a for-profit company receives a licence to operate a radio station, its characteristics will emerge, in the main, from the profit-seeking requirement of the parent organisation. Much the same is true for the case of non-profit NGOs running a radio station. Within this milieu, although legally there is no community radio in Nepal, those radio stations operated by cooperatives (which distribute dividends to their members), NGOs, educational institutions and local governments have *de facto* been described as community radio stations.

Sixth, this lack of legal distinction has an implication for the radio stations when they pay their licence fees or licence renewal fees, which are determined only on the basis of their transmission powers. The National Broadcast Regulation has determined the exact fees to be paid in six categories. For instance, until recently, for a 51-100 watt transmitter, the licensee had to pay NPR 50,000 (Nepali rupees) as a licence fee but this fee has now been reduced to NPR 10,000. The annual licence renewal fee is 110% of the licence fee. In addition, all institutions holding a radio licence have to pay the Nepali government 4% of their annual turnover amount as a royalty when renewing their licences. These requirements put a heavy financial burden on those who want to run non-profit community radios in Nepal and put them at a disadvantage when compared with for-profit radios of equal transmitting power. There has been a recent reduction in these fees for the three lower power transmitter categories.¹⁴

Finally, unlike for the print media, the Act does not identify any legal body for handling complaints about radio content. Those who feel aggrieved by any particular radio station because of the content it has broadcast do not have an automatic right to reply nor any mechanism of redress apart from recourse to a legally cumbersome defamation law whose scheme for monetary punishment for violators does not act as a deterrent. According to Rajendra Dahal, the chairman of the Press Council Nepal (PCN), which is a legally constituted body to handle such complaints in the case of print media, the interim government has recently

12 From a presentation to a national consultation on community radio in Kathmandu, 3 December 2007. He has also emphasised this point in his interview with Shekhar Parajulee (2007, 103-104).

13 Mentioned in his interview with Parajulee (2007, 92-93).

14 After the reduction, the fees scheme is as follows: up to 20 watts, NPR 500 (reduced from NPR 10,000); up to 50 watts, NPR 1,000 (reduced from NPR 20,000); up to 100 watts, NPR 10,000 (reduced from NPR 50,000); up to 250 watts, NPR 100,000; up to 500 watts, NPR 200,000; and 500-10,000 watts, NPR 500,000 (no change in the last three categories).

asked the PCN to set up a mechanism to handle complaints for radio as well.¹⁵ The PCN has started working on a code of conduct for radio content and journalists but it is unlikely to set up any mechanism for monitoring broadcast content for FM radio any time soon, as this is beyond its current remit and budget.

Business environment

There is a hybrid business environment for radio in Nepal. While most of the private-sector-owned radio stations rely on local and nationally significant businesses for advertisement revenue, radio stations run by NGOs, educational institutions and cooperatives receive donor funding in various forms. Apart from the advertising market, private-sector radio stations also rely on sponsored programmes and occasionally receive donor money to produce specific thematic programmes.

Sustainability has been an issue in debate for commercial FM stations since the early days of independent radio in Nepal. For instance, we can look at the case of FM stations in the central western city of Pokhara. In early 2001, four commercial FM radio stations came into operation within a two-month period in Pokhara. In May 2001, many Pokhara residents, including some promoters of FM stations, told this writer that four stations could not survive in the city. They thought two would survive, or at most three. It was not too difficult to work out why they thought so. Pokhara's economy, it was then thought, could not support four FM radio stations. The city does not have a large industrial base. Its tourism industry was not in great shape or geared toward serving local clients. Remittances from long-distance labourers constituted nearly a quarter of the city's income, but most of this was being invested in private real estate after the families took care of their more immediate needs. The growth in the service industry in the late 1990s, mainly in the form of higher-level educational institutions, schools and computer institutes, had provided advertisements to Pokhara's daily newspapers, but if this advertising had to be shared between the newspapers and the radio stations, those who talked to this writer in 2001 feared that there would be serious undercutting of advertisement rates.

Undercutting has happened but none of the four FM stations has gone bankrupt. In fact, those four FMs have been joined in the intervening years by another local FM station and two more that relay programmes from Kathmandu-based stations. Does this mean that all four of the early FMs in Pokhara and the new ones are making money? Not at all. Industry insiders say that most of the commercial radio stations, including those in Pokhara, are running at a loss. The growth in the independent radio sector coincided with the political and economic crisis generated by the intensification of the Maoist insurgency. Until about the year 2000, the insurgency had not significantly impacted on national industries and tourism. However, from around the turn of the century, tourist arrivals began to drop

sharply, industries began to feel the impact of Maoist extortions and intermittent disruptions at the workplace, and development projects slowed down under Maoist threats to workers. Due to this downturn in the economy, the overall advertisement market did not grow. Commercial FM stations experienced undercutting in their advertisement rates and long delays in payments from their clients. However, apart from two that have gone out of business, others are still on air.

How is this possible? Many of the companies that have invested in the radio sector know that they will not be earning profits in the short run. Hence the fact that they are running at a loss in the initial years of their existence would not be news to them. But there is also something else at work here. Industry insiders have, over the years, told researchers that the promoters of some of the radio stations that are running at a loss can sustain some monetary loss each year because their logic of operation exceeds the simple accounting notion of the bottom line. Such loss is often seen to be an investment that is recovered in the form of social prestige obtained from running an important local media institution or even in monetary terms from other business ventures in the portfolio of those promoting the radio stations concerned.¹⁶ We can conclude that sustainability in the commercial radio industry then has a social logic beyond the accountant's income and expenditure balance and calls for an investigation that looks into how radio is embedded within a social economy that is larger than the market economy. And radio is not an exception in this matter. Big money-losing ventures in the world of print media in Nepal, including broadsheet dailies, continue to be published years after media analysts predicted their demise.

Radios dubbed as community radios have received the support of international donors in setting up their radio stations and in producing various types of development-oriented, rights-based, and educational programmes. Once they come on air, they too have made an income by broadcasting advertisements. Many of the community radio stations have adopted a policy regarding the playing of advertisements. They have chosen not to broadcast some ads that are broadcast over commercial stations by claiming that they are exercising their social responsibility in doing so. However, their overall income stream does not look all that different from those of commercial operators, even though the percentages of income these two different types of radios derive from playing advertisements are not the same.¹⁷ Further evidence of this fact can be derived from the desire of some community radio stations to upgrade their transmission power in an effort to compete with more powerful commercial stations broadcasting in the same primary broadcast territory. Radio Madanpokhara, one of first rural community stations to go on air in Nepal, has recently upgraded its transmitter power to 500 Watts (from 100 Watts) to compete

¹⁵ Personal communication, December 2007.

¹⁶ Based on private conversations with radio promoters since the late 1990s.

¹⁷ This difference allows Raghu Mainali to claim that the business plans of the community and commercial radio stations are in fact different (see his response in the interview in Parajulee 2007, 107-8).

with commercial stations located in its neighbourhood town of Tansen in the central western district of Palpa.¹⁸

International donors have also supported institutions that have produced radio programmes that have then been aired by various radio stations. Among those doing this work, the two based in Kathmandu, Antenna Foundation and Equal Access are NGOs, whereas another Kathmandu organisation, Communication Corner, is a private limited company that also started operating its own FM station, Ujyalo FM, from 2007. These outfits are also instrumental in helping radio stations exchange programming, even though the volume of such exchanges at the moment cannot be described as significant. This kind of initiative has the potential to pool the production resources of radio stations located in various parts of Nepal as well as increasing listeners' knowledge of regions and cultures beyond the primary broadcast area of any single radio station.¹⁹

Some community radio stations have volunteer producers, and other members of the staff work on a semi-voluntary basis by taking low pay. Other stations have received free labour or contributions in cash and kind from their listeners to set up buildings for their radio stations. Still others have collected money from those described as "friends" of a particular radio to establish some kind of a corpus fund. However, such efforts have been executed in a half-hearted and haphazard manner. There is, as yet, no systematic attempt to realise these ideas in a robust way and resources obtained from such efforts, apart from the labour of volunteer radio producers, have not contributed in a significant way to keeping these stations going.

Many radio promoters who have set up community radios have *talked about* various plans to make their ventures financially solvent without having to rely on local advertising money and foreign donors. Mohan Chapagain, the station manager of Radio Lumbini, has said that the central government is the key player in this issue.²⁰ According to him, the government can not only drastically reduce the licence and renewal fees, but also give discounts in the telephone and electricity bills

that community radio stations pay each month. In saying all this, he is simply echoing the view that many community radio activists have voiced over the years. These activists have argued that the very high licence fees and the licence renewal fees, along with the requirement to pay royalties on their annual turnover, are the biggest hurdle in the path towards the sustainability of community radio stations. They have called for a sharp reduction of these fees. A petition at the Supreme Court claiming that these fees were against the spirit of the National Broadcasting Act and that they inhibited the growth of the independent radio sector, registered in the year 2000 by Raghu Mainali, was defeated when the Court ruled that the government had the right to charge them. The recent reduction in the licence fees for low power transmitters is a step in the right direction. "However, the government could do more for non-profit radios by giving them a bigger relief in licence and renewal fees," says Ghamaraj Luintel, deputy station manager of Radio Sagarmatha.²¹ Gunakar Aryal, station manager of Radio Madanpokhara, also adds that the government needs to differentiate between commercial and community stations and promote the latter type of stations by giving them suitable financial incentives.²²

Suman Basnet of the Nepal office of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) feels that community radio stations in Nepal need to learn from the experiences of other countries such as Switzerland and Indonesia in being able to mobilise larger numbers of volunteers to run their stations.²³ However, why those countries have been able to mobilise volunteers in large numbers to run their stations and why this has not happened in Nepal needs to be investigated. Suvash Darnal, former chairman of Jagaran Media Centre, which has just started a community radio station in the southern city of Butwal, feels that as long as community stations accept donor money with conditionalities, it is hypocritical for them to say that they will not play this or that advertisement. If community radio stations could have a consistent policy regarding donor money as well as their advertisement selection, Darnal feels it would be good for their financial health.²⁴

Minbahadur Singh, a promoter of Saipal FM in Bajhang in far-western Nepal feels that sustaining community radio stations would be easy if there were elected governments at the local level. "Community radios could do programmes highlighting the work going on in the village development committees (VDCs) in their broadcast area. They could even do programmes covering the various wards of the VDCs in rotation and be paid NPR 25,000-30,000 per ward. However, because there are currently no elected representatives, there is no incentive for the

18 Personal communication with Gunakar Aryal, station manager, Radio Madanpokhara, December 2007.

19 However, in its current incarnation, these production houses located in Kathmandu have also been criticised for continuing to send media content from Kathmandu to other regions of Nepal and possibly stunting the growth of local content in local radios. The most severe version of this criticism can be found in the interview with Raghu Mainali by Parajulee (2007, 111-112). Those who are involved in such an enterprise, such as Gopal Guragain of Communication Corner, defend it by saying that they are providing a service that is demanded by local FM radio stations. Guragain adds that FM radios that buy his service broadcast at most four hours of Kathmandu-produced programmes each day. In the rest of their programme slots, as many as 14 hours per day in some radios, they broadcast local content and hence he thinks the criticism is misplaced (see his responses in the interview with Parajulee 2007, 126-130). The uplinking and downlinking of programmes have been facilitated by projects that have promoted networking between production houses and radios. One of the main ongoing projects of this kind is being implemented through collaboration between Panos South Asia and Communication Corner with the assistance of the Open Society Institute. Personal communication, Khem Raj Shrestha, December 2007.

20 Personal communication, December 2007.

21 Personal communication, December 2007.

22 Personal communication, December 2007. This is a view shared by many in the community radio sector.

23 Presentation to a national consultation on community radio in Kathmandu, 3 December 2007.

24 Personal communication, December 2007.

wards to work with radios in this manner," said Singh in a discussion devoted to FMs in far-western Nepal.²⁵ Singh is of the view that if there were elected governments at the district development committee (DDC) level, radio stations could ask for a small percentage of the millions of rupees that each DDC mobilises for development each year for "awareness raising". For his part, Raghu Mainali feels that if community radio stations immerse themselves in cultivating social credibility and in increasing participation of the members of the communities they serve, sustainability should not be a problem at all. However, if they begin to rely too much on the market, Mainali feels that they will suffer from a credibility deficit as community radio.²⁶ Nevertheless, others feel that Mainali's position on community radio is a classical or purist one and is hence a little unrealistic.

In this section of the report, it has been suggested that while political changes and a democratic legislative framework have enabled the growth of non-state radio in Nepal, political high-handedness, silences in the regulatory mechanism and bureaucratic obduracy have seriously curtailed radio's democratic possibilities. Lack of bold initiatives to make community radio financially solvent in a context where locally elected political representatives have been absent for many years has also contributed to the less than full realisation of the potential of local and community radio. All this has meant that the explosive growth in independent radio could result in radios being operated all over Nepal that are in the hands of the national and local political/financial elites, and not in the hands of community representatives.

RADIO AS A MEDIUM FOR PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Radio as a medium of expression for citizens, civil society organisations and political actors

How has the changing availability and character of radio changed the availability of media of expression for individual citizens, civil society organisations and political actors?

A precise answer to the above question is rather difficult. However, we can break it down into two subsidiary questions. First, what kinds of access do listeners have to radio and radio content? Second – and this is a more important question – what kinds of influence do individual citizens, civil society organisations and political actors have over independent radio for them to feel that it is available as a medium of expression for them?

Listener access

In fall 2005, when only about fifty FM radio stations had gone on air, it was estimated that about 65% of Nepal's population was receiving FM radio signals (Mainali 2007, 117).²⁷ This percentage was calculated by adding up the number of individuals living in the primary target broadcasting areas of the fifty stations. By early 2008, the number of radio stations on air had more than doubled. Although no fresh calculations have been made, it would be safe to assume that perhaps about 70% to 75% of Nepal's population has access to some FM radio broadcast at the moment. That is a total population of about 19 to 20 million Nepalis who can potentially be reached by FM radios.

Given the uneven spread of FM radio, the number of stations that individuals have access to depends upon where they are located. In the Kathmandu Valley, a listener has access to about thirty stations that broadcast from various locations within the Valley. In the central Tarai belt between the cities of Bhairahawa and Butwal, eight FM stations are located but listeners in that area can receive signals from up to seventeen FM stations. In general, listeners in the eastern, central and western parts of the country have access to more FM broadcasts than listeners in the mid-western and far-western regions. Due to the haphazard way in which frequencies have been assigned, reception quality has been compromised in many parts of the country.

Beyond the issue of physical access to FM signals, there are other relevant issues related to access to FM radio. In a country where half of the population is not literate, access to the print media is immediately limited to the half that can read. Radio has a distinct advantage because its listeners do not have to be literate. Since various FM radios are broadcasting programmes in languages spoken by different ethnic and caste groups, even those who cannot understand Nepali have begun to have access to FM radio contents in some parts of Nepal. This is true for speakers of at least eighteen languages including Rajbanshi, Bantawa Rai, Santhal, Jhagad, Chepang, Newari, Tamang, Maithali, Gurung, Magar, Bhojpuri, Rana Tharu, Purbeli Tharu, Dangora Tharu, Avadhi, Kham Magar, Limbu, and Doteli at the moment.²⁸ As FM spreads further into rural areas, broadcasts in other languages of Nepal are very likely.

In the same decade of FM radio growth, Nepal has imported hundreds of thousands of cheap Chinese battery-operated radios that can be bought for between 50 and 500 rupees. These radios are being sold even in rural markets. When a new FM station goes on air in parts of the country not previously served by FM radios, newspaper reports have suggested that shopkeepers have quickly sold hundreds of radios to their customers. In 2007, a campaign to distribute radios to households that cannot

25 This discussion was held at Martin Chautari in Kathmandu, 6 December 2007.

26 Presentation to a national consultation on community radio in Kathmandu, 3 December 2007.

27 According to the 2001 census, the total population of Nepal was 23.15 million. For early 2008, the estimated population of Nepal was about 27 million (CBS and MPE 2003).

28 This list has been compiled with help from Gopal Guragain, personal communication, January 2008.

even afford cheap receivers was started by senior radio journalist Bhairab Risal. In collaboration with community radio stations located in Makwanpur, Dhading, Chitwan, Nawalparasi and Palpa, more than 1,200 radios were distributed to people in the communities of Chepang, Darai, Bote, Majhi, and Kumal. This citizens' initiative is likely to continue in other parts of the country and has been picked up by the radio programme production organisation Antenna Foundation, which has distributed over 5,000 radios as part of its project of mobile radio demonstrations.²⁹ We can confidently assume that in the last decade, more Nepali families have come to own radio receivers than was the case in any previous ten-year period since Nepalis started buying radios in the late 1920s.

A survey in 1997 found that about 51% of Nepali households had radios (Maung & Ghimire 1997). A more recent survey in 2006-2007 found that 82% of Nepali households have radios and about 76% have radios with the FM band (Equal Access Nepal 1997). The same survey has suggested that about 95% Nepalis have FM radio stations in their neighbourhood and about 44% of the households have radios that cost less than NPR 500.

Some of the new radio stations have undertaken surveys of their own to find out some details of radio ownership and access in their primary broadcast areas. The baseline audience survey undertaken by Radio Madanpokhara in 2004 amongst 690 families in the city of Tansen and 15 Village Development Committees of the Palpa district revealed that while almost 87% of the respondents owned a radio set, only 77% had a set that could receive FM signals. In the city of Tansen, 85% of the families had FM radios whereas the corresponding number was 74.5% for the villages. The survey also revealed interesting differences amongst various caste and ethnic groups in terms of FM radio ownership. Almost 90% of the Brahmin and Newar families owned such radios, whereas the corresponding figures for Chhetris, Magars and "lower" castes were 73.8%, 73.7% and 60.7% respectively. Amongst Magars, 94.4% owned FM radio sets in the city, whereas the corresponding number was only 72.4% for the villages. More than 91% of those surveyed who had an FM radio set reported listening to Radio Madanpokhara. Almost 97% of the respondents with a college-level education reported listening to Radio Madanpokhara, whereas among illiterate respondents, this number was only 56.2%. Radio Madanpokhara was reported by 85% of the respondents as the most often listened-to radio station.³⁰ These data indicate very important differences in FM radio ownership and use between urban and rural residents and educated and illiterate citizens, as well as between and across caste and ethnic groups.

The availability of cheap radio sets, the spread of FM radio coverage to about 70% to 75% of the country's population, and con-

tents in some eighteen languages mean that radio has become the most accessible mass medium for the citizens of Nepal. Radio content has become a relatively cheap resource with which Nepalis can think about issues that concern their lives and the life of the nation at large.

Influence over content

What kinds of influence do radio listeners have over the content of FM radio stations in their areas? A definitive answer to this query can only be given after a comprehensive study involving investigation of the efforts of the respective radio stations and their listeners, as well as analyses of broadcast content and the processes that generate that content. Such a study was not possible as part of this investigation.

When commercial FM growth first took place in the Kathmandu Valley in the late 1990s, the general public's engagement with radio left a lot to be desired. Those analysing the situation then felt that members of the public were either too pleased to hear their own voices broadcast as part of (often trivial) phone conversations or they considered radio as only good for entertainment and thus a medium that was to be enjoyed, not one that required serious engagement (Onta 2006). Even on Radio Sagarmatha, which was considered to be a serious radio station offering discussions and analysis by some of the country's leading social critics, musical programmes drew considerable response from listeners in terms of regular feedback through various channels, but hosts of talk programmes barely got any feedback from their listeners.³¹ Friends of radio producers occasionally provided some encouraging advice but this too was merely perfunctory in functional terms.

Despite this situation, it was encouraging to hear many more and different types of voices over the radio than was customary for the case of the state-owned Radio Nepal. In the form of "vox pop", soundbites in magazine-style reportage, interviews, and discussion programmes, listeners of the then new radio in Kathmandu were getting to hear daily the voices of dozens of "small" and "big" people from all different walks of life. Just this fact alone made these new FM radios sound as if listeners had relatively good access to them and were in a position to influence their content. This perception was important in FM radio stations' ability to build rapport with their listeners and to make the medium appear far more democratic than had been the case with Radio Nepal and the print media in general.

As has been argued at some length by Guragain and Ghimire (2005), the relationship between radio stations and their listeners depends upon a host of factors on both sides. On the side of the radio stations, the quality of their programme content, their user-friendliness and their social reputation are some of the

29 Personal communication with Bhairab Risal and Madhu Acharya, January 2008.

30 This paragraph is based on Banjade (2006) who reports extensively about the findings of the survey.

31 The author hosted the discussion programme *Dabali* on Radio Sagarmatha between May 1998 and December 1999. During those months, he received no written feedback from his listeners. He did get a few phone calls from listeners who disagreed with points made in the programme by the guests.

more influential factors that determine their ability to attract listeners. On the side of the listeners, their social and demographic backgrounds, personal circumstances and interests influence their choice to tune in to particular stations and programmes. Guragain and Ghimire add that most listeners seek participation in programmes after being influenced by them to some degree and once that happens, it is up to the radio stations to decide if and how to organise their relationship with such listeners. They argue that although most stations have not defined this relationship in their policies, both commercial and community stations place great value in listener participation. However, only some radio stations have managed to structure this relationship formally (Guragain & Ghimire 2005, 63-73).

By and large, commercial stations have relied more upon market surveys for feedback on their programmes than direct responses from their listeners. Their desire to reach large audiences makes commercial sense as it allows them to claim higher rates for advertising. This explains why some Kathmandu-based stations have obtained licences to run a set of relay transmitters so that they can reach listeners in different parts of Nepal with the same set of programmes produced in Kathmandu. Nevertheless, commercial stations have come up with some programme formats that allow listeners to call the stations and interact with programme hosts and their guests. For instance, on *The Headliners* on Kantipur FM, listeners can call in and ask questions.

Community radio stations based in rural Nepal seem to have a better and more structured mechanism to engender and use listener feedback than is the case with commercial or urban-based radio stations. Some community radio stations such as Radio Madanpokhara have extensive networks of what are known as “listener clubs” which provide formal and extensive commentary on what is put on air by the radio, suggest ideas for programmes and even co-produce programmes with station staff. This radio station has formal representatives in the VDCs in its primary broadcast area and they are also part of the mechanism through which letters from listeners are gathered from various collection points and forwarded to it. Others such as Radio Lumbini have also organised listener clubs but additionally rely upon regular public hearings to collect feedback from listeners located within their primary broadcasting areas. Still others such as Radio Swargadwari collect listener commentaries while their reporters are in the field chasing stories. Some radio stations such as the Nepalgunj-based Bageswori FM have a network of active volunteer correspondents who provide feedback and materials for programme content.³² Some combinations of these feedback mechanisms have been adopted by other stations.

As the FM revolution has spread across Nepal, listener influence over content has come through various means and channels.

These have included personal visits to the stations, letters, email messages, phone calls and faxes. In the last three to four years, because of the increasing reach of mobile and CDMA phone lines, more and more rural listeners have been able to call radio stations from their phones to give their responses. “Perhaps because local radios have contributed to the demystification of radio broadcast technology, people are not afraid to speak on air. They have the confidence to speak on radio because they know people from their communities who have done that,” says Bhanu Timilsina, the former programme manager of the community radio Bijaya FM in Gaidakot.³³ Tula Adhikari of Bageswori FM also acknowledges the importance of the spread of mobile phones to generate responses from rural listeners.³⁴

Apart from feedback on broadcast content, FM radio stations have been accessed as a medium of expression by citizens who feel that the radio can voice their grievances or help them find solutions to their personal problems. Gunakar Aryal of Radio Madanpokhara recalls a time when a woman wrote to his station asking for suggestions regarding what she could do after her husband took a second wife. The station found a woman lawyer who explained on air the legal sanctions against polygamy. Apparently the couple reconciled and the woman wrote back to the station saying her husband loved her more than before.³⁵ Radio journalists in Kathmandu and elsewhere have over the years told many similar stories, some tinged with a sense of happiness because they were able to broadcast content that helped the individuals who had approached them.³⁶

Rural listeners have come to see radio as a medium of expression for news and commentary on aspects of family and community life. For instance, many have asked radio stations to broadcast news about marriages and births in their families or events in their communities. When development plans have been perceived as having a deleterious effect on the life of local communities, members of these communities have spoken out on local radio. For instance, this has happened on the programme *Hamro Lumbini* (Our Lumbini) on Radio Lumbini, where the negative impact on the local community of the expansion of Lumbini as a World Heritage Site was criticised (Martin et al. 2007). When journalist Ghama Raj Luitel (2004) studied the positive impact of Radio Swargadwari in Dang in mid-western Nepal, more than half of the 200 people he talked to mentioned the fact that they could now use radio to express their feelings and problems. Radio has also been used by local, regional or national critics to vent their opinions and commentary on a whole range of topics. But this is not to say that radio is equally available to all members of the community. As J.B. Biswakarma (2008) has reminded us, independent radio stations have been largely unavailable to members of the Dalit community, who have had to produce

32 Based on personal communication with Gunakar Aryal (Radio Madanpokhara), Mohan Chapagain (Radio Lumbini) and Dadhiram Subedi (Radio Swargadwari), December 2007, and the presentation by Tula Adhikari (Bageswori FM) at Martin Chautari on 29 March 2008. More details on the work of listener clubs can be found in Guragain and Ghimire (2005, 68-73).

33 Personal communication, January 2008.

34 Presentation at Martin Chautari on 29 March 2008.

35 Personal communication, December 2007.

36 This assessment is based on the author's continuous conversations with radio journalists since 1997.

their own programmes, and such producers have had to face discrimination from their non-Dalit colleagues.

FM radio stations have also been accessed as a medium of expression by civil society organisations for a number of reasons. Some approach the radio stations because they are interested in having news about their activities broadcast over radio. While for the radio station, these activities might constitute part of the work that generates local news of the day, for the organisations involved, this reporting provides them and their activities with the visibility necessary for their survival. In each radio station that broadcasts local news, dozens of phone calls, faxes and emails are received daily that report on activities that could potentially make it to the news. In Radio Sagarmatha, more than fifty such items are received daily, whereas in Radio Annapurna in Pokhara, about fifteen such items are received by the newsroom every day.³⁷

Civil society organisations have also used radio to highlight the issues they work on or care about. Radio programmes produced by such organisations (or jointly with some radio stations) have been broadcast on a variety of themes over the past decade. Themes such as anti-corruption campaigns, books, child rights, community forestry, conflict resolution, Constituent Assembly elections, Dalit rights, education, environment, good governance, human rights, old Nepali songs, public health, reproductive health, rights of the disabled, science and technology, social inclusion, sustainable development, and women's empowerment have been the focus of such programmes. As the escalation of the Maoist insurgency made development service delivery very difficult or impossible from around the turn of the century, many of the international NGOs working in Nepal and their Nepali NGO counterparts turned to promoting the rights of variously disenfranchised citizens and groups. As malgovernance and corruption were cited as two of the main causes of the Maoist insurgency, themes such as good governance were promoted by such organisations as well. The easier availability of independent radio stations – physically and bureaucratically speaking when compared with Radio Nepal – and the larger degree of editorial freedom granted to such organisations by those radio stations while producing the programmes focused on the above-mentioned themes meant these radio stations became an almost automatic medium for expression by civil society organisations in the last decade.

However, this combination also reflects the poor editorial and financial situation in which most of the independent radio stations find themselves. As they are financially weak and need to fill up their air time with socially relevant content, most of the radio stations have given up some of their editorial prerogative by broadcasting content prepared by outside entities. "Yes, we have sacrificed some degrees of our editorial capacity when broadcasting content prepared by other organisations," says Durga Karki of

Radio Sagarmatha. But she adds that such organisations also figure out rather quickly the parameters within which they should generate content acceptable to the radio stations concerned. However, other radio journalists are more critical of this relationship with civil society organisations. "This arrangement is not very good for the future health of independent radios," says Binod Dhungel, the news coordinator of Nepal FM in Kathmandu.³⁸

With respect to the radio stations' relationship with civil society organisations that are not producing their own programmes or are not necessarily interested in being in the news, this has to be described as less than satisfactory. If fault has to be identified, then the failure of radio stations to evaluate and challenge in depth the work of such organisations (and the social movements they are part of) and the failure of such organisations (or social movements) to engage seriously with radio are both responsible for this state of affairs.

The relationship between independent radio stations and political parties/actors is beginning to come under increasing public scrutiny (Bhusal 2007). Political parties have certainly used independent radio stations to push forward their party lines. Given the previous history of their doing the same with party-owned or affiliated print media, this dynamic on the part of the political parties is nothing surprising, and is perhaps part of a trend noticed in many countries. In their recent review of the state of community radio in Nepal, Pringle and Subba wrote:

In the past, some political "affiliation" of radio owners and staff, and by association of stations themselves, has been common, perhaps even the norm; furthermore, the growth of FM radio has, in part, been driven by the impulse to first advance and subsequently balance political presence... In the past, all stations have generally adhered to the principle that affiliation to political parties does not directly influence content and that FM stations remain strictly non-partisan and editorially independent (Pringle & Subba 2007, 19).

However, this is not to suggest that all radio stations have a political affiliation to project or promote. Deependra Shrestha of Radio Annapurna in Pokhara claims that his station provides selective space to all types of politicians, both national-level ones from Kathmandu and local leaders. "We invite them for talk programmes where we set the agenda. When they address public forums, we cover them in our news," says Shrestha.³⁹ When asked why only the same political leaders seem to appear repeatedly on all of the Kathmandu FM stations, Binod Dhungel of Nepal FM says that journalists approach only those politicians "who are popular, radio-sexy and in the mainstream of their own political parties."⁴⁰ In other words, radio stations are relatively easily

37 Personal communication with Durga Karki (Radio Sagarmatha) and Deependra Shrestha (Radio Annapurna), January 2008. Further details of the news production process in FM radios in Kathmandu and Pokhara are discussed in Adhikari (2005a, 2005b).

38 Personal communication with Durga Karki, Deependra Shrestha and Binod Dhungel, January 2008.

39 Personal communication, January 2008.

40 Personal communication, January 2008.

available as a medium of expression for specific individuals from the major political parties.

For rural radio stations, the absence of locally elected politicians for several years has meant that the medium's potential as a means of expression for locally competitive politics has been underdeveloped. "If our radio could challenge locally elected politicians to inform our listeners how they make and spend the development budget, we would be enhancing local democracy," says Mohan Chapagain of Radio Lumbini. In the absence of elected politicians, Chapagain adds, office secretaries avoid the limelight and do not want to be involved in controversies.⁴¹ Even though not in office, local politicians do have to pay attention to local radio stations. According to Min Bahadur Singh of Saipal FM, they tell the stations, "Please broadcast our words properly."⁴²

During the second People's Movement of 2006, most radio stations sided with those who wanted to put an end to King Gyanendra's active rule. When the movement reached its climax in April 2006, many stations became a medium of expression for those who wanted to see not only the end of Gyanendra's rule but also an end to monarchy as a political institution. This has continued even after the successful relegation of Gyanendra to the margins of Nepali politics.

As mentioned earlier, many new licences have been issued to radio stations since April 2006. In the words of Pringle and Subba:

There is serious concern that in the current phase of radio growth, concurrent with a critical time in the country's socio-political development, political parties will begin or have already started to exercise more overt influence over FM stations. The clearest example of this change is the advent of "Maoist" stations..., broadcasters that are clear and upfront about the influence of the party in decision-making (Pringle & Subba 2007, 19).⁴³

They added that, in the run-up to the Constituent Assembly elections, due to increasing competition between radio stations and the political parties that influence them, there existed the fear that the "politicisation of broadcasting" would get worse. However, they also said that "radio stations with clear community orientations are aware that their credibility lies in avoiding overt influence and maintaining a non-partisan position" (Pringle & Subba 2007, 19).

Radio as a medium for public engagement in issues concerning poverty, development and political change

How can we assess the recent experience of the development of independent radio, including community radio, as a medium for public engagement in issues concerning poverty, development and political change? To answer this question we need to understand that most of the independent radio stations are largely run by journalists and broadcasters who have been hired to produce journalistic and entertainment-oriented contents. Community radio stations are no exception. For that reason we can say that most of the existing community radios are more "for the community" radios that rely on journalists to produce most of their content than "from the community" radios. This is not to say that there is no participation from the communities in running these community radio stations and producing their content. There is, to various extents in different radios. However, most community radio stations, in fact most independent radio stations, operate under the journalist-as-a-trustee-of-the-public-interest model, and this fact has a direct bearing on how radio has performed as a medium for public engagement.

Since this is the case, the above question can be answered in three parts. First, we can offer a general view of the content of radio programmes as a way to understand what radio journalists and producers are offering to their listeners. Second, we can look at the quality of journalistic engagement and performance and on investments made (or not made) to enhance their capacities. Third, we can then assess radio's role in public engagement in issues concerning poverty, development and political change.

Programme content

FM radio has increased the amount of news available to radio listeners. This has especially been the case with respect to listeners located in urban areas, but is also becoming true for rural listeners as the coverage of FM radio stations expands further into rural Nepal. In the early days, since the FM stations were not supposed to broadcast their own official news bulletins (as per one of the conditions mentioned in their licences), none of the stations called their news-oriented programmes "news". However, they did broadcast news by other names. In terms of content, news programmes on independent radio stations vary a lot: they include a reading of the newspaper headlines and some main news from major newspapers of the day, both national and local; political, economic, development-related and sports reports; and reportage about literary activities, formal meetings, institutional events and other happenings in the local and national society at large.

In a 2005 study of news programmes broadcast over eleven FM stations in Kathmandu, it was found that nine stations were broadcasting over two hours of news each per day in four languages. Radio Sagarmatha, the leader in this category, was broadcasting a total of three hours and 40 minutes of news dur-

41 Personal communication, December 2007.

42 Stated during a discussion at Martin Chautari, 6 December 2007.

43 The reference to Maoist stations is to those four to six stations in different parts of Nepal that are generally perceived to be under the control of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist).

ing the course of its 18-hour daily broadcast. Media researcher Krishna Adhikari (2005a) found that politics dominated the news bulletins and almost half of the news broadcast was directly related to politics. In terms of other news coverage, development works, education, health and tourism-related items were also broadcast. Events, especially disasters and accidents, were also covered. In these Kathmandu stations, news reports were being produced through station correspondents, press releases, print, online and agency sources. Adhikari found much the same dominance of politics-related news in the five FM stations he studied in Pokhara which were broadcasting anywhere from two to three hours and 40 minutes of news daily in Nepali.⁴⁴ In recent years, a package of news programmes produced by the Kathmandu-based company Communication Corner has been bought and broadcast by more than thirty FM stations all over the country.⁴⁵

Second, FM radio stations have provided what can be called “everyday life” information. This includes information about bus schedules, market prices for vegetables and fruits, lost animals, traffic accidents, health camps, air pollution readings, weather forecasts, etc. In addition, FM radio has provided live information about special events such as elections, religious gatherings, and ethnic and national celebrations.

Third, FM radio is assisting the dissemination of expert and social knowledge on topics of interest to general listeners as well as NGOs and other entities engaged in social transformations in Nepal. This is being done through programmes designed to cater to various themes – about contraceptives and careers, disasters and development, health and hobbies, languages and literature, music and movies, poverty and politics, theatre and sports, and so on. This new knowledge is being disseminated through many popular formats such as “quiz” interaction, interviews, chat shows and musicals. Music production in many Nepali languages has received a shot in the arm due to the popularity of musical programmes on FM radio, and riding the wave of the popularity of such programmes, more serious programmes in those languages devoted to current affairs and analyses have also come on air.

Fourth, FM radio has increased the amount of social analysis available through various programming formats. In the form of a monologue it has come as anonymous or attributed response from persons walking on the streets, often called “vox pop” in radio parlance. It has also come in the form of commentary from noted social critics – a format pioneered by Radio Sagarmatha in its early days. As a dialogue, such social analysis has come in the form of short one-to-one interviews or longer conversations between the host and guest(s) in talk programmes. Additionally, it has come in the form of multiple dialogues between the host(s), guests and listeners who call in by phone. Frequently, others have participated in such discussions by sending in their queries by

mail, fax or email before the programmes go on air. Such analysis was also to be found in the magazine-style feature reportage focused on a specific theme as demonstrated by the early team of *Hamro Khald* on Radio Sagarmatha and *Madiko Pahur* on Radio Madanpokhara. In the early days of independent radio, some of the subjects covered by these programmes had never been discussed on Radio Nepal, while others received critical treatment that was then impossible to find on the state-owned radio.

The volume of this kind of analysis, especially in the talk format, has increased greatly in almost all of the radio stations. Talk radio is happening primarily in Nepali but it is also emerging in other languages spoken in Nepal. Topics selected have been quite varied, such as good governance, sustainable development, quality education, the Maoist insurgency, efforts to alleviate poverty, public health issues, local development, corruption, youth, foreign labour and the remittance economy, NGOs, literature and arts, human rights, etc. The rights of citizens and their development needs have also been discussed frequently as the importance of both increased when the state went into a spiralling crisis following the intensification of the Maoist insurgency from around the year 2000. After radio won back its freedom from authoritarian administrators, first during the emergency of 2001-2002 and again during 2005-2006, politics of the day has dominated talk programmes. The ongoing crisis of the Nepali state and the efforts to search for a permanent solution to this via the election of a Constituent Assembly and the eventual writing of a new constitution have frequently been the themes for discussion programmes in various talk shows.⁴⁶

Fifth, FM radio has increased the amount of oral history available on the radio. This has been achieved through programmes that present the life history of a “big” person in his own voice (*Mero Katha*), interviews with senior citizens and through profiles of “little people” made by reporters. Alternatively, personal histories have also been broadcast in programmes that have been presented in the form of letters from listeners to programme hosts.⁴⁷ These points hardly exhaust the programme content of FM radio stations in Nepal but they help us to come to a preliminary understanding of what independent radio stations are providing to their listeners.

Quality of journalistic engagement

We can look at the performance capability of radio journalists as a step towards the evaluation of the nature of public engagement with radio. In the early days of independent radio in Nepal, radio journalists who were all, relatively speaking, new in the profession were at a disadvantage when compared with their colleagues in print journalism. Some who had come to radio had a print media background but found the new medium and its requirements challenging. Others with no previous journalism

44 For further details on news in FM radios in Pokhara, see Adhikari (2005b).

45 Personal communication with Manteswori Rajbhandary, Communication Corner, December 2007.

46 For further details on talk shows in Kathmandu and Pokhara, see respectively Bhatta (2005) and Parajulee (2005).

47 For a social analysis of one such programme, see Kunreuther (2004).

background were inducted in the radio sector as raw personnel. They had to learn the techniques of radio format and the skills of journalism while on the job. Hence in the early days, independent radio journalists were not equipped, relatively speaking, both in the newsroom infrastructure preparedness sense and in terms of their personal skills, to broadcast breaking news. Instead they focused their attention on social reportage (this was especially true for Radio Sagarmatha in the late 1990s) and, given the absence of such contents on Radio Nepal, their work attracted both attention and appreciation from the public at large. Political news in the then new radio stations, it could be said, was a derivative product of what the print media had covered.

In the more recent past, radio journalists are becoming increasingly involved in the practice of broadcasting breaking news. In fact one could even say that the frequent (hourly) news bulletins on most independent FM stations have become the most popular news format. Many of these bulletins are produced with a shoestring budget. Even though the number of news bulletins has increased over the years, station owners have been reluctant to add additional journalists and make new investments in their news teams. For instance, one FM station in the south-central city of Hetauda had just two reporters and an editor staffing its newsroom in early November 2007.⁴⁸ It is rather common to find radio stations where staff exclusively dedicated to news production are absent. In 2005, at one leading commercial station in Pokhara, the person who headed the news section also hosted several talk shows a week and handled some phone-in entertainment-oriented programmes, as well as managing the station. As a result, there is a severe lack of editorial depth even in stations that have been on air for a good part of the past decade. This lack shows up in poor news judgement and the broadcast of news stories that have not been cross-verified.

According to Gopal Guragain, the director of the production house Communication Corner, there is a looming crisis that independent radios are inviting upon themselves given their penchant to be the first to broadcast news that has not been processed according to the correct editorial protocols. Continuous abuse of editorial authority on the part of unscrupulous radio producers is likely to bring discredit to the entire independent radio sector.⁴⁹

Talk show hosts pioneered discussions on current affairs and much else in independent radio in the late 1990s. These programmes, it could be said, contributed to radio's role in expanding the burgeoning Nepali public sphere around the turn of the century. They brought into public scrutiny many aspects of Nepali society in ways that were certainly new for Nepal during the late 1990s. However, this format and its achievements started to plateau by the year 2002 or so. In the late 1990s, it was common for talk show hosts – even those who produced several programmes a week – to be their own producer, researcher and anchor. That situation was then justified, both by the producers involved and

by station managers, as somewhat “natural” given the infancy of the independent radio sector. However, the model of the single-person-produced talk show has not changed much in stations with such programmes in the past five to six years.

According to journalists, one of the main reasons for this stagnation was again the unwillingness of the radio stations to make additional investments in the personnel producing such programmes. “I have given up on the hope that I will ever have a research assistant to run my daily evening show,” says Kiran Pokharel, who hosts the very popular talk show *Ajaka Kura* on Radio Sagarmatha. “The idea that I might need research help in running my two talk shows is so alien to the station management that I have not even made a proposal to them regarding this,” says Shreeram Paudel, who hosts *Ajako Sandarva* and *Samaya Chakra* on Image FM. When asked if the increasing competition in the talk show genre on FM stations in Kathmandu has helped to upgrade its quality, Pokharel mentions his personal effort, adding that it is necessary to maintain his reputation. Paudel adds, “When doing programmes related to politics, I discuss them with my reporter colleagues. However, there is no structural strength and this shows when I do programmes on non-political issues.”⁵⁰

Other journalists too have often blamed the managers of radio stations – commercially-owned or NGO-owned – who ask them to increase the quantity of programmes broadcast with very little new investment. There seems to be much truth in their accusation. Most radio stations cannot demonstrate that they have added investment in their news teams and talk shows even when they are producing more of both compared with three or four years ago. In fact, the station manager of a relatively new commercial FM station in Kathmandu, Manteswori Rajbhandary, acknowledges that a talk show hosted by one of her colleagues had to be put on hold because she could not provide him with a research assistant. According to her, except for donor-supported programmes, the station does not have enough money of its own to produce such talk shows. However, she does not feel that all the blame should go to radio station management. Even as the intellectual resources available to radio journalists have increased significantly over the last decade, she feels that many of those who have joined the sector recently do not apply themselves adequately to prepare for a long career in radio journalism.⁵¹ “Journalists employed by radio stations do have the time to do research on topics they are chasing as reporters or talk show hosts, but they do not do research because they fail to see it as a long-term investment in their own careers,” adds Rajbhandary.

What this means is that the enthusiasm and skills of individual radio journalists have contributed to making radio an important medium of public engagement. However, as the number of radio stations has increased over the years, robust institutional investments are lacking. Those who have joined the sector recently

48 Personal communication with Hari Humagain, Hetaunda FM, November 2007.

49 Mentioned in his interview with Parajulee (2007, 134).

50 Personal communication with Kiran Pokharel, Radio Sagarmatha, December 2007; and with Shreeram Paudel, Image FM, December 2007.

51 Personal communication, December 2007.

have not been provided with institutional incentives to apply themselves to produce better quality programmes. As a result of all these factors at work, the quality of journalistic engagement in issues across the board has not improved in the desired manner.

Public deliberations on poverty, development and political change

What, then, has been the experience in Nepal with respect to radio as a medium for public engagement in issues concerning poverty, development and political change? A definitive answer to this question will have to wait for a more comprehensive study that can look at the programme portfolio of each radio station in recent years and analyse not only the content of the relevant programmes but also the level of their engagement on these issues. Given that most radio stations claim to have broadcast many programmes that deal with development issues of Nepali society, this will certainly not be an easy task. Given the short duration of this investigation, such a study was not possible here. Hence only provisional answers have been provided on the basis of what others have said in the past and also on the basis of responses given to the writer by various stakeholders in the radio landscape during the course of this investigation.

Despite their shortcomings discussed above, it is clear that independent radio stations have furthered a culture of public deliberations on issues concerning poverty, development and political change in Nepal. Through broadcast of various types of information and analysis in many different formats and languages, radio stations have broadened the public debate on poverty, development and politics in Nepal through the participation of previously unheard voices and through the dissemination of the debate to areas and communities poorly served by radio until recently. Examples of programmes in languages other than Nepali can be cited here. Significant programmes in the Tamang language (Tamang 2005) and Newari (Maharjan 2002) have gone on air from various radio stations in the central and eastern parts of the country. Tharu language programmes were put on air by the organisation Backward Society Education (BASE) through its station Ghodaghodi FM in the western district of Kailali. These programmes were especially targeted towards former bonded labourers who had become free after a declaration by the Nepali state in July 2000 (Fujikura 2007). In the more recent past, programmes focused on the ongoing political transition in Nepal have been broadcast in many languages. *Katchari* (in Tharu), *Deskai* (mostly in Maithili from Janaki FM in the eastern Tarai town of Janakpur), *Chinophano* (in Nepali, produced by Antenna Foundation and broadcast from various stations) and *Badlindo Nepal* (in Nepali, produced by Communication Corner and broadcast over several stations) are some examples, but there are many more.

Talk shows have been the format par excellence through which radio stations have pushed forward the culture of public deliberations. On talk shows, radio stations have promoted discussions related to politics including internal democracy in political

parties, their financing, elections, and inter-generational struggles for leadership. These shows have also featured many issues directly related to poverty and development including agriculture, education, environment, economy, food and livelihood security, health, hydropower, NGOs, and tourism. They have promoted a multifaceted discussion about democracy, civil and political rights and social movements. Discussion programmes have got Nepalis talking to each other in ways that are important for the overall democratisation of Nepali society, concludes Komal Bhatta after a study of talk shows in Kathmandu which are often burdened with issues at the “national” level.⁵²

On the other hand, local radio stations have been very successful in bringing local and community-specific issues into public deliberation. After a study of discussion programmes on four FM radio stations in Pokhara, Shekhar Parajulee has concluded that they have brought to attention problems in local development (e.g., supply of drinking water), delays in government offices, environmental degradation, education, and much more. Despite many weaknesses on the part of the show hosts, these programmes are effective on many counts, says Parajulee. They have been useful in bringing to the same table representatives of groups that have been parties to everyday conflict. Many such conflicts have been resolved as a result of these discussions. After hearing the versions of many sides on a specific issue, the knowledge of the listeners has been enhanced and members of the local community have discovered each other’s skills and strengths. Parajulee adds that by subjecting public officials to a kind of public hearing, such programmes have played a role in increasing the monitoring of local politicians and development administrators by the media. In so doing they have contributed to the making of an accountability system for local leaders.⁵³ “When radio broadcasts news or discussions that highlight problems in the village, city or district development committees, pressure builds up on the officials and they act to resolve those problems,” says Bhanu Timilsina, who worked for Bijaya FM until recently.

FM radio’s interactions with government officials and politicians have added to the collective knowledge of radio listeners regarding governance, or the lack thereof, in Nepali society. Similarly discussions with practitioners of other professions have demystified specialist knowledge, intellectually empowering the community of listeners to some extent.

Independent radio stations have assisted public deliberations through other programme formats too. These include short interviews, news, commentaries, magazine reports, special thematic programmes, radio drama, etc. Through short interviews and news, listeners have had a chance to hear a lot from

52 For further details see Bhatta (2005). Bhatta has not noticed any significant changes in the format and performance of radio talk shows in Kathmandu since 2005. Personal communication, January 2008.

53 For further details, see Parajulee (2005). These views were also shared by Pokhara-based broadcaster Gangadhar Parajuli in a conference organised at Martin Chautari on 29 March 2008.

politicians, constitutional experts and others about the rapid political changes of the past two years and about the ongoing political process to elect the Constituent Assembly. Though talk about poverty and development issues has been sidelined a bit (compared to the late 1990s), these subjects have not completely vanished from the programmes in these formats.

According to Gunakar Aryal of Radio Madanpokhara, in his experience, news has not been a very good format for promoting public deliberations on poverty and development. “Educational programmes, radio plays and even musical programmes have been far more effective when it comes to promoting discussions on poverty and development; radio magazines come second,” says Aryal. Mohan Chapagain of Radio Lumbini adds that radio programmes have urged individuals to do more than just deliberate on issues related to development. He gives the example of a radio programme that prompted a listener with money to engage in local philanthropy by paying for the construction of drinking water pipes for a school.⁵⁴ Development issues feature prominently in magazine reports and special thematic programmes, some of which are being produced by civil society organisations as mentioned above.

Although an overwhelming number of radio stations on air are still located in urban areas or district headquarters, most of their listeners are located in rural areas of Nepal. Hence, according to Guragain and Ghimire, the pressure to broadcast content that is relevant to the needs and aspirations of Nepalis living in rural Nepal bears equally upon commercial and community stations. On issues that have a direct bearing on social development, independent radio stations have played an important role. In particular, they have been important partners in the campaign against “untouchability” spearheaded by Dalit activists, the campaign against social discrimination of widowed women, the campaign against the practice of dowry, and in the rights-based movement of women, Dalits, children and others. Independent radio stations have contributed to the positive public evaluation of such campaigns and to enhancing the self-confidence of poor and socially excluded groups and communities, conclude Guragain and Ghimire.

However, they also add that the total minutes of broadcast time dedicated to programmes related to agriculture, skills development, livelihoods, and other concerns of rural listeners is very small compared to the total minutes of daily broadcasts by the various stations on air. Most commercial stations are not interested in broadcasting programmes targeted towards farmers or related to their concerns. Although many programmes are targeted at the poor, Guragain and Ghimire argue that only a few raise the issue of poverty. Programmes on development and health, on the other hand, do receive lots of air time.⁵⁵ Despite

these shortcomings, radio promoter Gopal Guragain has recently concluded that independent radio stations have created curiosity regarding local development, facilitated the participation of citizens in national development activities, enhanced the political consciousness of their listeners and contributed to the deepening of democracy at the local level.⁵⁶

Radio activist Raghu Mainali feels that in the past ten years, independent radio stations have successfully brought the voices of those marginalised in Nepali society to the mainstream of Nepali social and political life. He adds that these stations have made public the fundamental strength of local communities. By amplifying the voice of various communities, Mainali adds that they have contributed to the reduction of poverty. They have also played a role in empowering local people and made their rulers more accountable to them. By doing this, according to Mainali, radio has contributed to the creation of (public knowledge about) good governance and the delivery of development. He adds that radio has played a significant part in the rights-based social movements of women and ethnic and linguistic minorities. All this has contributed to the enhancement of the living standards of local people, claims Mainali.⁵⁷

The changing relationship between radio and other media

From the very beginning, FM radio programmes have encouraged cross-media reference as a routine everyday practice. While newspaper content has been read over FM radio, programmes aired have influenced the print media as well. Additionally, radio programme hosts are bringing internet content to listeners who do not have direct access to the net and more radio programmes are increasingly becoming available over the internet.

Radio and print

In the early days when FM radio stations were not generating their own news, they read news published by local and national newspapers in the morning. The intentions behind doing so were many. The radio stations thought that they would be providing a free news service to those who could not read newspapers or could not afford to buy many of them. Radio stations outside Kathmandu had agents in Kathmandu whose job was to fax copies of important news from the nationally significant dailies published in the capital. This would be done early in the morning and radio stations in cities like Pokhara, which the Kathmandu-published newspapers would only reach after 10 a.m. or so, thought they were providing important news from national newspapers to their listeners before physical copies arrived in their city.⁵⁸

54 Personal communication with Gunakar Aryal and Mohan Chapagain, December 2007.

55 Based on Guragain and Ghimire (2005, 35-51).

56 This passage is based on Guragain's interview with Parajulee (2007, 124-25).

57 This passage is based on Mainali's interview with Parajulee (2007, 108-09).

58 Based on conversations with radio journalists in Pokhara between 2001 and 2005.

While some radio announcers would properly credit the sources of the news they were reading on air, there were others who were less scrupulous about this. This led to the situation where newspaper editors, publishers and reporters thought their work was being poached for free by the radio stations which had not invested in their own newsrooms. In Kathmandu and Pokhara, this led to an acrimonious relationship between newspapers and radio stations in the early days. In 2003, two years after four FM stations went on air in Pokhara, this became a major issue and had to be handled by the Kaski branch of the Federation of Nepalese Journalists (FNJ), the largest professional body of journalists in Nepal. It decided that the radio stations not only had to give full credit to the newspapers whose news they chose to read on air, but also had to pay royalties to the newspapers. According to media researcher Krishna Adhikari, who has written about this, this decision has not been fully implemented (Adhikari 2005b, 311-313).

Deependra Shrestha of Radio Annapurna says that the relationship between newspapers and radio stations in Pokhara has improved and is now “very cordial.” Much the same is the case in Dang, according to Dadhiram Subedi. In Dang and elsewhere, journalists are known to be working both for radio and print at the same time. “This allows for some sharing of personnel and resources,” says Subedi.⁵⁹

Does radio content influence print media and vice versa now? “A lot of information is being broadcast over radio and that is good for print journalists as we can get clues for news, pursue our own sources and produce more elaborate news for our newspaper the next day,” says Razen Manandhar, who reports for *The Himalayan Times*. Rama Parajuli, who worked for the newspaper *Kantipur* for over ten years and Suveksha Bindu, a senior reporter at *Nepal Samacharpatra*, add that radio has made the job of lazy print journalists easier because they can manufacture news without doing field research. In rural Nepal, some print journalists who work as stringers for Kathmandu newspapers are known to have produced news based on the broadcast of local radio.⁶⁰

But not all print journalists find radio useful. Tilak Pathak, a reporter for the weekly newsmagazine *Nepal*, says that radio content in the present format is of almost no use to him. Pathak, Parajuli and Bindu cannot recall an instance where a story they have written was based on a radio item. However, Ghamaraj Luintel of Radio Sagarmatha asserts that radio discussions do help magazine reporters prepare their reports and analysis and radio features provide story ideas to many print journalists who want to do soft stories. “Many of them have called me to ask for telephone numbers of people who we have featured. It is something else that they might not want to

acknowledge that their stories are influenced by what we have broadcast,” adds Luintel.⁶¹

What about the other way around? Radio journalists admit that they do get ideas to produce radio content from print media. Durga Karki of Radio Sagarmatha says that material she and her colleagues find in newspapers is useful not for their newsroom but for discussion or magazine programmes that her station airs. Her former colleague Narayan Shrestha, who hosted discussion programmes for over six years, adds that the reports and analysis of print media were useful for him to figure out the angles he would pursue in the issues he would select for his programmes. “Because the print media has a more elaborate production routine, I found it more useful for this purpose than online news portals and TV,” says Shrestha. Ghamaraj Luintel adds that stories published by print media have also been useful to design and execute other specialised radio programmes. Deependra Shrestha, who runs a morning talk show in Radio Annapurna, says that the contents of local newspapers in Pokhara occasionally help him to set the theme for his programme. Shrestha adds that the content broadcast by his radio station has also influenced print content. Bhuwan Timilsina, who hosted a talk show on Bijaya FM in Gaidakot in south-central Nepal until August 2007, says that the news and features carried by local Chitwan-based newspapers did help him to select the topics for his show.⁶² All in all, there seems to be a feeling that the relationship of influence between print and radio goes both ways.

Radio, television and the internet

Bhuwan Timilsina says that he did not find the internet useful to run his talk show on Bijaya FM. However, others seem to have found the internet to be useful in two ways. First, according to some radio journalists such as Narayan Shrestha, it is useful for searching online archives of old newsmagazines and papers. This is especially handy because most radio stations do not have a functional library. Second, for those who work in the newsrooms, the internet is useful for writing international political and sports news. Many owners of commercial stations have, over the years, told media researchers that it is cheaper for them to generate international news this way than to report about local activities. In April 2005 Pritamman Buddhacharya, the owner of Pokhara FM, told researcher Krishna Adhikari that it was difficult to report about local sports activities, whereas by following television and internet reports, his reporters could provide up-to-date reports about international sports.⁶³ Independent radio stations also play a role in enhancing the

59 Personal communication with Dadhiram Subedi, December 2007; and with Deependra Shrestha, January 2008.

60 Personal communication with Razen Manandhar, Rama Parajuli, Suveksha Bindu and Gunakar Aryal, December 2007.

61 Personal communication with Razen Manandhar, Rama Parajuli, Suveksha Bindu, Tilak Pathak and Ghamaraj Luintel, December 2007.

62 Personal communication with Durga Karki and Ghamaraj Luintel, December 2007; and with Deependra Shrestha, Narayan Shrestha and Bhuwan Timilsina, January 2008.

63 See Adhikari (2005b, 306). What Buddhacharya was really saying was that it was cheaper for him to produce updated news about international sports than to cover sports in Pokhara.

general public's knowledge about the internet when stations such as Radio Sagarmatha broadcast programmes focused on the internet and its use.

Radio journalists have also found television coverage to be of some use for their work. Narayan Shrestha, who used to run talk shows on Radio Sagarmatha before joining the BBC World Service Trust, says that television was sometimes useful for him to set the theme for his shows. However, it was more useful as a medium to figure out how to interview political leaders, adds Shrestha. Similarly, Bhuwan Timilsina found the evening coverage of Nepal Television, Kantipur Television and Image Channel (not to mention BBC Nepali Radio Service) useful to decide the theme and speaker of his early morning interviews on Bijaya FM.⁶⁴

Radio and print journalists who were interviewed as part of this investigation said that mutual influence between the two media worked best for stories related to the changing political scene in Nepal and less so for themes related to development and poverty. Perhaps this has something to do with the way in which political stories dominate the lives of most Nepali journalists, who pay much less attention to issues concerning development and poverty *per se*.

CONCLUSION: RADIO AND POLITICAL DEBATE/CHANGE

In this final and concluding section of the report, the relationship between radio and political debate and change is discussed. As this is an issue that has been touched upon in the previous two sections, the discussion here will be succinct. It will draw upon what has been said earlier in the report.

Relationship between radio and political debate and outcomes in Nepal

Evidence presented by those who have been involved in promoting independent radio in Nepal or in producing content for both commercial and community radio stations has suggested that these stations have been at the forefront of promoting political debate in the country. As many journalists consulted during this investigation have pointed out, radio reporters have given instant reports and news of all kinds of political activities and transitions that have taken place in national politics in Nepal. According to media researcher Devraj Humagain, who has closely observed the FM radio scene since 2001, this kind of continuous political coverage has allowed listeners to be constantly aware of what is happening at the political centre of the country (Kathmandu).⁶⁵ FM news programmes over the networks promoted by Communication Corner and others have

allowed listeners in different parts of Nepal to know, almost blow-by-blow, what was going on in Kathmandu amongst the political parties as they tried to sort out the path for the holding of the Constituent Assembly elections.

Local radio stations based in different parts of the country have done as much in the case of local politics, even when there has not been much competitive substance in them because of the absence of elections to the locally elected bodies at the village, city or district levels for several years. Even in the absence of locally elected representatives, radio stations have promoted a culture of public hearing and accountability on the part of local politicians and administrators and have got them and their public involved in a multi-way conversation that augurs well for the future of Nepal.

Talk shows hosted by various stations have provided a platform for representatives of different political parties to elaborate their views and their stand in the ongoing political negotiations. This is an important service radio stations are providing to their listeners. In addition, commentaries from social critics, broadcast in the format of a monologue or while they are participating in talk shows in the company of politicians, provide different perspectives to the public than those provided by politicians interested in a particular outcome that is more favourable to their respective parties. In other words, as discussed in the second section of the report, talk shows have enlarged the public sphere of political debate in Nepal.

The verdict on the relationship between radio and political outcomes is less clear. While this investigation can definitely conclude that radio stations have enlarged the scope of the political debates in recent Nepal, it cannot demonstrate that they have played a significant part in ensuring a definitive political outcome. All the political parties were committed to the process of holding the Constituent Assembly elections and drafting the new constitution, but neither radio stations nor the media sector as a whole could ensure that they took place. Radio stations have been building pressure on the parties, but only the parties can ensure a smooth political transition.

Aspects that make radio different from other media in influencing political change

As discussed in the first section of the report, the diverse ownership arrangements and spatial distribution of radio stations all over Nepal mean that independent radio stations form part of the partially successful democratisation process that is ongoing in the country. This is a reflection of how the erstwhile Kathmandu-dominated country is gradually changing. It is a reflection of how power relations between the capital and other regions of the country, as well as between the traditional ruling class/caste and other sections of Nepali society, are being increasingly negotiated and managed by radio stations and other types of intermediate-level organisations located in various parts of Nepal.

64 Personal communication with Narayan Shrestha and Bhuwan Timilsina, January 2008.

65 Personal communication, January 2008.

The easy access (in terms of being able to receive the signals and in economic terms) that independent radios have provided to a large majority of Nepalis – when compared with both print and television – means that radio has a significantly different potential for influencing political change in Nepal. Some aspects of this potential have been realised. Thus far, radio's contribution to inculcating a robust kind of political consciousness in the citizens of Nepal with respect to their political rights has been documented. Radio's ability to provide a degree of self-confidence to the citizens of the country so that they begin to have a healthy curiosity about their right to development and better living standards has also been recorded. These are important contributions but they alone cannot assure that multiply-disenfranchised Nepalis will see optimistic political changes and benefit from the delivery of development services and outcomes.

Impact of radio, other media, and participation in radio and other media on political change in Nepal during the past two years

The one impact that many of those consulted for this study seem to agree that radio and other media have had on political change in Nepal during the past two years is the successful relegation of King Gyanendra to the margins of Nepali politics after the completion of the second People's Movement in spring 2006. During the People's Movement, news on radio allowed listeners to be aware of what was happening in different parts of the country as part of the movement. The talk shows highlighted why King Gyanendra's role as an active monarch should come to an end. According to media researcher Devraj Humagain, independent radio prompted listeners to participate in the movement.⁶⁶ Radio promoter Raghu Mainali has claimed that the large and non-violent participation of the Nepali people in the movement to dislodge the active monarchy of King Gyanendra can be attributed to the work of independent radio.⁶⁷ Subsequent to this movement, the level of curiosity regarding politics among listeners has been enhanced and radio has contributed to an overwhelming desire among the people of Nepal for a substantial and pro-democratic transition.

In the months since spring 2006, radio has been able to build constant pressure about elections to the Constituent Assembly as the only route that will deliver a permanent solution for the political aspirations and demands of the formerly armed Maoist party, the other political parties and many identity-based and regional movements. By putting that squarely in the focus of the present political debate, radio has done its bit to try to curb the excesses of all parties. In other words, in collaboration with many other democratic forces in play in Nepal, radio has contributed to bringing into the mainstream the former rebels in the form of the Maoist party.

Aspects of the regulatory regime and of the style and content of radio which affect its capacity to influence political change

This has been discussed at length in the previous two sections. As mentioned in the first section, silences and confusion in the regulatory regime have resulted in a situation where non-profit and community radio stations are at a serious disadvantage when compared with for-profit stations because the legal regime does not distinguish between the two. As the fees imposed by the state for the initial licence and annual renewal are the same for both categories of station, and bold initiatives have been lacking to make community radio financially solvent, those who have a more service-oriented purpose have also been forced to rely on the market to cover their expenses. This has created a dynamic that implicitly forces most independent radio stations to rely on the market-led business plan model for their survival.

As the number of radio stations has gone up at a time when the economy has virtually come to a halt, this has led to debilitating competition amongst radio stations, forcing them to produce their programmes on a shoestring budget. The analysis presented in the second section of this report has suggested that in the absence of additional investments in their newsrooms and programme producers, radio stations that have been around for a good part of the last decade have not been able to enhance the journalistic quality of their news and talk shows. The number of news bulletins and talk shows has gone up but not the quality of their content. Some stations have dropped presentations in the magazine format as they cannot afford to hire an adequate number of programme producers. All this has somewhat stunted radio's ability to monitor and report seriously about the fast changing political landscape in Nepal in a more effective way as demanded by the advancing expectations of the radio listeners at large.

Finally, with regard to the hypothesis that was investigated in this study, independent radio as a source of information and communication among poor and marginalised Nepalis has enhanced some aspects of their ability to influence their everyday circumstances and participation in local-level democratic processes and political change. However, the impact of this change at a larger social level is not yet clear. It can be hoped that the coming months and years will provide the experience and insight to document that change as well. ■

⁶⁶ Personal communication, January 2008.

⁶⁷ See Deane's (2006) interview with Mainali.

List of People Consulted

1. Bhairab Risal, radio commentator, Radio Sagarmatha, Kathmandu
2. Bhuwan Timilsina, ex-programme manager, Bijaya FM, Gaidakot
3. Binod Dhungel, news coordinator, Nepal FM, Kathmandu
4. Dadhiram Subedi, station manager, Radio Swargadwari, Dang
5. Deependra Shrestha, talk show host and station manager, Radio Annapurna, Pokhara
6. Devraj Humagain, media researcher, Martin Chautari, Kathmandu
7. Durga Karki, news coordinator, Radio Sagarmatha, Kathmandu
8. Ghamaraj Luintel, deputy station manager, Radio Sagarmatha, Kathmandu
9. Gopal Guragain, director, Communications Corner, Kathmandu
10. Gunakar Aryal, station manager, Radio Madanpokhara, Palpa
11. Hari Humagain, Hetaunda FM, Hetaunda
12. Khem Raj Shrestha, radio network project coordinator, Panos South Asia, Kathmandu
13. Kiran Pokharel, talk show host, Radio Sagarmatha, Kathmandu
14. Komal Bhatta, media researcher, Martin Chautari, Kathmandu
15. Madhu Acharya, director, Antenna Foundation, Kathmandu
16. Manteswori Rajbhandary, station manager, Ujjalo FM, Kathmandu and Communication Corner
17. Mohan Chapagain, station manager, Radio Lumbini, Manigram
18. Rama Parajuli, BBC World Service Trust-Nepal, Kathmandu
19. Rajendra Dahal, chairman, Press Council Nepal, Kathmandu
20. Razen Manandhar, reporter, *The Himalayan Times*, Kathmandu
21. Shekhar Parajulee, media researcher, Martin Chautari, Kathmandu
22. Shreeram Paudel, talk show host, Image FM, Kathmandu
23. Suvash Darnal, former chairman, Jagaran Media Centre, Kathmandu
24. Suveska Bindu, news coordinator, *Nepal Samacharpatra*, Kathmandu
25. Tilak Pathak, assistant senior reporter, *Nepal Weekly*, Kathmandu

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INVESTIGATION 2

Poverty Reduction

Introduction

DAVID SOUTER

Investigation 2 of the BCO Impact Assessment – Component 3 focused on the hypothesis that *ICTs help to make markets work for the poor*. It included two separate inquiries:

- A general review of the evidence base concerning ICTs, markets and development, which was commissioned from Richard Duncombe of the Institute for Development Policy and Management at the University of Manchester.
- A specific review of six market-related interventions supported by Hivos and IICD in Ecuador, which was commissioned, at Hivos' and IICD's request, from Manuel Acevedo, who had previously undertaken evaluation work in connection with these projects.

Markets are fundamental to the dynamics of economic relationships. People have exchanged goods and services in some form of market for millennia – long before the advent of money as a mechanism to facilitate exchange. When markets work effectively, as DFID argues in a discussion paper cited in Richard Duncombe's report, they provide "the most efficient primary mechanism for exchange, coordination and the allocation of goods and services and other resources within the economy." "In a modern economy," according to the 2001-2002 *Global Information Technology Report*, "all economic activity, from the production and sales decisions of the smallest farmer to those of the largest corporation, relies on markets."

The relationship between markets and the poor is therefore crucial to strategies for poverty reduction, and an increasing amount of attention has been paid in recent years to ways in which markets might become more responsive to the needs of the poor and marginalised, and in which the market capabilities of the poor and marginalised might be enhanced. There are many aspects to the literature in these debates, to which Richard Duncombe's report provides a valuable introductory guide. Two seem particularly important for those concerned with the potential impact of information and communication technologies on market performance and behaviour.

The first aspect of special interest concerns the complexity of interactions which people in all societies – including the poor and marginalised – have with market mechanisms. Much of the literature in this area, particularly that concerning ICTs, has focused on the poor as producers, usually primary producers and particularly farmers. However, this represents only one area of market interaction for the poor, who often sell their labour as well as produce – indeed, the sale of labour rather than produce is for many the primary source of income – and

who also interact with markets as consumers. There has been particular attention paid recently to the poor as consumers following the work of the Indian economist C.K. Prahalad on what he characterises as "bottom of the pyramid" markets (i.e., the aggregation of demand for small units of consumption amongst the poor).

The second aspect of special interest concerns the nature of relationships within the markets that are available to the poor and marginalised. As with other aspects of social and economic life, people's market capabilities vary according to many different factors: their relative economic status; their ability to substitute alternative goods and services, whether as producers or consumers; their position in power structures based on politics, landholding, ethnicity or gender; their access to resources such as knowledge and social networks with which they can enhance their bargaining position.

Markets are complex, and all markets are, of course, imperfect. No market ever optimally matches supply and demand, or equally meets the needs of producers or consumers. All markets are in a state of flux, responding not just to changes in economic circumstances but also to political, social and cultural influences on the supply and demand of a changing range of goods and services. The relative positions of market actors also fluctuate as time goes by. Markets, as a result, may well favour particular actors or groups of actors, whether as a result of market failure (i.e., failure to maximise efficiency in the distribution of goods and services), imperfections in market structure, or the power dynamics within particular markets. The latter are most significant – and most likely to result in exploitation of the poor – where there are too few buyers (monopsony, oligopsony) or sellers (monopoly, oligopoly) of goods or services.

From a development point of view, and particularly that of poverty reduction, the key objectives where markets are concerned might be described as being:

- To facilitate circumstances in which markets deliver the range of goods and services for which there is demand at prices and on terms which are affordable to the poor.
- To facilitate circumstances in which the value of goods and services (including labour) generated by the poor is divided between producers, intermediaries (including employers) and consumers in such a way that it gives the poor sufficient return to meet current living costs and accumulate resources for the future (pay for education, save for times of crisis, etc.).

It is here that there has been much discussion about the potential role of information and communication technologies. It has long been understood that information about market circumstances is a critical factor in enabling participants in markets to maximise market outcomes from their point of view. Information and power tend to reinforce one another, and new ICTs have been seen as potentially powerful mechanisms for increasing the information about market conditions which is available to the poor. This includes information for production (farm inputs, produce prices in different urban markets), labour (job availability) and consumption (sale prices in different shops, etc.). Information of this kind has always been available – for example through word of mouth, exchanges within peer groups, inter-generational transfer and official extension services – but the range of channels for information distribution has been increased by the new ICTs that have become available. It now includes, for example, local radio (producer and consumer information, advertisements), mobile telephones (automated SMS information services) and the internet (access to a wide range of government and other information resources).

The literature on this has not been without criticism. Much of the evidence to date about the impact of ICTs on business information has been anecdotal in character. A high proportion of it has concerned producers gaining access to information about prices in consumer markets which appears to enable them either (some would say) to “bypass middlemen” or (more likely) to negotiate more effectively with market intermediaries and achieve a better distribution of the return on the sale of produce. There is, however, also strong evidence here that much depends on context. It is not just producers that gain increased access to information, but also intermediaries and consumers; the dynamics of market power may change in a number of ways as a result of increased market information, not necessarily in favour of producers. Producers, too, are not always free agents: some (maybe those with more education or more capital) may be better positioned than others (maybe those who are indebted or otherwise tied to particular intermediaries) to take advantage of changing market power. Information could therefore lead to a redistribution among producers as well as to a redistribution between producers and others in the value chain.

These are some of the complexities which led BCO partners to select the issue of ICTs, markets and the poor – and in particular the hypothesis that *ICTs help to make markets work for the poor* – as part of the BCO Impact Assessment. As noted earlier, BCO partners agreed to address this hypothesis by commissioning two pieces of work.

The authors of both studies were asked to focus on five issues in particular:

- The relationship between markets and information
- The relationships between producers, intermediaries and consumers

- The relationship between ICTs, other inputs into the livelihoods of project stakeholders, and other factors influencing stakeholder behaviour and livelihoods
- The distributional impact of the benefits of market information
- Overall impacts on poverty and livelihoods

The first study commissioned was a general overview of the existing evidence base. This was commissioned from Richard Duncombe of the Institute for Development Policy and Management at the University of Manchester, which has developed specialist expertise in this field over the past decade. Richard Duncombe’s paper looks at the relationships between markets, development and ICTs from three distinct perspectives: that of the market itself, that of the enterprise, and that of the livelihoods of the poor and livelihoods analysis. It then assesses current evidence, building in particular on the value chain experienced by consumers and small enterprises, and concluding with recommendations for a variety of actors interested in entrepreneurship development.

Alongside this general study, Hivos and IICD asked BCO to commission Manuel Acevedo to build on earlier work which he had done to assess their support for microcredit and entrepreneurship in Ecuador. His evaluation of the experience of six interventions of this kind makes up the second part of this investigation.

By reviewing these issues in this way, BCO partners hoped to draw attention to a number of key questions, in particular the following:

- What information sources are used by the poor within markets, and for what purposes?
- What are the primary information gaps within poor communities?
- What effect do ICTs (old and new) have on market information – for producers and consumers?
- How equipped are the poor to use market information in their favour – for example, by selling produce into new markets, accessing new products and services, or restructuring marketing and purchasing behaviour?
- What complementary factors help to determine this?
- What is the distributional effect of increased information availability on the poor – i.e., who “benefits” most, who least?

Increased understanding of the relationships between ICTs and market dynamics, BCO partners believe, will help them to target future interventions more effectively on aspects of poverty reduction and the creation of prosperity in the communities with which they work. Although the inquiries within this investigation cannot answer these questions, it is hoped that they might help BCO partners and other ICD agencies to explore them as they move forward with their work in this area. ■

ICT, Markets and Development¹

RICHARD DUNCOMBE

Introduction

There has been renewed interest in recent years in defining a new relationship between markets and development. A number of key donor reports have highlighted a shift in focus, such as those from the International Labour Organization (Miehlbradt & McVay 2005) and the UK Department for International Development (DFID 2005a). The approaches outlined in all these reports signal a shift away from an over-concentration on supply-side mechanisms for stimulating growth and enterprise in favour of the poor, such as business development services (BDS), and towards a greater concentration on the demand side: creating mechanisms that make markets work better for the poor.

This renewed interest in the role of markets for pro-poor growth has been accompanied by significant increases in the availability and use of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) in areas of the world where levels of poverty are high. For example, both India and China have seen rapid expansion of ICT industries in recent years which are fuelling significant levels of ICT-led growth and job creation. In Africa, new private sector investment has led to rapidly expanding telecommunication markets that are reaching into rural and previously unserved areas where a large proportion of the poor live.

Drawing together these two trends, this report assesses a broad range of recent and historical research and literature concerning the relationship between ICTs, markets and development – drawing upon conceptual studies as well as the results of empirical and case research. The report draws upon previous reports and research papers produced by the Development Informatics Group (DIG) at the Institute for Development Policy and Management (IDPM), as well as a broad range of literature and research from worldwide sources.

The aim of the report is to review assessments of the relationship between ICTs, markets and development in countries and contexts worldwide, with particular reference to the impact of markets on the lives of the poor, and of ICTs and enterprise on the livelihoods of the poor. Given the context of livelihoods and poverty reduction, the report defines ICT in its broadest sense to cover the full range of information handling tech-

nologies that the poor commonly use and to which they may have access. These include digital ICTs, but also encompass technologies such as radio and analogue telecommunication networks, as well as consideration of traditional forms of communication and information exchange.

The report is organised into five sections. The first section outlines three interlinked perspectives for understanding ICTs, markets and development: a) a market perspective, which examines the institutional structure and the role of information within markets, discussing how the poor act as producers as well as consumers within market settings; b) an enterprise perspective, highlighting the role of information for enterprise development, distinguishing enterprises according to scale; and finally, c) the role of information within a livelihoods perspective, emphasising the need to integrate livelihood objectives – of empowerment and security – into market-led initiatives.

The second section assesses the role of information and communication in building interrelationships between market actors, highlighting the importance of understanding both market linkages and networks in the lives of poor producers and consumers; how enterprises and consumers are linked together in value chains; and how analysis of value chains can be facilitated. This leads into the third section of the report, which puts forward a value chain framework for ICT application. Again, the role of enterprise is assessed according to scale: subsistence and micro-enterprises on the one hand, and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) on the other. Case study examples of enterprises are provided to illustrate the four dimensions of the framework.

The fourth section provides a discussion of issues that relate to assessing the impact of ICTs on enterprises within market environments, again providing a distinction between the role of growth-orientated SMEs in providing employment and innovation, and survivalist and micro-enterprises that have greater potential to serve the immediate needs of the poorest. The final section makes suggestions for priorities and policy responses.

PERSPECTIVES FOR UNDERSTANDING MARKETS, DEVELOPMENT AND THE ROLE OF ICTS

This section outlines three interlinked perspectives for understanding the relationship between ICTs, markets and development – a market perspective, an enterprise perspective and a

¹ The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the BCO Alliance, individual partners of BCO or *ict Development Associates Ltd*.

livelihoods perspective – and highlights the role of information in each case.

A market perspective

Much of the thinking about poverty and development has been done within a framework of sustainable livelihoods. However, as Doward et al. (2003, 319) point out, there is an important gap in much of this thinking:

... namely a lack of emphasis on markets and their roles in livelihood development and poverty reduction... Further, if the roles of markets and market relationships are not properly addressed in livelihoods analysis and action, it can lead to failure to identify and act on: a) livelihood opportunities and constraints arising from critical market processes, and b) institutional issues that are important for pro-poor market development.

Markets are of fundamental importance to the livelihoods of the poor. As producers, the poor buy their inputs and sell their outputs (and often their labour) in markets, and as consumers the poor purchase essential goods and services in markets. In comparison with those who are non-poor, the ability of the poor to participate in “core market relationships” is constrained. The rural poor, in particular, face difficulties of low population densities, remote locations and high transport costs.

The rural poor are also often constrained by their lack of understanding of the markets, their limited business and negotiating skills, and their lack of an organisation that could give them the bargaining power they require to interact on equal terms with other larger and stronger market intermediaries (IFAD 2003, 3).

Poor producers face significant challenges for accessing more distant markets, including overseas, requiring interaction with a range of market intermediaries from informal traders, to local SMEs, or large international purchasers.

Defining markets for the poor

It is generally accepted that when markets work effectively they provide the most efficient primary mechanism for exchange, co-ordination and the allocation of goods and services and other resources within an economy (DFID 2005b, 2).

Markets are a set of transactions by agents over a range of goods and services. Such transactions allow for mutually beneficial exchange. Taken at this fundamental level, markets perform the important task of freeing individuals from self-reliance. In a modern economy, all economic activity, from the production and sales decisions of the smallest farmer to those of the largest corporation, relies on markets (Eggleston et al. 2003, 62).

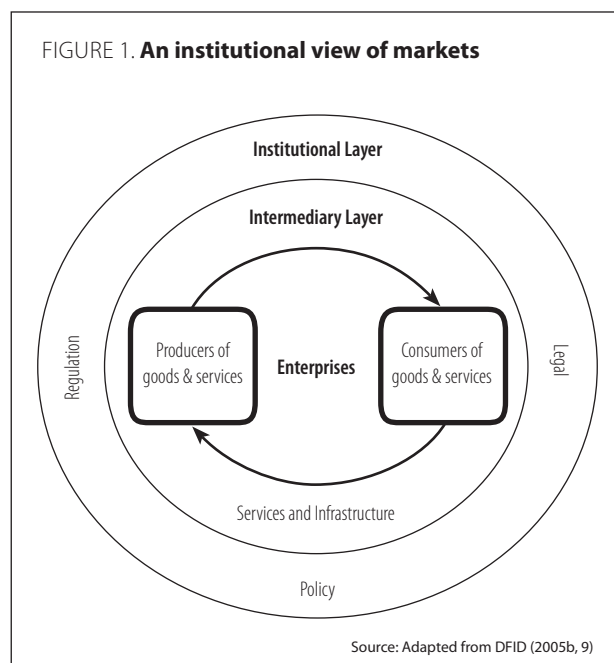
However, there is strong evidence that, for the poor majority in developing countries, markets have often failed, and continue to fail to deliver the desired benefits. Therefore, based on historical experience – of not wanting to return to flawed policies of direct state intervention – developing country governments and international donors are looking to implement measures that will make markets systems work better for the poor (DFID 2005a; DFID 2005b; Porteous 2004; Doward et al. 2003). New institutional economics (NIE) (see Figure 1) has become influential in this respect, because it recognises the imperfection of the market system, and most noticeably, observes that information is almost always incomplete, asymmetrical, costly to acquire and costly to use.

Poor information introduces risks in undertaking transactions. Transaction costs must then be incurred to acquire information and provide protection against these risks, and market players must make decisions that allow for these risks and costs. Institutions (rules of the game) exist and evolve to reduce transaction costs and risks. An NIE definition of a market is framed by this understanding: “markets are institutions that exist to facilitate exchange; that is, they exist in order to reduce the cost and risk of carrying out transactions” (Porteous 2004, cited in DFID 2005b, 4).

For markets to work better for the poor they must not only address market failures but also livelihood objectives – “to build and acquire assets and reduce vulnerability” (DFID 2005b, 4). To do this, markets must not only become more efficient, but also more developed and accessible. As well as providing a means to transact goods and services, they must also enhance the empowerment, opportunity and security of the poor majority.

As illustrated in Figure 1, a market perspective focuses on the ability of the poor to act as both producers and consumers of goods and services.

FIGURE 1. An institutional view of markets



The poor as producers

Evidence suggests that the poor largely benefit from their own subsistence, whilst also earning small incomes by trading surplus produce, usually in local and sometimes in distant markets. The poor also earn income from “off-farm” productive activities, often via micro-enterprise (Ellis 2000). Poor households are likely to step in and out of micro-enterprise activity depending upon the nature of the activity, seasonal demand, the availability of resources, and other personal and social factors (Shepherd 1998).

Studies from Malawi (Orr & Mwale 2001), Sri Lanka (Shaw 2004) and Uganda (Ellis & Bahiigwa 2003) confirm that the proportion of earnings from micro-enterprise is either non-existent or very low for those in extreme poverty, but tends to increase in a fairly uniform manner for those who are less poor, and that this becomes an important source of income for those who have climbed above the poverty line.

However, for most poor households (particularly those in rural areas) micro-enterprise is a supplementary activity, with the largest proportion of household income gained from a wider portfolio of sources, which include: a) wage labour in larger enterprises including agricultural labour, public works and waged employment in SMEs; b) crop sales, livestock or other asset sales; c) remittances from productive relatives residing abroad or in urban areas; and d) transfers from social programmes or microcredit.

This means that the incomes and livelihoods of the poor will be impacted upon by a broad range of markets and market-based institutions. The vast majority of the poor are still dependent upon rural agricultural markets, and there has been considerable effort in recent years to make rural and agricultural markets work better for the poor, employing a demand-side approach. This has involved supporting the poor as producers by, for example, stimulating demand-side financing, building the capacity of producer associations, and helping producer groups to integrate into global value chains such as by meeting quality standards for traceability or organic certification.

The poor as consumers

As consumers, the poor gain access to markets through the medium of prevailing market prices for goods (e.g., food, shelter and clothing) or services (e.g., sanitation, healthcare and education). A new focus on the poor as consumers has been created by the work of Prahalad (2004) through his work suggesting a fortune at the “bottom of the pyramid” (BOP). This approach emphasises the creation of the capacity to consume amongst the poor through innovative means, by creating appropriate forms of market-driven product and service delivery based upon affordable quantities and small transactions. For example, there is much evidence that SMS and texting via mobile phones has been particularly suited to poor users due to the ability of mobile networks to incorporate micro-payments (Donner 2007).

The proposition, however, should be looked at critically. Karnani (2007, 17) states:

The BOP proposition suggests that the consumption choices available to the poor can be increased by targeting various products and services, such as shampoo, iodized salt and “televisions”, at the BOP. Holding the poor’s nominal income constant, the only way he can purchase the newly available product is to divert expenditure from some other product. Still, this increased choice will increase his welfare, assuming he is a rational and well-informed consumer. However, as a practical matter, this increase in choice is unlikely to result in a significant change in his poverty situation. A poor person is far more constrained by lack of income than by lack of goods and services offered in the market.

BOX 1

Types of market

Export vs. domestic markets: Most developing country enterprises sell only to the domestic market, bringing advantages such as lower cost of access but disadvantages such as limitations on market size.

Goods vs. services markets: The former being simply defined as the production of “anything you can drop on your foot”. There are important differences between goods and service enterprises – for example, about the nature of competition or about the relationship to consumers.

Producer vs. consumer markets: Producer items are used by other enterprises for further processing; they can be capital items (tools or machinery used to make other goods) or intermediate items (used as inputs for further processing). Consumer items are made for direct consumption and are sometimes divided into wage items that everyone requires, and luxury items that consumers may want but do not need for basic survival.

Rural vs. urban markets: Enterprises in rural areas are likely to face greater challenges, for example in sourcing production inputs such as finance, labour and equipment, and in locating customer markets. On the other hand, bringing “non-farm” income into rural areas is often seen as having a significant value in addressing poverty and in reducing rural-urban drift.

Source: Heeks, Arun & Morgan (2004)

The ability of the poor to generate income and to use that income to access and afford basic goods and services is a key requirement for poverty reduction. Thus, an approach based on the “poor as consumers” needs to be preceded by an equal if not greater focus on the “poor as producers”. This would emphasise upgrading the skills and capabilities of the poor and increasing their productivity, thus creating employment opportunities that can command greater incomes and security.

The poor may participate as producers or consumers in different types of markets, as indicated in Box 1.

The role of information within a market perspective

As recognised in new institutional economics, the poor functioning of markets is strongly linked to inefficiencies and bottlenecks in relation to information. Table 1 outlines market failures that inhibit markets for the poor, providing an example of a bottleneck and defining a role for information and communication that can improve the functioning of the market.

The intellectual debate around institutional economics strongly suggests that information and communication is a requirement for making markets work better for the poor. Better information and communication systems are likely to lead to long-lasting and sustainable improvements in the way in which markets are able to function in favour of the poor, as well as benefits for both producers and consumers, as follows:

Market improvements

- Market coordination: through the provision of price information between producers and consumers, thus matching supply and demand.
- Market efficiency: through the provision of more and better quality information that is delivered in a timely manner.
- Market equity: through better dispersion of information (on prices, etc.) through the local economy and between geographical areas. This leads to closer price equalisation, and greater equity for poor consumers.

Producer benefits

- Greater productivity: through giving poor producers (such as farmers) greater ability to respond to market signals, e.g., decisions about when to plant and what to plant in what quantity; information about sources and prices of inputs (such as seed varieties); information about the location of customer markets and market prices.
- Access to market intermediaries: better information can foster more choice between middlemen, and inject more competition into the market.
- Labour market coordination: producers themselves may be selling their labour in the market, or they may be purchasing labour.
- Enhancing social capital: building market relationships; accessing market networks; building trust.

TABLE 1. Market failure and the role of information

Market bottleneck/failure	Constraint	Possible role of information
Barriers to entry/exit from the market	The costs or risks of entering a market are too high for a poor producer	Sharing of information, and more effective communication with other producers, can lessen costs through economies of scale, or reduce risk through collaboration
High transaction costs	The cost of receiving, transmitting and acting on information are too high for the poor producer	Better quality and more timely information
Asymmetric market relationships	Where parties to a transaction have different information about the nature of the exchange	Faster and cheaper communication
Cost of establishing and enforcing agreements Adverse power relations	Inbuilt political, social and cultural biases Where the poor producer seeks to enter formal markets, costs of seeking binding contracts are prohibitive	Infomediaries able to act on behalf of the poor producers or consumers
Lack of market linkages/integration	Lack of access to input (e.g., finance) and output (e.g., customers) markets	Information and knowledge sharing through collective action and advocacy
Weak enabling environment	Lack of secure and stable property rights, laws and regulation that govern the functioning of markets	Enhanced information provision via BDS and microfinance institutions
Cost of establishing and enforcing agreements	Adverse power relations	Two-way information flows concerning the impact of the enabling environment and the needs of the poor

- Accessing public good information: e.g., environmental conditions/weather forecasts.
- Stimulating innovation: access to new knowledge, techniques and technologies.
- Coordinating transport: to and from markets.

Consumer benefits

- Competition and reduced prices: stimulating affordability and the capacity to consume.
- Greater choice: improving access to consumer markets and enlarging the proximity of outlets.
- Security of supply (e.g., for food security): when operating efficiently, markets can compensate for local shortages, by providing alternative sources, through extending credit, or providing other novel purchasing schemes.

Many of these potential benefits will not only be attributable to individual economic actors, but will be collective benefits. This highlights the inadequacy of viewing economic actors (such as subsistence farmers or micro-enterprises) as individual economic units that compete within an environment of perfectly functioning markets. Thus, when considering the role of information and markets in poverty reduction, it is appropriate to look at collective efficiency, rather than individual efficiency – for example, by identifying the role of information for producer groups, where brokers or middlemen may bring together networks of small enterprises in order to access a market. It is also important to realise that information can enhance the workings of markets, but it can also inhibit and distort.

An enterprise perspective

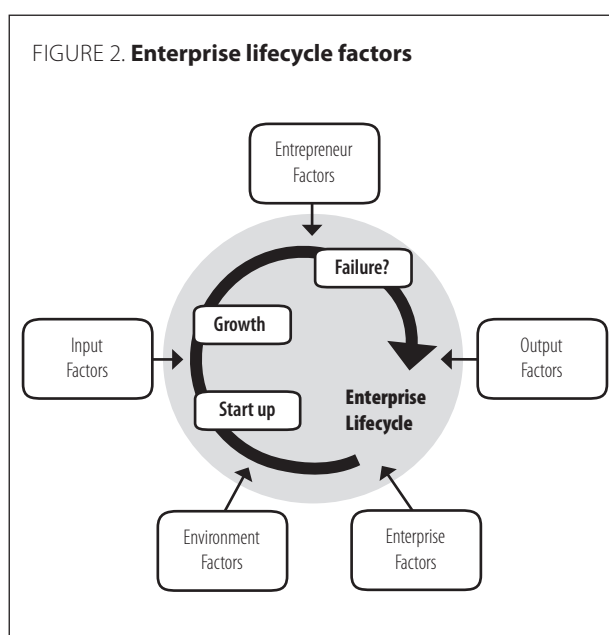
A business enterprise perspective places the productive unit at the centre of the analysis. Business enterprises can be categorised as follows:

- *Subsistence enterprises:* The poor are pushed into such economic activity by the lack of other income-generating opportunities. They form the majority of enterprises in developing countries, and are commonly located in households.
- *Micro-enterprises:* These tend to employ one to five workers, and typically provide incomes for one third to one half or more of the labour forces in developing countries (Mead 1994). They are typically unregistered or unlicensed. Their impact on the wider economy in terms of growth, innovation and income redistribution can be limited. In some countries (in sub-Saharan Africa, for example) they can provide greater benefits to women.
- *Small enterprises:* One step up, tending to employ five to twenty-five workers, but there are far fewer than micro-

enterprises. Still limited (though greater) impact on the wider economy. They provide some creation of wealth, economic flexibility and innovation. Many workers are still poor; some owners will be “comfortable”.

- *Medium and large enterprises:* Significant employers; significant creators of exports and wealth; longer-term job creators via externalities/indirect employment. Workers and, even more, managers and owners are better off.

We can use Figure 2 to explain the key factors that impact upon the enterprise in a market environment, and then summarise the factors that underlie the “enterprise lifecycle” (see Box 2).



Factors related to demand for outputs from the enterprise

These are “pull” factors inducing people into a market if: a) there is a demand (in addressing a new opportunity or in addressing an existing market in some way more competitively than existing producers), and b) the income from supplying this market is perceived by the entrepreneur to be a sufficient additional incentive over and above present circumstances to induce and sustain enterprise activity (Perren 1999).

Factors related to the entrepreneur him/herself

These are “push” factors that impel people into markets. Being unemployed (or having no immediate income source) is a fairly obvious and very strong factor pushing people into start-up (Smallbone 1990). There are continuing arguments about whether an “entrepreneurial personality” exists, but it seems likely that any personality effect is very much context- and culture-specific. Few entrepreneur factors seem to link to the survival of an enterprise, though some personality, motivation and experience factors do relate positively to growth (Perren 1999).

Factors related to the inputs an enterprise needs in order to function

Inputs such as money, labour, technology, etc., are essential to an enterprise. In general terms these inputs are facilitators rather than drivers. Hence, it is their absence – or barriers to accessing inputs – that mainly affects enterprise.

Factors related to the environment within which the enterprise operates

Unemployment levels are positively associated with micro-enterprise start-up. So, too, is proximity of other small enterprises: probably caused by a combination of high failure rates plus high rates of small firm experience. It is fair to say that government

policy is generally agreed to have an effect, but the nature of this effect is contested.

The role of information within an enterprise perspective

Subsistence and micro-enterprises: These largely depend upon informal and social networks to provide the information they need for enterprise operations (Duncombe & Heeks 2002). However, the information reaching such enterprises through these channels can be unreliable because of inaccuracy, though trust is a major factor in their reliance on informal networks. Timeliness of information is, however, the most serious failure of the information delivery system currently used by micro-enterprises, and a significant aspect of their vulnerability to exogenous change. The quantity and range of information received through traditional channels is also an issue, with barriers such as literacy and language.

Intermediaries (e.g., microfinance institutions) within the networks used by micro-enterprises are often not geared to processing information specifically for enterprises, but provide information in the course of delivering other services or products. The provision of information on a commercial basis to micro-enterprises is not practised on any scale in low-income countries and enterprises are often not accustomed to paying specifically for information. Some success has been seen where enterprise or business associations have become information providers (Duncombe & Heeks 2002).

Micro-enterprises will tend to have smaller, narrower networks, which serve the functions of insurance and risk reduction at the same time as they provide business information. Known social and business contacts are trusted and regarded as sources of reliable information, reducing the perceived risk of acting upon it. At the same time, smaller networks limit the range and quantity of information available to the micro-enterprise operator (Duncombe & Heeks 2002).

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs): These enterprises tend to be more market orientated, often having identified niche products or services leading to profitable and sustainable market opportunities. SMEs in urban areas (the majority) benefit from a higher degree of integration into market systems, which are more highly developed and in closer proximity. As enterprises grow, they are likely to develop more sophisticated market linkages for the supply of business inputs and for the marketing and sale of outputs. Liedholm & Mead (2002) show that growth orientated enterprises are more likely to sell larger quantities (of goods or services) to market intermediaries such as retailers, wholesalers, other enterprises and institutions. (This is in contrast to micro-enterprises that do not grow and remain largely dependent on selling small quantities to individual customers).

Enterprise growth is likely to bring a higher degree of specialisation in the production of goods or services. Larger enterprises

BOX 2

The enterprise lifecycle

In basic terms, one can envisage a three-stage enterprise lifecycle:

Start-up: Figures do vary considerably, but some enterprise surveys have shown 15% to 25% of any given group of enterprises will have started up within the previous year (Liedholm & Mead 2002).

Growth: Growth is most often defined in terms of growth in turnover and/or growth in number of employees. Studies of developing countries indicate that most enterprises do not grow. Aggregate employment growth is thus often a reflection of growth in the number of enterprises rather than size of enterprises. In the absence of demand growth, this just means ever-more enterprises chasing ever-smaller slices of the same pie. Mead (1994) found that among micro (<5-worker) enterprises, only around one quarter had added even a single person to their work force during a 10-year period, and only 1% had grown to become a larger-than-10-worker enterprises. Nonetheless, while growth is rare, it is also very important. There is tremendous variation between sectors, but Liedholm & Mead (2002) estimate that around half of firms in the 10-50-worker category started life as micro-enterprises with less than 5 workers.

Failure: Most enterprises fail, especially new and micro-enterprises. Estimates vary considerably, but 50% gone within three years and 75% within ten years would not be untypical (Liedholm & Mead 2002; Storey 1994).

are more likely to source processed and semi-processed material inputs, as well as other business services, externally. More sophisticated procurement of inputs and greater market opportunities also give rise to increased levels of risk and a greater need for trust in the marketplace.

Enterprises that move towards a more specialised mode of operation are open to a new set of risks not borne by those who operate in a more vertically integrated fashion. Such producers must rely on other participants in the market to supply them with required inputs in a manner that is reliable in terms of quantities, qualities, timing and price. On the output side, again, they must trust buyers to take delivery of their products and pay reasonable prices for them in a timely manner (Liedholm & Mead 2002, 54).

Growth, above all else, requires an increased ability to interact with other market actors and institutions (Shaw 2004). In this respect, enterprise growth requires significantly higher levels, and breadth, of managerial ability and interpersonal communication skills. SMEs are more likely to have made provision for sustaining cash flow, and are likely to require larger sums of capital investment, and will have broader needs in relation to work force training, market access, technology and management skills (Rhyne & Otero 1992). In consequence, their needs for information will reflect a greater degree of business maturity, and most such enterprises will already be ICT users.

An enterprise perspective highlights three additional issues in relation to understanding ICTs, markets and growth (Heeks, Arun & Morgan 2004).

- *First, the entrepreneurs themselves:* Enterprises come and go, but entrepreneurs typically keep going.
- *Second, the issue of demand:* Even with all other factors in place, an enterprise cannot start up or survive or grow unless there is some demand for what it produces. Demand analysis must therefore form an important part of the analysis portfolio.
- *Third, context:* There are so many factors affecting an enterprise that their balance and impact will vary, suggesting that factor analysis must go hand-in-hand with a detailed understanding of the context within which the enterprise operates.

A livelihoods perspective

As indicated earlier, in order for markets to work for the poor they must address livelihood objectives, as well as underlying social factors such as “trust” and “reciprocity” in economic relationships. Two key sets of underlying social factors have been identified:

- The capabilities of the poor to be able to act as producers and consumers. In this context poverty is viewed as a depri-

vation of basic capabilities (e.g., good health and literacy) as well as lack of income (Sen 1999). The capabilities of an individual will be impacted upon by their personal profile (e.g., age, gender, ethnic origin, etc.) and personal circumstances (location, access to services, proximity to family, etc.).

- The degree to which the poor are empowered and are able to participate to act as producers or consumers.

A livelihoods perspective suggests that the poor operate in a context of vulnerability. Within this context, the poor have access to certain assets or poverty-reducing factors. These gain meaning and value through the structures and processes of the prevailing environment (including market structures and processes). This environment influences the livelihood strategies of the poor – ways of combining and using assets – that are open to people in pursuit of their own objectives (Carney 1999).

The role of information within a livelihoods perspective

The livelihoods approach deals rather inadequately with the role of information, communication and associated technologies, which tend to be treated as separate physical assets (Doward 2003; Albu & Scott 2001). Rather, information should be viewed as a cross-cutting resource, and not necessarily as an asset in its own right (Duncombe 2007). The poor need information in order to access a broad range of assets: information about access to training/new knowledge, information about finance, information about technologies, and information about natural resources.

Chapman and Slaymaker (2001) suggest time-dependent roles for information in contributing to livelihood strategies. The first role relates to long-term capacity-building through education, training and technical support, such as has been traditionally provided through government-run extension services. To this could be added information for enhancing the long-term rights and entitlements of the poor (their socio-political capital) in areas such as health, education, participation and empowerment. The second role relates to information concerning short-term decision-making. For micro-enterprises, this type of information is likely to be gained predominantly by building and extending social capital resources and facilitating access to (predominantly local) economic networks. In terms of livelihood strategies, therefore, information can be seen to play a dual role: a) informing and strengthening the short-term decision-making capacity of the poor themselves; and b) informing and strengthening the longer-term decision-making capacity of the intermediaries that facilitate, assist or represent the poor.

The role of information-handling technologies within livelihood strategies can be further understood by drawing a second distinction between information types – formal and informal. The poor hold informal information as indigenous knowledge. On the other hand, formal information is that which is recorded and available in a readable form and is more likely to be mediated through formal structures, such as technical information from

manuals, market information from a market report, official government information or information accessed via the internet (Duncombe & Heeks 2002).

PRODUCERS, INTERMEDIARIES AND CONSUMERS – DEFINING MARKET RELATIONSHIPS

Neoclassical economics views see all enterprises as independent economic units in an homogeneous market where price and quantity are the only important variables. Yet the evidence is that small enterprises – far from being independent – exist at the centre of a vast web of economic and social relationships, and are very much part of their socio-economic environment. Enterprises must therefore be seen from this perspective: as interdependent, linked to other enterprises via a flow of goods, money, information and knowledge, skills and labour.

Market linkages and networks

The linkages that exist between enterprises can be categorised as follows (Heeks, Arun & Morgan 2004):

Backward linkages

- **Inter-enterprise linkages with suppliers:** Raw materials, production inputs, equipment, maintenance. For example, the supplier who provides the workshop with the sheet metal that forms the basis of its products, as well as utility companies that provide power, water, transport and telecommunications.
- **Linkages with other input providers:** Human, financial and information resource inputs that allow the enterprise to function – e.g., linkages with the family member or microfinance institution (MFI) that provides credit to allow the purchase of inputs that keeps the enterprise running. Studies show the majority of inputs, spares and producer goods for micro-enterprises come from the formal sector, often with high import content. The extent of use of local materials is often overstated, and micro-enterprises tend to have strong backward linkages to larger wholesalers, agents or even foreign suppliers of equipment or primary inputs (Duncombe and Heeks 1999; Mazibuko 1996).

Forward linkages

- **Inter-enterprise linkages with distributors/agents:** For example, if the workshop produces garments which are sold in a shop, then there may be a transporter and the shop itself in the chain.
- **Linkages with customers:** Those who purchase the outputs from the enterprise and make use of them.

- **Inter-enterprise production contracting linkages:** Between different types of enterprise in a chain. In other words, where the enterprise's output is another enterprise's input, e.g., sub-contracting (or outsourcing) from a larger enterprise or government institution to a micro-enterprise.

Horizontal linkages

- **Inter-enterprise production linkages:** Between enterprises. Where the sub-contracting linkages are formalised between a group of roughly equivalent small enterprises, we move towards the idea behind "clustering" – integrated and coordinated networks of micro- or small enterprises. Here, market brokers or middlemen may serve to coordinate relationships between enterprises and outside agencies or buyers.
- **Inter-enterprise exchange linkages:** For example, the use of another workshop's equipment when it has a particular tool that your workshop does not have or when your equipment is broken. Enterprises are also found to lend workers to each other or to cooperate in the purchase of materials, often based on informal, ad hoc systems, such as mutual favours (Duncombe & Heeks 2002; Rasmussen & Sverrisson 1994).

When enterprises cooperate, as well as compete, this provides a concept of "collective efficiency" – that is, understanding and incorporating more of the externalities that are ignored by neo-classical economics – where you see each individual enterprise in the context of its environment. According to Pedersen et al. (1994, 10) networking of enterprises can involve "commodity exchange, information exchange, exchange of services, subcontracting, mutual reliance on technical specifications or standards, a common labour force, a common language, a common location, a common social background and so on."

Enterprises that exist in clusters can accrue significant benefits:

- They can save on the transport and distribution costs of any common inputs or outputs.
- They can save on the provision of other inputs such as finance, infrastructure, etc. (e.g., one bank that is easily accessible to serve the cluster as a whole; one main power or telecoms trunk line).
- Low customer transport and search costs.
- Greater political visibility and credibility.

However, the degree to which enterprises (particularly micro-enterprises) are able to network or cluster varies considerably according to country, location and sector. For the poor, and in many developing countries, enterprise clustering (as opposed to informal, occasional collaborations) does not exist and local competition is a stronger force than local cooperation (Duncombe & Heeks 2002; Rasmussen & Sverrisson 1994). Studies also indicate that networking activity amongst micro-enterprises is conditioned by vulnerability and risk minimisation rather than by productivity enhancement (Fafchamps 1999). Also,

there are considerable constraints in managing and coordinating these external networks.

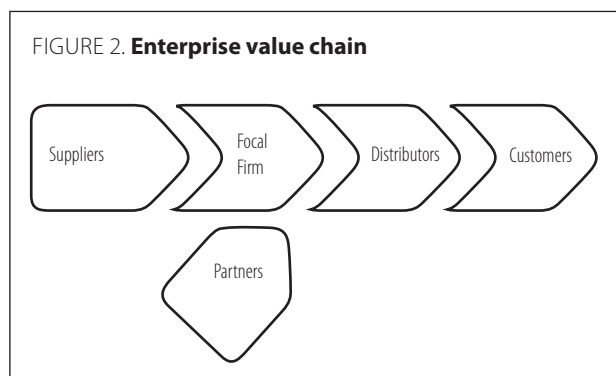
It is not only through inter-enterprise production and exchange linkages that enterprise groups can become institutionalised. A range of other market-orientated models have arisen such as co-operatives, social enterprises, producer groups and trade associations. The benefits from these groupings tend to arise in an ad hoc manner through existing social networks. Such networks can also be based on ethnic groupings. Cooperatives and not-for-profit associations can also produce some of the benefits of formalised clusters. However, they have often faced constraints such as the tensions of competition, social and ethnic tensions, the dominance of elites and the lack of managerial coordination skills.

Enterprise value chains

In conducting productive activities, most enterprises interact with a range of actors within their supply or value chains, using a variety of means of communication.

The value chain describes the full range of activities which are required to bring a product or service from conception, through the different phases of production (involving a combination of physical transformation and the input of various producer services), delivery to final consumers, and final disposal after use (UNIDO 2001, 28).

Of particular interest from a market perspective is the sectoral value chain (see Figure 3). This focuses on the institutions that form the enterprise's context.



Value chain mapping is particularly valuable to help do two things:

- Understanding the internal value chain: finding ways to increase the efficiency of an enterprise, producer group or cluster.
- Understanding the external value chain: finding ways in which the outside world (markets and institutions) have an important effect on an enterprise, producer group or cluster.

A focus on *internal value chain analysis* helps to:

- Identify the key activities required to initiate, plan, carry out and deliver a product or service offered by an enterprise, producer group or cluster.
- Map the key input-output (market) relationships that link activities together.
- Identify resource inputs required in order that the key activities can be carried out.
- Identify key indicators (quantitative and qualitative) required for value chain analysis.
- Identify the key actors (stakeholders) in the value chain, and assess their role and influence.
- Consider ways of improving the operation (e.g., upgrading through use of ICT) of the value chain.

A value chain approach helps to identify what information and data exist about each link in the chain, thus defining the market relationships of poor producers and (possibly faraway) consumers. Indicators (both quantitative and qualitative) may cover: number of enterprises, employment, gender composition, earnings, non-financial rewards/benefits, efficiency and effectiveness indicators.

Value chain mapping will also help distinguish between internal and external influencing factors. This is useful because it will help to identify where interventions may need to be directed. For example, internal value chain analysis involves identifying and analysing the key processes that are required to carry out the core activities of an enterprise and which may lead to productivity or efficiency gains.

A focus on *external value chain analysis* involves identifying and analysing all the external links that are required to:

- Carry out the key activities and processes of the enterprise.
- Ensure effective delivery to customers/consumers.
- Understand the political, social and economic environment factors that determine how the value chain is governed and controlled.

Key external links are those related to:

- Accessing resource inputs: The links required to locate skills/labour, money, technology/equipment, materials, information, and ICT/other infrastructure.
- Entering markets: The links required to locate and retain customers.
- The external environment: Links with individuals and institutions that influence the operation of the value chain and determine how it is governed. These include other value chain participants (particularly dominant buyers); other market actors, market conditions and competition; and

the regulatory impact of government or other large institutions (e.g., with regard to price fluctuations or standards compliance). All these factors govern the level of risk that an enterprise takes when entering a market.

External value chain analysis should focus primarily on access to markets. It is only through the supply of new customers/buyers that poor producers will be able to sustain their enterprises into the future. External value chain analysis will help highlight areas of weakness in the pricing, sales and marketing techniques of producer groups or enterprises managed by the poor.

Value chain analysis will also help to identify solutions that may include technical upgrading via investment in new ICT, skills upgrading through targeted training programmes, and upgrading of managerial capabilities through training and mentoring.

MARKETS, ENTERPRISE AND THE ROLE OF ICTS

An understanding of the value chain can be useful to assess the role of ICT in relation to markets and enterprise.

A value chain framework for ICT application

Four direct value chain roles of ICT have been defined by Duncombe and Heeks (2005):

- *Value chain core:* Using ICTs for the core operations of the enterprise, as for IT sector enterprises.
- *Value chain boundaries:* Transactional application of ICTs used to interface with suppliers or customers; mainly seen in terms of e-commerce applications.

- *Value chain support:* Application of ICTs for access to information and decision-making relating to four main areas: a) supply information, e.g., getting data on finance, materials, skills, etc.; b) demand information, e.g., getting data on markets; c) environmental information, e.g., about supporting regulations and institutions; and d) internal information, e.g., about enterprise operations.
- *Networking support:* Use of ICTs in building networks and linkages to other stakeholders, such as business stakeholders, social stakeholders and political stakeholders, and building various aspects of social capital.

Subsistence and micro-enterprises

Few micro-enterprises have direct access to digital ICTs. Micro-enterprises may possess a radio, and a minority may have a telephone, or more likely, access to a mobile phone. Access to telephones and electrical ICT varies, depending on the remoteness of the enterprise and the infrastructure of their area. Indirect or intermediated access to ICT may be more common. There may be shops or post offices where phones can be used, and if the infrastructure is developed some shops may provide internet access. These shops, and some support service organisations (MFIs and BDS providers), increasingly also provide other office services (e.g., photocopying), and possibly email accounts.

Micro-enterprises and producer groups are likely to make use of ICTs in value chain support, principally as a means of exchanging information with buyers or suppliers in the supply chain. For the majority this will mean accessing public ICT services, usually provided commercially. There are possibilities (although limited) for ICTs to be used as a “core processing technology” – the much-documented “Grameen Phone” or the “Mobile Ladies” of Uganda are examples.

TABLE 2. Summary of ICT applications in the value chain

	Value chain core	Value chain boundaries	Value chain support	Networking support
Subsistence and micro-enterprises	Limited application (e.g., mobile phones)	Faster and more timely communications (mobile phones, community radio) Lower transaction costs (mobile phones)	Access to BDS/information via infomediaries (e.g., telecentres, BICs, etc.)	e-Networking for enterprise support structures (e.g., MFIs) Building social capital e-Advocacy
SMEs	Production of computer hardware, telecommunications products Software/digital products ICT-based business services ICT-based training Productivity improvements and production control	Facilitating and conducting transactions (e-commerce) e-Marketing	Information access via internet/email Internal processing of information Support for decision-making (e.g., e-appraisal)	e-Networking for business support structures Cluster development e-Advocacy

Barriers to the use of ICTs by micro-enterprises include:

- Lack of literacy amongst enterprise operators (most of whom are women).
- Lack of English (the main sources of information on the internet are in English).
- The predominance of traditional oral cultures and social barriers to accessing ICT.
- Lack of familiarity and skills with computers in enterprises, coupled with lack of awareness.
- Poor infrastructure in rural areas and the distance required to travel to access ICTs for enterprises.
- Some ICT links not reliable even when they are available, because of poorly maintained equipment or disrupted power supplies.
- Less widespread use of ICTs in the micro-enterprise supply chain, i.e., by suppliers and customers, making actual use of ICT by enterprises difficult, which reduces the value of ICT use.
- Lack of funds for investment in ICTs (predominantly for access).

Despite these constraints, suppliers and markets are increasingly going to expect communications in the supply chain to be via ICT. The most common way of enabling access to ICT that would reach micro-enterprises is through telecentres. Often telecentres are established as components in broader development projects, but where they are designed to be integrated into existing market-driven activities this can facilitate high usage, which can be difficult to achieve as telecentres cannot be expected to be in great demand before they exist and have gained widespread support. Initiatives that embed telecentres in existing economic activities – such as E-Choupal (see Box 3) – create the greatest scope to make improvements in the supply chain, facilitate access to market-specific knowledge and reduce transaction costs.

However, telecentres that are purely market-driven will fail to serve wider community goals (UNCTAD 2007). Most telecentre projects seek to involve the community at large to benefit from the facilities and services. If they are placed at the centre of the community, they hold potential to become powerful engines for rural development, through which a large number of information services can be accessed. These may include telephone, fax, local bulletin, documentation searches on demand, video libraries for entertainment and education, health and nutrition training, government services, market prices, self-paced learning and more.

Community radio is one of the most common ICTs, with a high degree of ownership by low-income households in developing countries. Radio is effective for dissemination of transmutable information (i.e., information that can be gathered from different sources and redistributed widely). Examples include information about improving agricultural productivity through

new methods, new technologies, improved seeds and live-stock methods, as well as more general information concerning weather conditions or market opportunities (see Box 4). Grace et al. (2004, 18) observe that radio as a method of information delivery has several advantages:

Firstly, both the radio unit and programming and delivery mechanisms are among the cheapest forms of mass media.... Secondly, radio signals can penetrate remote geographic regions, and any individual with access to a radio set can receive information, regardless of literacy or education level. Finally, rural radio provides region specific information, easily incorporates local concerns and feedback, and can operate in local languages.

Until other ICTs (e.g., computer-based technologies such as the internet) can replicate these advantages at the same cost, then it is likely that radio will continue to be the most relevant technology for the rural poor. Technology has also developed which enables local radio stations to use ICT to access regional and global information and to develop and produce their own programmes easily and at low cost. However, there is mixed evidence concerning the direct application of radio to the business sector.

Since the advent of mobile networks there has been increased usage of telecommunications by the poor. A three-country study (Uganda, Ghana and Botswana) carried out by McKemey and Souter et al. (2003) indicated high levels of telephony usage (both fixed line and mobile) in what were described as “rural no-access” areas of developing countries (areas where predominantly poor people lived with no direct access to telecommunication services). The study points toward regular use of phones by 75% of the samples surveyed in these areas, with roughly uniform usage across the three countries.

BOX 3

Case study: E-Choupal, a market-driven telecentre model

E-Choupal is one of India's most successful programmes using ICT to support the economic activities of people living in rural areas. Through network orchestration it caters for underserved rural markets and helps farmers halve transaction costs. E-Choupal is a commodity services programme that supports farmers through over 5,000 information kiosks providing real time information on commodity prices, customized agricultural knowledge, a supply chain for farmers' inputs and a direct marketing channel for farm produce. Because the network is strongly embedded in a specific economic activity, it enables its participants to derive economic opportunities.

Source: UNCTAD (2007, 291)

BOX 4

Case study: ILO FIT Small Enterprise Media in Africa (SEMA), Uganda

The ILO SEMA support of commercial small business radio programming in Africa, funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) has empowered the poor to advocate for their own business interests. Nationally, 75% of radio listeners – the vast majority in the bottom two thirds of Uganda's income strata – tune in regularly to small business radio, which was launched as a concept by FIT in 1999. As one listener put it, "in the days of the Internet it is good that we villagers are not left behind." One critical role of interactive SE radio is to provide a voice for SE listeners and a public platform for them to engage policy-makers, government agencies, and pow-

erful private interests to hold them more accountable to the public. Around one third of listeners list advocacy as the primary role for the stations, while others highlight the programmes' education and market linkage functions. Issues that SE radio programmes have helped resolve include national policy toward milk distribution by SEs, negotiating on time payments for coffee growers, exposing unfair elections in urban market associations, and resolving conflict between livestock traders and a local abattoir.

Source: Miehlbradt & McVay (2005, 17)

Large numbers of respondents indicated they were prepared to travel large distances in order to use telephone services, via a range of access methods including booths (public payphones), teleshops, telecentres and private (mobile and fixed) lines. The purpose of calls was recorded as predominantly to friends and family (70%), a large proportion of which concerned financial matters. However, on a cautionary note, only 15% of respondents in all three countries indicated that they were using telephones for business purposes, but telephony has been found to be particularly important in relation to planning and facilitating remittances in the form of "income transfers" from family members residing abroad or in urban areas, thus supporting diversified income streams. More recent research by Jensen (2007) has established a more definable link between use of mobile phones and increased market efficiency (see Box 5).

Notwithstanding the benefits outlined in the case study research, through the use of telecentres, radio and telecommunication networks, ICT interventions for subsistence and micro-enterprises should not be judged solely on monetary and market impact, as issues of governance, environmental sustainability and social benefits cannot be readily separated from enhancements to their communication and information systems for enterprise purposes.

Small and medium enterprises

Research suggests that ICTs are of most direct value to growth-oriented enterprises (Duncombe & Heeks 2002). They are better placed than others to make use of ICTs, and they provide a greater capacity to generate wealth, employment, exports

BOX 5

Case study: Mobile phones increasing market efficiency in Kerala, India

An abundant catch of fish for Kerala fishermen usually meant the local beach market prices would be low. Fishermen then faced the dilemma of accepting a smaller return on their time and effort, or investing additional labour and fuel – and taking the relevant risks – to seek opportunities in a more distant market where the local catch might not have been so good and therefore prices were higher. According to Jensen (2007) on average 5-8% of the total catch ended up being thrown away. At the same time, owing to information inefficiencies, some fish markets were undersupplied and prices of fish varied substantially along the Kerala coastline. Since mobile telephones were introduced in Kerala in 1997, anecdotes have surfaced about how fishermen used them for price discovery and inventory management: how much fish to catch and to which of the beach markets to take the catch. However,

Jensen's research adds a formal micro-economic analysis to existing anecdotal evidence. Having access to information about catch volumes and beach market prices at various locations resulted in fishermen taking on the additional risk of venturing beyond their home markets, the final result being a reduction in catch wastage and in price volatility. Thanks to improved market efficiency, fishermen's profits rose by an average of 8% while fish prices fell by 4% thus benefiting consumers. Improved earnings more than compensated for the cost of the mobile telephone and subscriptions. The enhanced flow of information helped local markets work more efficiently and, consequently, improved welfare.

Source: UNCTAD (2007, 248)

and innovation, and to build a wider range of local and external business linkages. As direct ICT users, such enterprises have already crossed the "ICT threshold" (Duncombe & Heeks 1999). They have overcome the (financial) barriers to entry, and the total costs of ICT ownership.

This section considers three functional "action areas" for ICTs and SMEs: ICT production, ICT support, and ICT use.

ICT production: Larger and more technologically developed countries have achieved considerable success in ICT production and show further opportunities for expansion (India, Brazil, Indonesia, South Africa, Mexico and Egypt fall into this category, as well as Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, South Korea and Taiwan). India is now seeing the benefits of such high levels of technologi-

cal investment in terms of increased productivity and through the creation of new ICT industries. There are opportunities for small-scale assembly (see Box 6), adaptation of hardware, software, and in the production of ancillary components, by forging forward linkages to larger enterprises, through clustering, or by focusing on the local market. Lessons from India show that small-scale software producers have succeeded through long-term support within a defined national strategy (Heeks & Nicholson 2004).

ICT support: Developing countries require specialised local support for customised software production, systems integration, and hardware installation and maintenance; and through the provision of ICT-based services, including data entry, internet service provision (ISP), web design and other services. SMEs are

BOX 6

Case study: InfoShree Systems and Peripherals, Kasargod, India

During 2003, the district government of Kasargod organised a six-month training course in desktop publishing covering below-poverty-line families as part of a computer literacy and self-employment programme. Meanwhile, the local government discussed starting a hardware assembly micro-enterprise. Kudumbashree – Kerala State's poverty eradication agency – then initiated the efforts to form a group suitable for the micro-enterprise by linking with the women being trained on the desktop publishing course.

This led to the formation of a work group by September 2004. Financial credit to the tune of USD 4,700 was obtained from the Dhanalakshmi Bank of Kasargod along with a subsidy of USD 2,222 from the local government. A Computer Centre in Kasargod gave initial training about computer hardware and assembly. The same centre also helped the group purchase necessary materials from a state-level computer component marketing company in Cochin. Now the women do business with that company direct.

Starting with small-scale computer system supply in and around their hometown, the business slowly evolved to cover various institutions within the district and now supplies orders from five northern districts of the state. The unit has ten core women members including the group leader and the secretary, all in their twenties. The group leader has a postgraduate diploma in electronics, the others are all qualified in desktop publishing and trained in hardware. The unit's customers for hardware include local governments in five Northern districts of Kerala State, the nearby mu-

nicipal government, schools, banks, shops, desktop publishing centres and individuals. The unit uses one landline telephone, two mobiles, one PC and printer, an Internet connection and software including Windows98, Windows XP, Linux, Office XP, Script Easy (Malayalam software), Page Maker, Photoshop and Corel Draw. It benefits from an uninterrupted power supply.

In 2004-2005 it achieved total sales of USD 82,000 through selling 160 PCs, delivering two IT training courses and completing one data entry contract. This represented a net income of USD 9,000 (i.e., value of sales minus cost of purchasing inputs). Two more people are now employed than were in 2002 and sales have increased. Excluding the cost of purchasing inputs (which represent almost 90% of total expenditure), the main expenditure is around USD 330 per month on salaries. Couriers, travel, food and accommodation, and rent are the other major expenses. After all expenses are accounted, the unit makes around USD 60 per month profit.

The women use their income to support their families financially by, for example, paying their siblings' school fees and repaying housing loans. They can also provide support through representing their families and carrying out bank transactions. Their parents allow them to travel alone to different places – reflecting the parents' increased confidence in them. Their communication skills and self-confidence have developed. They also have opportunities to go to different places and interact with different people. Their knowledge of IT has increased. However, as most of the women are unmarried they are unsure about their future involvement once they are married.

Source: Planet Kerala, Research Consultants, planetkerala@rediffmail.com

BOX 7

Case study: Rodwel Foundation Women's Cooperative, IT training in Zimbabwe

The Rodwel Foundation was formed in 1996 and registered as a women's cooperative by ten women who pooled their finances to find the initial capital required (about USD 650). This purchased one PC, a printer and a photocopier. Another computer was donated by TIPS-UNDP. The intention was to train other women in the use of computers and their benefits. Initially there were five employees – four women and a man. By 2002, this had gone down to three because of financial problems, but by 2005 it had increased again to six plus Mrs. Gladys Mabaso, the director/enterprise founder, making six women and one man altogether. Rodwel offers short training courses ranging from a basic "Introduction to Computers" to training in specific applications such as MS Word, Excel, Pastel Accounts, etc. It also offers training in e-commerce, international trade using the internet, and the International Computer Driving Licence. The enterprise has also started offering internet services to the community for those who wish to surf the web or simply send and receive emails.

Customers are mostly local women, usually unemployed housewives, who range from semi-literate to literate. Customers are also drawn from school leavers and young adults seeking computer literacy before securing employment or venturing into business.

In 2005 monthly income was running at USD 1,470 and monthly expenditure at USD 880, giving a monthly profit of USD 590. Most of the women involved were not employed prior to joining Rodwel and now earn a net salary of around USD 88 monthly. The women also have raised their levels of skill and training and have greater interaction with people from other communities and cultures via the internet and the telephone. This has been a benefit to the women members of the cooperative society (and their customers) rather than to the women staff members: the cooperative members are now able to market their homemade crafts (from knitting, crocheting, weaving, pottery, etc.) to a broader market by using ICTs and networking with different organisations on the internet.

Source: www.womenictenterprise.org

central to providing these services to the wider economy. They can also act as providers of telecommunications value-added services (Arun et al. 2004). ICTs also form a central component of local business support services, including secretarial and word-processing services, desktop publishing, media and advertising, distance learning providers, and design services including computer-aided design, as well as phone kiosks. There are also growing opportunities in the sales of ICTs and ICT-related items such as consumables (paper, inks, CD/DVDs, etc.) and opportunities in IT training also appear strong (See Box 7).

ICT use: The impact of the internet for accessing market information, amongst growth enterprises in developing countries, varies considerably between sectors. The majority of enterprises serve local markets, and will only derive benefit from net-based market information if (in low-income countries) and when (in higher-income countries) sufficient web-based local content becomes available through local networks. At present, in most developing countries, there is still little digitised content from local institutional or private sector sources.

For enterprises that trade across borders (importers, exporters and the tourist sector) the internet is now a critical tool for accessing business information from external institutions and global business networks (see Box 8). For importers, and especially exporters, there will be growing pressures to move into e-commerce because of the way that it reduces financial and time costs, and improves transaction certainty and record keeping. There are four specific channels through which e-commerce can impact on enterprises in developing countries (UNCTAD 2004):

- Making it easier for local producer groups (e.g., artisans) to access business-to-consumer (B2C) world markets.
- Stimulating global markets to draw upon agricultural and tropical products from developing countries.
- Allowing enterprises in the developing countries to tap into the business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-government (B2G) supply chains.
- Encouraging small-scale service-sector providers in developing countries to link more effectively into world markets.

Sector-based surveys indicate that use of ICT has enhanced existing business-to-business trading relationships, with developing-country SMEs using ICT to exchange information, coordinate logistics and improve communications via regional or global supply chains (Humphrey et al. 2003). There is also evidence of a growing number of enterprises making use of web-based marketing techniques that are effective for targeting niche export markets, as well as the overseas diaspora community (Moodley et al. 2003). However, growth of transactional e-commerce for SMEs is confined predominantly to the industrialised countries, and the highly skewed distribution of growth in revenues from e-commerce also implies an unbalanced spread of benefits (UNCTAD 2004). Research by Duncombe & Molla (2006) and Wresch (2003)

found that such markets are not easy to break into. There needs to be sufficient organisational capacity to ensure that orders can be made, quality controlled, and payment delivered.

Internal data processing (business accounts, inventory, payroll, invoicing, etc.) is also an important area for many enterprises, particularly as they grow and for controlling enterprise finances and cash flow. “Off-the-shelf” packages such as QuickBooks are in widespread use in developing countries. However, they are sometimes inappropriate for individual business needs and require customisation. Sector-focused training or training links with suppliers will be the main requirement for successful implementation of such internal information management systems.

Research suggests that diffusion of ICT must achieve a “critical mass” in terms of coverage, organisational adaptation and learning-by-doing before widespread productivity or efficiency gains become observable within a developing market economy. In most developing countries, achieving any form of critical mass will be a long-term process. It requires economy-wide redesigning of business processes and the development of new business and organisational cultures, which in turn require changes in systems, procedures, skills and attitudes. The SME sector will play a critical role in stimulating these developments and increasing

the volume of ICT critical mass. Focusing on ICT producers will emphasise organic growth – encouraging a step-by-step approach to building local capacity, at least partially serving the needs of ICT consumers and consumers more widely.

THE IMPACT OF ICTS ON ENTERPRISE AND MARKETS

Addressing the impact of ICTs in a market context can involve both: a) an income and expenditure approach, seeking to isolate ICT-related factors that lead to increased incomes and job opportunities for the poor; and b) a broader approach that attempts to assess ICT impacts on livelihoods in terms of assets, delivery of public services, gender, etc. For the limited purposes of this report, some broad areas of impact will be suggested and (as in the previous section) a distinction will be drawn between impacts associated with: a) SMEs (primarily urban-based in the formal sector) and b) subsistence and micro-enterprises (primarily informal and rural or semi-rural based). This distinction throws up two quite different approaches for understanding impacts of ICTs in relation to markets and development, but with a common emphasis placed on the poor as producers.

BOX 8

Case study: ToeHold and ICT application in the value chain

Located in Malleswaram, Bangalore, the enterprise manufactures and markets traditional leather sandals. These are manufactured by a community of artisans from a marginalised area in the Belgaum Region of Karnataka. There are four full-time employees in the field and four in the office. Established in 1999, it is run on a cooperative basis. Customers are mainly shoe stores, designer houses and boutiques in Australia, Japan, Italy and other countries. Awareness of e-commerce opportunities is high due to the international outlook of the enterprise, and particularly that of the entrepreneur who travels widely. Orders are received via email and company representatives follow up with a quotation. Clients also use email to send in suggestions, alterations and photographic evidence of damages/faults in products that might need replacement. This helps improve the quality of their product design. A management information system keeps track of customers and predicts their buying patterns. This helps them to optimise their leather and accessories purchases and keep inventory levels low. Workers in the villages are able to speak to their head offices via mobile telephone. Decisions get taken faster and get communicated down the line cheaper. Hence, the time taken to develop a new

product for a customer is reduced and delivery and production schedules are easier to monitor.

The enterprise website contains a catalogue of its products and customers are able to browse and purchase its products via the integrated shopping cart application. A digital camera is useful as images of new products or test designs can be edited and uploaded quickly. Implementation of ICT has been driven almost exclusively by customers’ needs, and through this the enterprise had achieved legitimacy and a reputation with clients who are purchasing a high value-added design-driven product. A local ISP assisted in software development and offered a free template-based shopping cart application. With only limited computer know-how initially, the entrepreneur was able to put together an effective website and display their products to a worldwide audience. The enterprise retains the intellectual property rights to its original designs. However, showcasing their designs on the web means they could be easily copied by others and passed off as their own. This is a key issue for the enterprise in the global market.

Source: www.ecomm4dev.org

BOX 9

Scale of general technological capability

Level 1: Non-production operational capabilities

- a Using the main production technology involved in producing the enterprise's goods or services
- b Choosing the technology
- c Training others to use the technology

Level 2: Non-production technical capabilities

- a Installing and troubleshooting the technology

Level 3: Adaptation without production

- a Modifying the finished good or service to meet local consumer needs

Level 4: Basic production

- a Copying the main production technology to make new examples
- b Assembling the main production technology
- c Reproducing the entire main production technology to create a new production site using existing products and processes

Level 5: Minor production modification

- a Modifying the product and production process to meet consumer needs

Level 6: Production redesign

- a Redesigning the product and production process to meet local consumer needs
- b Redesigning the product and production process to meet regional/global consumer needs

Level 7: Innovative production

- a Developing a new product with production process innovation to meet local consumer needs
- b Developing a new product with production process innovation to meet regional/global consumer needs
- c Developing a completely new production process
- d Transferring a new production process to other producers

Source: Adapted from Narasimhan (1984), Lall (1987), and Schmitz & Hewitt (1991)

Taken from Heeks, Arun & Morgan (2004)

The impact of ICTs for SMEs

A direct way of understanding the impact of ICT on the local economy is to investigate who is employed in income-generating activity (enterprise), focusing on the impact of ICT on the levels of income generated. A poverty focus would look specifically at any of those employed who currently or previously had very low income and/or asset levels (Heeks, Arun & Morgan 2004). A broader focus would trace indirect impacts through connections in relation to other enterprises/stakeholders in the value chain, and through the effect of expenditure (consumption) by enterprise employees. Broader still would be a livelihoods approach that encompassed not just income but other forms of capital – physical, human, social, etc. – that were created for the poor through interaction with markets and use of ICTs (*infoDev* 2005).

Employment creation

The employment and livelihood opportunities created through use of ICTs and enterprise will be a key measure of impact, particularly in developing countries which have high levels of underemployment and unemployment. There is also a range of secondary impacts associated with employment creation. These include:

- The type of jobs created and the level of ICT competencies required to carry out the jobs created – unskilled, semi-skilled or skilled, for example.
- The sustainability of the jobs. Many new enterprises fail and, when they do so, the new jobs previously created are lost. Thus, upgrading of enterprises using ICTs may create more productive and sustainable enterprises.
- The level of indirect job creation. Adoption of ICTs may have positive or negative knock-on effects that indirectly create/destroy jobs in the supply chain (e.g., in local supplier firms who provide equipment, materials or services; or customer organisations which are made more efficient; or where jobs are changed through the introduction of ICT).

Incomes and job quality

For enterprise workers involved, a key impact of ICTs on the job they hold will be their remuneration. For an urban (micro-) enterprise there may be little or no direct pay involved: general income will just accrue to the household overall (which, typically, will involve uneven distribution of financial benefits; for example, along gender lines). Those workers with ICT skills may be able to command higher levels of pay. ICTs may impact on job quality in either a positive or negative manner. For example, job security can be enhanced through ICT if the employee has newly acquired skills that are in high demand in the local economy. However, there may be negative impacts such as a requirement for long working hours, such as for “low-skilled” female workers carrying out repetitive data entry work.

Technological capability, innovation and learning

An area of impact that has been relatively ignored in relation to enterprise development and ICT is that of technological capability (Lall 1987). This is a crucial determinant of industrial development, but in terms of enterprise development, quite difficult to measure. Closely related to the issue of developing technological capability is the issue of building knowledge and developing innovation through ICT in the enterprise sector (Wignaraja 2003a).

Technological capability can be defined as the general ability to undertake the broad range of tasks outlined in Box 8, and technological development as the growth of capability defined by movement up the categories. These capabilities are embodied in the skills and experience of individual workers, often seen as the most important resource for an enterprise (Heeks, Arun & Morgan 2004). Thus, technological development is measured according to the accumulation of capabilities (in this case ICT skills) by the working population.

However, it is insufficient to focus on technological capability only at the micro-level. There is also a need to understand the national innovation system within which a particular ICT-based enterprise or cluster sits: the competitors, clients, suppliers, national technology/training bodies, and other relevant institutions that can contribute to learning and capability accumulation within enterprises or clusters. Capability building is also:

... affected by a host of national policy and institutional factors ... [including] macroeconomic stability, outward-oriented trade and investment policies, ample supplies of general and technical manpower, ready access to industrial finance and comprehensive support from technology institutions (Wignaraja 2003b, 26).

Gender relations

Employment in enterprise is often seen as particularly beneficial for women. For example, in many situations a greater social value tends to be placed on the creation of income for women as compared to income for men because women tend to spend a greater proportion of income under their control for investment or for family welfare and less on personal consumption. However, the tradition within ICT is that of male domination. Thus, where greater levels of ICT are applied, women may find themselves paid less than men in equivalent work and/or restricted to less-skilled, lower-paid jobs and/or subject to subordination to men within the workplace and/or placed in jobs which are more likely to be lost during times of change in the enterprise (Arun & Arun 2002). Thus, gender-sensitised impact assessment, comparing incomes of men and women, comparative job content and job quality, the welfare value of comparative income, issues of self-esteem and empowerment and subordination, etc., need to be considered (Morgan et al. 2004).

The impact of ICTs for subsistence and micro-enterprises

The majority of the poorest lie outside the reach of the formal sector, and market mechanisms for providing information via ICTs are likely to be insufficient. This is due to the inability of the poor to voice their demand for information and their inability to pay for supply of that information.

Overcoming information problems in rural areas remains a key challenge for agricultural and agriculture-related markets – markets that are most relevant to the lives of the poorest (Berdegue & Escobar 2001). Information relating to agriculture (e.g., crop prices, standards, demand, availability of inputs, etc.) has traditionally been considered a public good and delivered via a range of traditional media that have embodied a high degree of sunken costs – where considerable investments have been made in government extension services and local radio networks, for example.

Chapman, Slaymaker and Young (2001) have highlighted some key issues concerning the costs of information for the effective functioning of agricultural markets, particularly in situations where public-good services (such as government-funded extension networks) are being scaled-down or withdrawn, thus giving a greater role for market driven processes to determine the supply and demand of information. Key issues relate to determining who should pay for such information and knowledge for development (e.g., training for farmers).

Experiences in reforming agricultural extension services vary considerably between countries and the question of who can reasonably be expected to pay (and how much) for these services remains largely unresolved. Quantifying demand for information from poor farmers who are unable to pay is problematic. In the livelihoods context, many of the basic information needs for livelihood support may correspond with an inability to pay, which renders economic arguments about willingness to pay and price irrelevant (Chapman et al. 2001, 15).

There is a strong public good argument for greater investment in information and communication systems in rural areas in order to reduce cost and increase efficiency for the exchange of market and other information concerning agricultural goods and services. However, as stated by Chapman et al. (2002), Duncombe and Heeks (2002) and Kenny (2002), the appropriateness of competing technologies and information systems needs to be carefully evaluated, with a focus on expanding the technologies that can be most successfully integrated into existing systems and which offer the most affordable access models. At present these should be focused on communications technologies (mobile and new radio formats) rather than information processing technologies (such as PCs and the internet).

Communication of information is also insufficient without consideration of further information chain processes which are

highly context specific. Experience shows that discrete pieces of information are best received as part of a broader package of information and pre-existing knowledge.

For example, farmers under contract to sell at a prearranged price may hear about high end market prices for their crops and may be motivated to sell to an intermediary offering a higher price, thinking that their contract buyer is not giving them a fair price. However, price information alone does not invite farmers to consider the cost of the inputs and services the contract buyer has provided, or to consider how the farmer will produce the following year without these services. Thus the information would have benefited the farmer more if it were more comprehensive (Miehlbradt & McVay 2005, 67).

Effective decision-making and action implies resource endowments that have nothing to do with ICTs. Information received about a new seed type is of no value if the farmer does not trust the supplier of that information. Information about a new market is of no value if the poor entrepreneur cannot increase production to supply that market, through lack of capacity or aversion to risk. Thus, Chapman and Slaymaker (2001, 22) outline this view:

Improved information alone is not sufficient for improved decision making. Decision-making is a political process and promoting multi-stakeholder participation in decision-making processes is a key concern. Furthermore, different stakeholder groups each have specific information needs and delivery preferences. Highly differentiated information needs assessment is essential in order to effectively support decision making at different levels. It is evident that effective promotion of poverty reduction and food security requires changes in institutions and attitudes, knowledge and information levels, processes and skills. Improved understanding of the capacity of decision makers at different levels to make use of the information provided is key for the identification of appropriate systems and institutions for the delivery of relevant information.

Infomediaries for the poorest

Evidence suggests that the information needs of the poorest will be met more by informal, "organic" information systems that are locally contextualised than by formal, ICT-based information systems that access existing information from external sources. This may come about through interaction between communities and community members rather than from the typical ICT-based pattern of data transfer. As Chapman and Slaymaker (2002) point out, information may be better delivered by pre-existing technologies than by new ICTs, and where ICTs are used, they should provide a supplement, not substitute, to existing information systems.

ICTs can be of greatest value to provide information from and about the poorest. To do this the poorest need "infomediaries"

to use ICTs. These infomediaries are needed to bridge the overt and the social resource gaps between what the poor have and what they would need in order to use ICTs (Heeks, Arun & Morgan 2004). Indeed, ICTs currently have a far greater enabling value in building capacity within intermediary institutions – in "helping the helpers" – than in directly affecting the poorest. In this respect, research conducted in Uganda concludes the following with regard to the type of institutions that are most relevant to the lives of the poorest:

Long-standing village institutions that provide checks and balances within the society at little or no cost to the individuals that utilize their services are widely favored. So also are newer community-based organizations that provide a social mechanism for members to undertake savings for stated purposes, and NGOs that make visible differences to peoples' lives (building schools, digging boreholes, providing piped water, etc.). Government agencies, whatever their purpose, did not feature in the facilitating institutions list in any sample villages, and this sounds a cautionary note regarding the current and future credibility of those public agencies and services that are in transition between central and local authority responsibility (Ellis & Bahigwa 2003, 1008).

If markets are to play a role in mediating information and communication via ICTs for the poorest and other vulnerable groups, then a key issue will concern the interface between markets and the type of local institutions that serve their needs. For example, ICTs have enabled NGOs to share experiences about – and thereby improve – their microcredit programmes and have assisted those campaigning for greater democracy, social equality and protection of the environment. There are also individual examples of ICTs assisting government agencies, universities, and hospitals, some of which – albeit often indirectly and imperfectly – can serve the poorest (Duncombe & Heeks 2002).

Thus, the best intermediaries will be drawn from within poor communities. Poor communities with the highest "social capital" of effective community institutions will be the most effective users of ICTs. Initiatives in which technical and contextual knowledge are disconnected, with intermediaries and control located outside the community, are more likely to fail. The poor will only reap the fullest benefits of ICTs when they own and control both the technology and its related know-how (Heeks, Arun & Morgan 2004).

ICTS, MARKETS AND DEVELOPMENT: PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

This section presents discussion of key responses and priorities for ICTs, markets and development. It is organised into three sections according to the institutional view of markets presented in Figure 1. They are: a) ICTs for supporting core market relationships (micro-level); b) ICTs for promoting market intermediaries (meso-level); and c) ICTs for building national/regional market institutions (macro-level).

Supporting core market relationships

For subsistence and micro-enterprises

Information constraints for this group can be most easily overcome by providing better communication networks and technologies. Mobile networks are already assisting in this respect, although for many such enterprises information is not that critical an issue as there are greater constraints that relate to markets, money, skills and motivation. Where other ICTs (e.g., telecentres) are used, they should provide a supplement, not a substitute, for existing information systems. In most cases infomediaries (and some form of subsidised access) will be needed to bridge the financial, socio-cultural and knowledge gaps experienced by (particularly the poorest) producers. Within such enterprises, basic skills and/or financial stability need to be acted upon in order for any true benefit to be gained from applying ICTs.

For growth-orientated SMEs

ICT-related (and other) interventions have greatest effect on growth-orientated SMEs. In this respect “one size does not fit all” and targeted strategies are required because of the different roles ICTs play in the different enterprise types. Many SME sectors may require specific ICT support, as in the printing and publishing sector or tourism sectors, where competitive pressures driven by rapid technological change mean enterprises must adapt quickly to the utilisation of new technology. SMEs need assistance to upgrade their use of ICTs in order to achieve compatibility with customers or suppliers in the value chain (UNIDO 2001).

For sector-focused value chain support

There is evidence in favour of abandoning size-focused support for enterprise and, instead, using ICT-related interventions to support particular sectors – encouraging ICT support for greater sector-based value chain integration. This suggests demand-side interventions, such as the development of linkages to customers (e.g., sub-contracting to local large customers, export support to link to overseas customers) and other marketing support. When considering support for ICT-adoption strategies for enterprises there needs to be greater thought given to the market drivers that will make enterprises demand ICTs (at present there is too much focus on enablers that help enterprises overcome supply barriers to ICTs). There is also a need for upgrading

of enterprises and clusters through integrated e-business support and productivity enhancement packages employing sector strategies, business incubators and demonstrators.

For specific measures to help the poorest

The primary criticism of approaches to development that involve markets and ICTs is that they fail to reach those in chronic poverty or vulnerable groups that lie outside the reach of such initiatives. Here, ICTs need to take on a broader role as suggested by McNamara (2003) and Marker et al. (2002): a) to help overcome/forestall inequalities, by providing information concerning public services and institutions – including education, health, nutrition, water and sanitation; b) to enable the poorest to learn about rights and entitlements and to be able to pressurise government and other powerful organisations into giving the poor a voice; and finally, c) to provide information that leads to income-earning opportunities, such as information for access to markets and on market prices for the goods and services that the poor produce.

Supporting intermediaries

To enable local ICT sector growth

At present, the local ICT industry (products and services) – particularly in smaller low-income countries – is dominated by the subsidiaries of large multi-national computer/consultancy companies. Development of nascent locally owned ICT enterprises (i.e., the local ICT sector) should be promoted for the following reasons (Duncombe & Heeks 2005):

- They contribute to building local ICT industry capacity and building a skills base.
- They substitute for (expensive) imported ICT goods and (particularly) services.
- They stimulate local economic development and provide the information and management tools for the wider business sector.
- They provide local ICT-applications capacity that NGOs, and other providers of welfare services, can draw upon.
- They can help more traditional industries (such as artisans or foodstuffs producer groups) connect to regional/global markets via ICT-assisted (fair) trade.

To enable business information services

Studies have shown the need for business information, packaged in simple ready-to-use formats and available in local languages (written, speech, or multimedia). Sector-specific information is more valued by enterprises. More up-to-date market-orientated information is also more valuable than generic information. Supplying this information requires systems, personnel and funding for collating and distributing it regularly,

and cost-recovery business models need to be adopted. In this respect, BDS providers should focus more on market research, define services in term of benefits to customers, focus on areas of strength, and not be too broad-based. These types of interventions often require relatively less financial assistance, but a higher level of skill and market/sector knowledge on the part of donors and BDS workers.

To enable microfinance institutions (MFIs)

A number of ICT-related innovations are already being used by microfinance institutions around the world, including smart cards, palm pilots for client record keeping and in-the-field loan appraisals as well as use of ATM (auto teller) machines (Atali 2004). Mobile phones have potential to become a low-cost accessible “account” or delivery channel for financial information, services and transactions (Porteous 2006). Microfinance institutions (banks for the poor) are already taking up these services, and mobile airtime credits are being traded as a new currency in many poor communities (Wishart 2006).

The “mobile revolution” may open up a new set of possibilities for innovation in the delivery mechanism for financial services and transactions for the poor. These include micro-payments (m-commerce), electronic money (e-money), and a banking channel (m-banking). Initiatives such as Globe Telecom’s GCash in the Philippines, Wizzit in South Africa, and Safaricom’s m-pesa in Kenya have already demonstrated the potential for extending m-banking services to poor and unbanked communities. Research into such services has shown mixed results: Ivatury and Pickins (2006) conclude that they are often viewed by the poor with the same mistrust as other formal banking channels, whilst Williams and Torma (2007) identify significant benefits amongst users on low incomes who had sufficient knowledge to use the systems effectively.

The ICT uses prioritised by different microfinance institutions are likely to relate closely to the very different core objectives found within the sector (ranging from prioritising financial sustainability to tight targeting of the poorest and most excluded micro-entrepreneurs). The long-term goals set for enabling ICT development for large and well-established MFIs in countries like India or Bangladesh, for instance, will be substantially different to those possible for small MFIs in countries like Uganda. In India and Bangladesh constraints are likely to be centred on the low levels of literacy and English language competence amongst MFI clients, whereas in Uganda key constraints may be in the rural telecommunications and power sectors (Duncombe & Heeks 2005).

To enable private sector support structures

Private-sector business membership organisations should be considered as effective and sustainable information providers for both micro-enterprises and SMEs. ICT capacity should therefore be built within:

- Trade associations – representing national (small) business sectors (e.g., tourism, legal and accounting, manufacturing, etc.).
- Chambers of commerce – representing the private sector within districts or regions.
- Umbrella associations – national associations dealing with government.
- Employers associations – organised at a national level.

Building national institutions

The successful adoption and effective use of ICTs by either growth-orientated SMEs or subsistence and micro-enterprises is crucially dependent on the environment in which they are operating. The comparatively limited resources of enterprises in developing countries mean that they are more dependent on the external environment for information and communication services than large-scale enterprises. In particular, the effective use of new ICTs for small enterprise development is significantly affected by the constraints and shortcomings present in policy, institutional and market environments.

There is broad agreement between different studies on the critical factors for an enabling environment for ICTs and enterprise development (Molla 2004; McConnell International 2000; Saenz 2000). The remit of this report does not include consideration of broader ICT policy questions. However, four key aspects of the external environment for enterprises should be highlighted: a) the policy and regulatory framework; b) the telecommunications (and other) infrastructure; c) the ICT sector; and d) the promotion and awareness of ICTs and e-commerce.

Crucially, macro-policies are also needed to increase the market/demand for enterprise outputs. Policy measures would include approaches to income redistribution and increasing demand of the poor, export promotion favouring poor producer groups, and promotion of sub-contracting links between large and small enterprises, as well as government preferential purchasing schemes. Full participation in e-commerce and the widespread adoption of ICTs for enterprise operations will require expansion of the ICT infrastructure and other essential services (such as electronic banking), the development of a strong user base to make it easier for enterprises to enter into e-commerce, and support services for SMEs, such as public access facilities (telecentres).

Implementation of these steps arguably calls for international cooperation to be focused at a higher level than the enterprise or the infomediary (such as BDS providers). An objective of the BCO Alliance and other international organisations should be to support governments in developing countries to establish the business environment, the skills base, and the infrastructure and support services to facilitate and encourage ICT use by the enterprise sector. ■

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ICT, Pro-Poor Markets and Livelihoods¹

MANUEL ACEVEDO

Introduction and research methodology

The purpose of this study in Ecuador was to explore experiences from projects and organisations supported by the International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD) and Hivos in the areas of microcredit and agriculture, in order to assess how they use ICT to contribute to pro-poor markets and improved livelihoods. It was carried out in the framework of the Building Communication Opportunities (BCO) Impact Assessment – Component 3.

This report is structured as follows:

- The present introductory section, which presents the objectives and methods of the study.
- A brief overview of the socio-economic context in Ecuador.
- Findings from the investigation on the uses and possibilities of ICT in Ecuador for pro-poor markets and to enhance livelihoods and incomes.
- A final section containing the analysis of these findings in view of the present national context.
- A set of annexes, including the questionnaire used in the research and a description of the projects involved.

Research methodology

National (field) research complemented conceptual research at the international level on the various issues addressed by the BCO Impact Assessment investigations, such as ICT for pro-poor markets and the effect of networks on ICT national policies. Ecuador was selected as one of the countries in which field work would provide data and information to underscore, contrast and complement these more extensive reviews. It had a fair number of projects at varying stages of implementation in the IICD national programme (some supported by Hivos).²

For the field work in Ecuador on ICT, markets and livelihoods, conceptual guidance was obtained from the conceptual review undertaken by Richard Duncombe as part of this same investigation to ensure that it would be coherent with its approach.

Consequently, this report examines the selected projects and organisations from the perspective of three different and complementary dimensions: how ICT plays a part in supporting the *enterprise*, making the *markets* function better from a developmental perspective, and improving *livelihoods* through higher incomes and better information.

The study focused on projects and organisations supported by IICD and Hivos in the areas of microfinance and agriculture, as these were the areas deemed to be most directly tied to markets and the economy (compared with those in education or governance, for example).

A desk review of individual projects as well as the overall IICD national programme was conducted prior to a ten-day visit to Ecuador. During the visit, additional reference information was obtained via recommendations of people interviewed, particularly on the country's economic and technological context.³

A questionnaire (Annex 1) was formulated on the basis of the three dimensions mentioned above to give a comprehensive picture of how ICT applications were used directly or indirectly by the projects and organisations in terms of economic activity. The questionnaires were filled out directly by representatives of the organisations during the course of visits to their organisations while in Quito. This served two purposes: first, that the questionnaires would be completed and returned in time, and second, that the questions could be explained and discussed in person as part of the ensuing dialogue held during the visits. Notes were taken at that time as well, reflecting information and impressions that complemented what was included in the questionnaires.

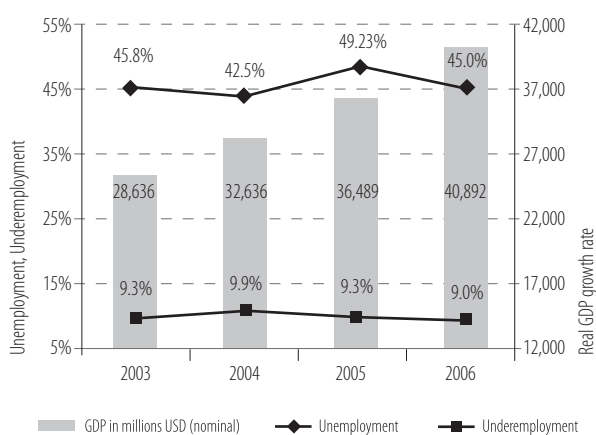
Besides providing an interpretation of the information received (in documented form as well as verbally during the interviews), it was also considered important to reflect as accurately as possible the diversity of points of view from the various actors involved. These claims and opinions, even if essentially impossible to verify under the research study framework, are valuable in their own right and it is important that they also figure in the research results – together with the information processed by the research team. In other words, the following pages provide

¹ The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the BCO Alliance, individual partners of BCO or *ict* Development Associates *Ltd*.

² It has also hosted one of the national information networks supported by IICD, *Infodesarrollo.ec*, since 2003, which was useful for being able to undertake another of the field investigations (Investigation 3) on the impact of networks on ICT national policies.

³ In addition, the researcher was familiar with most of the projects and organisations, as he conducted a separate evaluation of some components of these initiatives in Ecuador approximately two years before (available upon request to IICD and Hivos). Some of the information obtained during the present study was thus contrasted with what was learned back then, to examine consistency and levels of progress.

FIGURE 1.
GDP growth and unemployment/underemployment rates



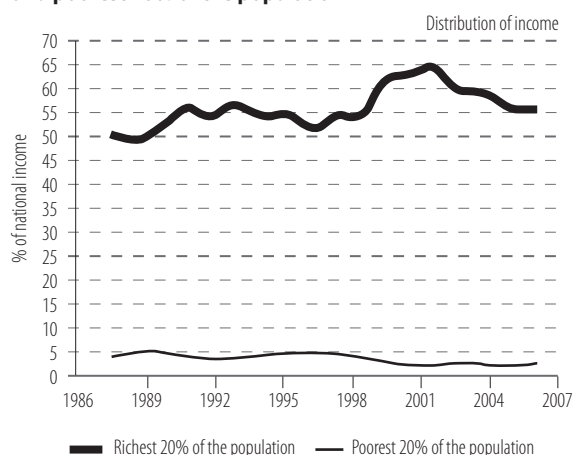
Source: Central Bank of Ecuador, National Economic Plan 2007-2010

a combination of objective and subjective information, with diverse inputs of the latter – from the research team and others.

A brief overview of the social, economic and political context in Ecuador

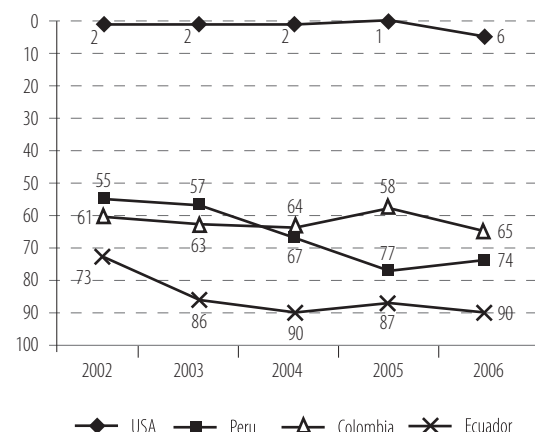
Ecuador has lived in a climate of political and economic instability since the mid-1990s. External shocks (global financial events in 1997-1998, the climate phenomenon known as “La Niña” in 1997), together with internal management problems (e.g., corruption, lack of control over bank operations) and poor economic performance led to a deep economic and financial crisis in 1999. This involved the closing of several banks with many people losing their savings, and culminated in the adoption of the US dollar as official currency in 2000. It also marked the start of high levels of emigration. There have been seven presidents since 1996; none of the four elected presidents have managed to complete their terms.

FIGURE 2.
Gap in distribution of income between the richest 20% and poorest 20% of the population



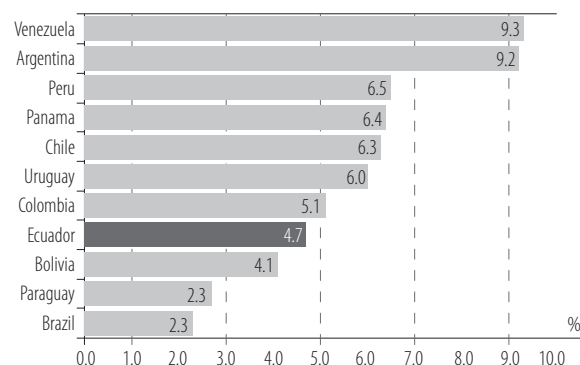
Source: Department of Statistics, Ministry of Finance, National Economic Plan 2007-2010

FIGURE 3A.
Global Competitiveness Index (WEF) Ranking



Source: World Economic Forum

FIGURE 3B.
Real GDP growth, 2005



Source: Andean Development Corporation (CAF)

The last elections in October 2006 brought a relatively unknown candidate to power, Rafael Correa. He has maintained a high degree of popular support that materialised in a large “yes” vote on a referendum to establish a Constituent Assembly, whose task will be to draft a new constitution. There is a participatory process underway for the drafting of the new constitution, with 10 *mesas* (committees) dealing with various aspects convening in different parts of the country (even travelling in some cases) and inviting people and groups to appear before them to make their proposals. People, including those who have emigrated, can also participate through the Assembly’s website.⁴ The new constitution is to be submitted to the country for a referendum vote in the second quarter of 2008.

There is relatively significant economic growth, but without a proportional increase in employment and continued high underemployment (see Figure 1), along with growing inequities

4 asambleaconstituyente.gov.ec

(Figure 2) and a high degree of dependence on the petroleum sector. Inflation is low, but price levels are high in terms of purchasing power (dating back to the “dollarisation” in 2000). Ecuador has substantial oil resources and rich agricultural areas. Its exports are primary products, mainly oil, followed by bananas, flowers and shrimp, so fluctuations in world market prices can have a substantial domestic impact. Oil products show a highly volatile growth pattern: contributions to GNP growth were 6.7% in 2003, 35.4% in 2004 and 3.4% in 2005.

The relative competitiveness of Ecuador within the Latin American region, low to begin with, has worsened in the last five years (see Figure 3a). This results from the fact that the country has had one of the lowest economic growth rates in the region (Figure 3b). Growth is concentrated in the oil sector. Between 2003 and 2006, there were low rates of growth in the so-called “real sector” – e.g., construction 4.0%, transportation and storage 3.3%, agriculture, livestock and forestry 2.7% – as compared with oil and mining (8.9%), financial services (12.0%) and manufacturing (5.5%).

Ecuador has a high level of debt, which until at least 2015 is not expected to decrease to more manageable levels. Figure 4 shows a comparison of debt services with expenditure on basic social services. The country therefore needs to continue to grow at a healthy pace in order to be able to increase its social spending.

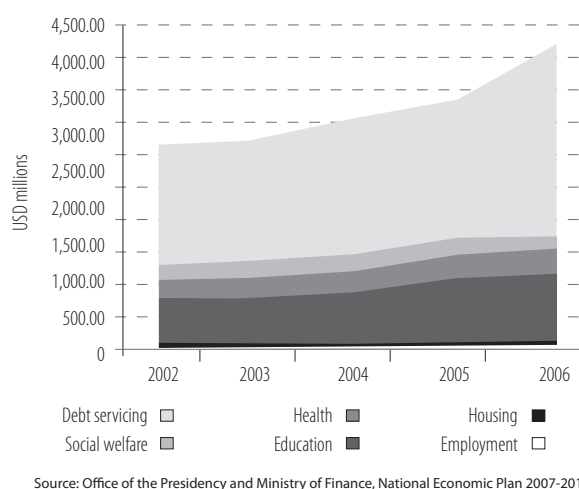
The National Economic Plan 2007-2010 established by the new Correa administration is based on five pillars:

- Production – developing production and increasing productivity.
- Employment – generating decent work.
- Regional integration – strategically positioning the country in the context of the Latin American region and also as a nation of the Pacific Rim.
- Equity – with productive inclusion and higher redistribution of wealth and income.
- Trust – via social cohesion, citizens’ participation and transparency.

Of particular relevance to this report are the main measures planned under the production and employment pillars, since they are highly coherent with, if not strongly conditioned by, the informational and technological upgrading of the economy and its actors. These measures are as follows:

- Increasing productivity and competitiveness, with emphasis on micro and SMEs.
- Investing in strategic sectors with the potential for high employment generation.
- Providing training and technical assistance.
- Implementing local strategies to achieve stable incomes and economic security for households.

FIGURE 4.
Comparison of debt servicing and social spending



- Maintaining clean production that allows for sustainable development in harmony with ecosystems.
- Promoting technological innovation aimed at gains in productivity.

RESEARCH FINDINGS ON ICT, PRO-POOR MARKETS AND LIVELIHOODS

This investigation explores the challenges and actual uses of ICTs to help reduce the unequal conditions for participating in markets by the poor and the disadvantaged, essentially through diminishing the asymmetry of information access and increasing trust among actors. It also explores the types of applications of these technologies that can bring more income and dignified conditions for improved livelihoods to these people.

This section presents the findings of the field research on six projects and their implementing organisations.⁵ It first provides a brief description of the projects to give the reader a basic idea of what they were about and what they have achieved (Annex 2 contains more detailed information about the projects).

⁵ There was one further organisation contacted, the FEPTCE (Plurinational Federation of Community Tourism in Ecuador), which also had a project supported by IICD as part of its national programme. It is not included in this report as it completed project operations long ago and was not in a position to provide the required levels of information about what the project did. Essentially, the project was meant to set up an e-commerce system for the FEPTCE and its members (e.g., an indigenous community in an Amazonian location offering tourist accommodations and activities). It stopped at a website (www.turismocomunitario.ec) which serves as a flat information base that lets interested visitors contact the Federation and possibly arrange tours. The problem lies in the lack of organisational capacity in FEPTCE, which is not yet ready to assume such a significant management load, and so very little business has been handled by the Federation. Nevertheless, the foundations are in place for what could be a fruitful livelihoods enterprise for the communities involved.

Research findings are organised by the three dimensions selected in the methodology, i.e., enterprise, markets and livelihoods. Within each of these dimensions, the first subsection refers to ICT uses that relate to its key modelling scheme (in terms of the conceptual review by Richard Duncombe). Thereafter the subsections refer to specific aspects drawing from discussions with the six organisations on ICT applications, impact or policy recommendations.

The intention for this section is to transmit all the relevant information gleaned through interactions with the organisations (and enriched through documentation and other contextual information). Since the focus is on ICT applications and other ICT-related points, the findings are presented in relation to these, rather than by organisation. Often a number of organisations made similar uses of ICT, and this is noted where it is so. At other times the information is systematised (from among all the organisations) to avoid an excessively lengthy treatment. In this section readers will be able to pinpoint rapidly those ICT applications or issues of particular interest to them, while in the subsequent Analysis section the findings are examined jointly to extract common/meaningful effects of the various uses of ICTs.

Brief description of projects and organisations included in the research

A brief description is provided here about each of the six projects and organisations looked into, to give the reader an idea of what they do and how their projects have fared (all have completed their planned implementation period).

1. CAMARI-FEPP (Assistive Commercialisation Foundation–Ecuadorian *Populorum Progressio* Fund)

Project name: “Strengthening an information and training network for producers working with the CAMARI-FEPP equitable marketing system”

CAMARI-FEPP markets agricultural and artisanal products domestically and internationally, based on “fair trade” principles, in order to improve living conditions for small producers. The project seeks to enable indigenous and non-indigenous small farmers to market their products widely, and guarantee increased sales volume by providing information on supply and demand, costs and pricing, and product quality in order to set marketing strategies.

The project has performed well, allowing CAMARI to develop a solid system of different ICT tools and ICT-based processes to (i) support increased and growing business and more effectively market agricultural and artisanal goods, (ii) professionalise the entire range of production processes and transactions, and (iii) build the capacity of its producers. The InfoCentros (community telecentres) used by the project function well and now serve additional purposes besides commercial ones. Sales have grown

(including overseas) and more opportunities have opened up for more producers, always based on the ethical conditions underlying CAMARI’s entire approach.

2. MCCH (*Maqita Cushinshic*; in the Quichua language: “Marketing like Brothers”)

Project name: “Optimising production, marketing and social organisation of the cocoa-stocking centres of Ecuador, applying a communication and dissemination scheme through the use of ICTs”

The project aimed to support the evolution and strengthening of the Associative Network of Cocoa Farmers of Ecuador, to guarantee the continuity and sustainability of the network on the basis of increased profitability. For that purpose, it needed to implement an information/communication system among the entities (i.e., cocoa-stocking centres) involved in the cocoa socio-productive process. That system would allow for information flows among stocking centres and between the stocking centres and MCCH, as well as better analysis of the information.

Even though MCCH is a well-established organisation with some solid ICT technical capacity, the project did not succeed in setting up the desired communications system, as it relied on an untested set of technologies in the Ecuadorian context (microwave transmissions). Along the way, however, informational processes were introduced and fine-tuned with the cooperative cocoa producers, and some useful software applications were developed (e.g., to document all information about the producers, including social information). Technological change in the form of rapid mobile telephony coverage around the country has brought about increased communications possibilities, making the project’s main technological objectives almost irrelevant anyway. This highlights the fact that in most projects it is not the technology that is truly important, but how technological tools help solve problems.

3. RFR (Rural Financial Network)

Project name: “SERVIR – Design and implementation of a regional service for credit evaluations”

The RFR is an association of rural financial organisations that provides services for microfinance institutions (MFIs). The SERVIR project aims to improve the performance and reach of microfinance organisations in Ecuador (and indirectly to improve the profitability of its micro and small enterprise clients through better access to credit), mainly by creating and making available an ICT-based credit information system for smaller microfinance organisations around the country. The main idea is to provide better tools for MFIs about who to lend to, resulting ultimately in reduced costs for micro-entrepreneurs and small producers.

The SERVIR project achieved its objectives, in fact surpassing them (in terms of the number of associated MFIs and client borrowers included). The use of ICT to set up a credit informa-

tion exchange service has helped participating micro and small cooperative finance organisations to lower the number of bad loans while increasing loan provision to riskier clients (i.e., those without any guarantees to provide). The project team was able to navigate its way through technological uncertainties (problems in data feeds, different data formats and communications infrastructure). The objectives of the original project could now be extended nationally (it was piloted only in three out of twenty-four provinces), and that is the next challenge for the RFR. On the results of this project, Hivos has recently extended its support to RFR for another three years.

4. **C-CONDEM** (National Coordinating Corporation for the Defence of the Mangrove Ecosystem in Ecuador)

Project name: “Mangrove ICTs – Conservation with community production”

The project was aimed at strengthening community production initiatives on the Ecuadorian coast based on mangrove ecosystems, through systematising experiences, research processing and socialisation, strengthening organisational capacity in communities, sharing of experiences, and the promotion and dissemination of the supported production initiatives.

The impact has been mixed at the community level, since income levels are low and livelihood conditions remain harsh. Some advances, in terms of improved and more sustainable natural resource management (particularly conch harvesting), have been registered. At the institutional level, C-CONDEM has strengthened its capacity to use ICT to support its community work and network with other organisations in Ecuador and abroad, and has gained advocacy/lobbying power as well.

5. **Acción Ecológica** (Environmental Action)

Project name: “Impacts of free trade on agriculture”

The objective of the project was to generate awareness and knowledge about the impact of free trade (particularly the Free Trade Agreement proposed by the United States), mainly on small and medium farmers, but also on the agricultural sector in Ecuador overall, in order to develop opposition and advocate alternatives to protect national and subsistence agriculture. For these purposes, it aimed to decentralise access to and expand the use of information directly by the target beneficiaries (including peasant and indigenous organisations, alternative production and distribution networks, medium-sized producers, environmental NGOs and media).

The project has been effective. Acción Ecológica has gained visibility and contributed to stopping the FTA, as well as engaging in other environmental causes (such as preventing oil drilling in parts of the Amazon basin). It has gained lobbying power as well, at a particularly timely juncture: when a Constituent Assembly is underway and has been opened to citizen participa-

tion from many groups in Ecuadorian society, including from civil society (Acción Ecológica is active in this). The project has also improved the capacity of a number of associated organisations and individuals (mainly journalists) to access information and generate and communicate content.

6. **CEA** (Ecuadorian Agro-Ecology Coordinating Office)

Project name: “Communication to manage sustainable production systems – Pests and diseases”

CEA heads a national network with a diverse membership, including grassroots community organisations, NGOs, universities, producers’ associations, etc., involved in natural resource management. It aims to inform and build awareness among its members and others about the practices and benefits of solving problems by applying agro-ecological principles, particularly related to pests and diseases. ICT, a hitherto unused tool for them, will serve to enhance the dissemination of techniques and technologies that have been validated in small farmer practice and others coming from academic circles. The project supports small farmers’ plot management through local-knowledge systematisation, information exchange, and online advisory support for agro-ecological management of the main pests and diseases.

The project has registered modest advances, albeit admittedly the starting point on ICT know-how and awareness was very low. CEA is learning various ways to use the technologies to support its members in incorporating more environmentally friendly practices, e.g., making accessible significant volumes of information on the topic, as well as by networking with other organisations and acting as a bridge so that knowledge and experience are passed on to its members.

Research findings

It is worth noting, before going into the specific findings, that two types of organisation broadly emerged among the six investigated in Ecuador.

The first type can be viewed as enterprises or companies in their own right (regardless of the orientation of their profits). This group includes CAMARI and MCCH, as marketers of agricultural and artisanal products, and RFR as a provider of services to microfinance entities. These organisations make a richer and more intensive use of ICTs, and would hardly be able to operate without ICT, at least in the way they are presently set up.

The second type act more as “traditional” civil society organisations (they are in fact NGOs), essentially involved in building capacity and/or providing information to their constituencies. C-CONDEM and CEA engage with local micro-entrepreneurs⁶

⁶ C-CONDEM works with communities living in mangrove ecosystems, extracting shellfish and other coastal natural resources; CEA works with small farmers wanting to incorporate environmentally sound agricultural practices.

and producers to enable them to work better – with higher incomes, more environmentally sustainable practices and defending their rights. Acción Ecológica provides information more generally about environmental issues to a variety of actors (farmers, journalists, activists, academics, government officials), and also engages in lobbying and campaigns – so it could be seen as a kind of proactive environmental think tank. For these three, the use of ICTs is more complementary (and less central or at their core), although they do gain by it. However, Acción Ecológica may be considered in a different category, since its website and ICT-based tools have become rather entrenched in the way they work.

Enterprise dimension

We first examine ICT effects in the selected organisations and their projects in Ecuador from the perspective of the enterprise or productive unit. For this purpose, the six organisations are nominally considered as small enterprises (5-25 workers), given the categorisation used in the conceptual review by Richard Duncombe. MCCH and CAMARI would be at the higher end of this category (and possibly MCCH may actually have more than 25 employees), with RFR and C-CONDEM having about ten, while Acción Ecológica and CEA would fall at the lower end of the range, with little more than five employees (though probably many more in terms of volunteers).

All of them, moreover, have direct relations with subsistence and micro-enterprises: farmers, artisans and other micro-entrepreneurs are sometimes direct clients (MCCH, CAMARI and RFR) or are supported by these organisations (Acción Ecológica, CEA, C-CONDEM).

Applying ICT to enterprise lifecycle factors

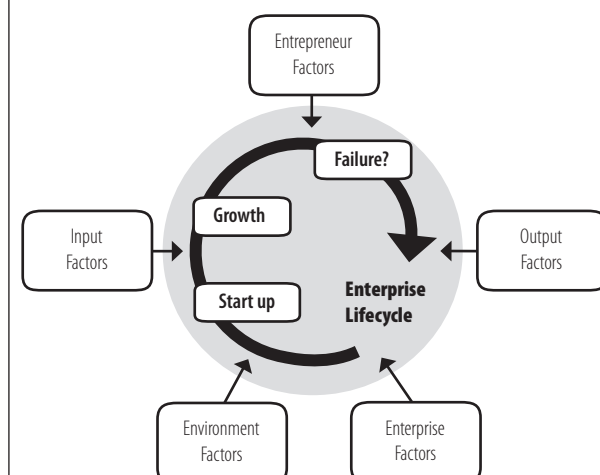
The author discussed with the six organisations their use of ICT related to the “enterprise lifecycle factors” introduced in Richard Duncombe’s research review (as per Figure 5), which encompass the factors that affect an enterprise in a market environment (or even in non-market ones). The findings are summarised below.

Output factors (demand)

The diverse nature of the organisations and products is reflected in different uses of ICT related to demand or output factors. CAMARI and MCCH, directly involved in commerce, use an array of applications to facilitate relations with the customer, via e-commerce systems, product design software (e.g., for clothes or tapestries), customer relations management applications or marketing applications (e-bulletins, digital catalogues on CD).

RFR offers a web-based database service to its clients, which are non-regulated microfinance entities (45 of them). They use it to check on the credit history of microcredit applicants. These entities serve 140,000 individual borrowers in three Ecuadorian provinces.

FIGURE 5. Enterprise lifecycle factors



Source: Duncombe

Entities that mostly inform other organisations about agricultural practices or conditions (Acción Ecológica, CEA, C-CONDEM) use a different type of technology, essentially to build awareness or even train individual actors (producers, journalists) through audio-visual productions (video, e-newsletters, radio content).

Input factors (labour, technology and know-how)

CAMARI and MCCH, as marketers of agricultural and artisanal products, employ a relatively sophisticated set of ICTs to manage their inputs – quality control systems, databases for stock/inventory control, sowing and harvests, and data about the producers. MCCH even uses an enterprise resource planning (ERP) system for decision-making across the organisation.

The challenge for RFR was to be able to receive updated data from organisations with little ICT capacity and widely differing accounting and financial applications. One of their key successes was in creating interfaces from this array of applications to their database.

Acción Ecológica uses the internet to access updated information on environmental issues, whereas C-CONDEM and CEA get inputs more sparingly from the net.

Management factors (growth, sustainability, etc.)

CAMARI uses Balanced Scorecard-based systems, including software for monitoring and evaluation processes (e.g., establishing socio-economic baselines). Together with the above-mentioned applications related to outputs/demand, this helps them to plan their growth better (they have targets of 15% to 20% annual growth for the 2006-2008 period, including a 20% target for international sales). As mentioned earlier, MCCH uses a recently installed ERP system, although it appears that this is

still going through its teething stage (problems in implementation, many features not utilised, etc.).

After three years, the system developed by RFR gives it precise figures about the cost per client, allowing them to reach sustainability and profitability. On the basis of known demand, growth has been estimated at 150% yearly in the number of MFIs using the service. The system has been extensively tested at this time and could be extended nationwide.

The integration of ICT in the other organisations does not appear to factor much into their growth or sustainability. For example, C-CONDEM uses little beyond slide presentations and digital pictures to help build awareness of the communities it works with. Acción Ecológica has not integrated interactive or collaborative tools into its website, which remains a “flat” information site, though a successful and well-visited one (52,800 individual visits in October 2007).

Development context factors (policies, physical location, unemployment, capacities)

In regards to influencing the specific development context in which these organisations are engaged, CAMARI, MCCH and C-CONDEM mainly use ICT for training individual producers or raising community awareness. They use them concretely through the creation of content and in supporting actual classes or meetings: slide presentations, digital photos, video clips, projection tools.

Acción Ecológica has used ICT extensively in its campaigns, through mailings, assembling petitions, informing activists and public opinion, discussion forums, etc. It claims that the use of these tools has played a significant role in stopping the Free Trade Agreement with the United States, as well as oil drilling in national parks.⁷

A different way in which these organisations are trying to influence the development context related to ICT is through their involvement in the Infodesarrollo network, trying to enhance mainstreaming of ICT into human development in the country (e.g., the production of a White Paper on the Information Society, national ICT4D projects, etc.). The Infodesarrollo network is addressed in detail in Investigation 3 of this BCO Impact Assessment.

Entrepreneur factors

This aspect of ICT applications does not appear much in this research in Ecuador. RFR indirectly supports the micro-entrepreneur by providing effective services to MFIs, since those microcredits give borrowers an opportunity to develop some of their capacities and potential. CAMARI, MCCH, C-CONDEM and CEA all help empower entrepreneurs through better access to information and knowledge, though most of the time these entities act as infomediaries or as information

“last miles” – it is not the beneficiaries who directly access or manage this information.

Conditions in Ecuador that facilitate or hinder the impact of ICT use for enterprises

Most of the organisations complained about the high costs of connectivity and insufficient (often non-existent) internet coverage in rural areas – a claim often heard in the country from many economic and social actors. Mobile phone coverage, perhaps the most popular ICT tool, has improved markedly since 2005, however.

Specific remarks made by the organisations:

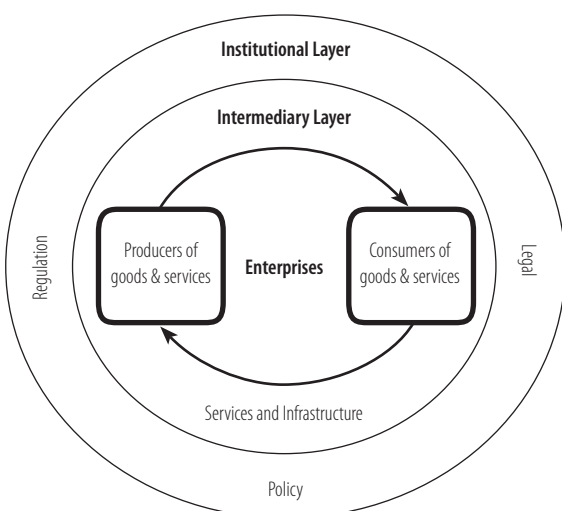
- CAMARI: “The telecommunications regulatory framework in the country does not contemplate communal connectivity, which is something they are promoting in the locations they work. They are trying to get around this regulatory vacuum by forming alliances with government entities and private organisations.”
- MCCH: “Since young people are demanding ICTs to work, this helps advance the integration of ICT in companies – even ‘social enterprises’ like MCCH.”
- RFR: “The lack of local ICT technical capacity, particularly in terms of quality ICT solutions (at an international level), limits harnessing the true potential on ICT in many firms, which may know what they want but not how to do it (or even if it is feasible).” On the other hand, RFR finds the microfinance context quite favourable, with clear governmental norms, good demand prospects for MFIs and a resurgence in financial activity (partly due to remittances from emigrants). It thinks it would be possible to reach one million micro-entrepreneurs with their services in a five-year period (from 140,000 now).
- CEA: “There is a clear perceived interest of the government in advancing ICT for development.”
- C-CONDEM: “Changing political conditions are adverse to education, and there is a lack of government policies oriented towards improving the welfare of people and the quality of life.”

⁷ See www.amazoniaporlavida.org and www.sosyasuni.org/en/index.php

Markets dimension

A market perspective allows the assessment of how ICT impacts on the ability of the poor and disenfranchised to act as producers and consumers, taking into account its supporting services and infrastructures ("intermediary layer") and the governance ("institutional layer") that shapes and defines this institution into its local variations. That is the view of new institutional economics (NIE) described in the conceptual review by Richard Duncombe, and the following findings about the markets dimension are related to this model.

FIGURE 6. **The new institutional economics (NIE) view of markets**



Source: Duncombe, adapted from DFID.

ICT applications within the NIE scheme

Core market layer (producers and consumers)

For the organisations involved, their direct role here is limited, since most of their work takes place at the intermediary layer and also at the institutional level. Where they do act, it is in strengthening information flows and the ability of the poor to access information.

CAMARI uses various ways to do this: (i) it runs a number of public community telecentres ("InfoCentros") for that purpose, where it trains people on basic ICT skills; (ii) it uses community radio, and (iii) it facilitates access to information by producers via SMS on mobile phones.

In the case of C-CONDEM, it also reaches out to consumers (not the poor, but those who consume the products of the communities in the coastal mangroves). In its campaigns, the objective is to guide the product preferences of middle- and upper-class

consumers on the basis of the benefits of shellfish with particular characteristics (a given size, a certain season of the year, etc.) that reflect sustainable catchment practices. Less pointedly and successfully, it also campaigns against the shrimp farms that are threatening mangrove biomes, but it is difficult to identify the provenance of shrimps and prawns. CEA and to some degree Acción Ecológica also appeal to the conscience of those same consumers, but less pointedly.

Intermediaries layer (infrastructure and services)

This is the key role of some of these organisations, and where they make more intense use of ICTs.

RFR is an innovative infomediary. MFIs feed data about micro-credit borrowers, which those lenders later use to determine an applicant's profile and thus reduce their risk. The SERVIR project has allowed it to develop not only a centralised web-accessible database, but also interfaces to different types of databases (including electronic spreadsheets) from the MFIs. Thus, it provides an intermediary service to the lenders (producers) which indirectly helps borrowers (consumers) with lower rates and higher chances of obtaining the micro-loans and lessening the domination effect of the lenders.

CAMARI and MCCH are classic intermediaries between producers (individuals and also cooperatives) and final consumers. This paragraph focuses on CAMARI, as it has a slightly larger range of supporting services. CAMARI uses "price-reporters" who go out every day to the markets and report prices. Producers (farmers and artisans) obtain information about prices through the InfoCentros that they (or their colleagues or relatives) visit. CAMARI buys from the producers, at fair prices, and then markets those goods, both domestically and internationally (presently at approximately an 80-20 ratio)⁸ including via e-commerce. The various producers list their products on CAMARI's websites, in their own individual sections.⁹

In its support to producers, CAMARI also provides them with information about fashion trends, quality levels in the various markets, training and technical assistance in the management of post-production, processing and marketing. Most of the information flows occur in the InfoCentros.

MCCH deals with stocking centres (of cocoa beans), installing financial/accounting systems there and training their staff. It has also attempted to provide connectivity solutions in those centres. C-CONDEM uses mobile phones to inform mangrove communities about product prices and market conditions.

⁸ National sales in 2007 totalled USD 1,920,705 while international sales totalled USD 553,632 (22.4% of the sum total).

⁹ As an example, readers can check out the products of Centro de Bordados Cuenca, which include clothes, accessories and embroidered goods, at www.camari.org/cbc/EN

Institutional layer (regulations, policies)

This is the other level of the NIE framework where some of the organisations studied in Ecuador are active.¹⁰

Acción Ecológica and C-CONDEM use the internet for exchanging proposals and counterproposals with their member organisations and academics, and then forwarding them to the appropriate governmental bodies. A clear example is underway now, as they have appeared before Constituent Assembly committees to propose measures for inclusion in the new constitution.

CAMARI, on the other hand, participates in e-forums about local/community connectivity and frequency spectrum in lobbying to modify regulatory measures at the local level. CAMARI, MCCH and CEA provide updates to their producers about changes in taxes, regulations and laws in their areas of interest.

Results and impact related to more effective pro-poor markets from the use of ICT

RFR reports that ICTs have allowed it to provide real benefits to a high number of micro-entrepreneurs, through lower interest rates and more opportunities to borrow. It emphasises the need to support intermediaries in development projects as they reach sizable shares of a given market, in comparison with limited effects for more traditional “pilot projects” which may only reach a few hundreds or thousands of people – an important point to note, which will be touched on in the Analysis section. For example, its project, with 140,000 borrower beneficiaries, claims to have established a ratio of almost USD 1 per beneficiary. The project director, Andres Freire, is adamant about the role of technology: “Microfinance programmes today simply cannot function without ICT.”

CAMARI described how ICT makes marketing processes both more effective, by zeroing in on the right products to meet customer demand, and more efficient, by making transactions easier, faster and more transparent. For example, it is largely through ICT that a small organisation like it can reach foreign markets, including the “nostalgia market” among the Ecuadorian diaspora living abroad.¹¹ Sales are expected to reach about USD 3 million in 2008, having grown over 15% in the last three years, the period in which it has really started to export on any significant level – and exports now account for slightly over 20% of sales.

While MCCH did not succeed in its IICD/Hivos-supported project to establish a system of internet connectivity, it has nonetheless experienced the benefits of mobile telephony. In 2004, when the project started, there were many “dark spots” in mobile coverage in the country, including the rural areas in the province

of Esmeraldas where the organisation was operating (hence its attempt to introduce a hybrid microwave-based internet network). Coverage has markedly improved, and with that the possibility of communicating not only through voice but also by SMS and even packets of data. In its opinion, this has made a huge difference to its projects.

C-CONDEM believes that its use of ICT has been useful (though not essential) to get better prices for shellfish-harvesters in mangrove areas. This is a result of educating communities about closed seasons for catchment and harvesting of conches over a certain size, as well as educating consumers about the importance of sustainable practices. In past years, a sack of one hundred conches brought between USD 3.50 and USD 4, whereas now it fetches about USD 7.

Though not in terms of direct impact on the poor, Acción Ecológica thinks that the use of ICT was instrumentally important in bringing about an end to the approval process of the Free Trade Agreement with the United States. While it is a matter of opinion whether that was beneficial or not for the poor in Ecuador, if Acción Ecológica is correct, then the impact was strategically significant, as it is suggested that the consequences of the agreement would be felt more by the poorer sections of the population.

CEA reports that even its admittedly modest use of ICT has helped to convince some farmers to utilise more agro-ecological practices, reducing their exposure to toxic chemicals and even opening the way for some to raise organic produce and increase their income (though it has no data to support this claim).

The distributive impact of information on markets

Some of the discussions with representatives of the organisations about the distributive impact of information gravitated towards “transparency”. CAMARI explained that the combination of higher accessibility of information and greater trust allows it to set (higher) prices together with the producers. In a previous visit to a stocking centre, the author had seen how the possibilities of cheating on the weight and quality of cocoa beans were reduced, based on the same information/trust combination, resulting in higher prices for the producers and better margins for MCCH. The purchasing process from communities, even if it was not with “friendly purchasers” like CAMARI or MCCH, empowers the communities to counteract what they had traditionally perceived, in a telling expression, as “the market’s exploitation”.

Other, perhaps less central, aspects of distributional impact emerged as well:

- RFR said that a significant level of distribution in terms of costs occurred because the rational use of information (in this case by MFIs) had been costed in terms of who truly uses the information, and growth-modulated in terms of the new number of users.

¹⁰ This is not the case of the RFR, which makes a point of not getting involved, claiming that the institutional framework should be established previous to their work processes so that they have the necessary regulatory and legal bases on which to operate.

¹¹ There are nearly half a million Ecuadorian immigrants in Spain alone.

- Acción Ecológica explained that the ease with which large amounts of information can be sent out, for example, to 10,000 people in its campaign against oil drilling in the Amazon region, makes ICT an essential tool for its work. This is not distributional in terms of income, but it does have an informationally distributional impact: the campaign has succeeded, and the government has adopted the unusual position of asking the international community to pay for its *not* drilling in this zone,¹² invoking provisions in the Clean Development Mechanism regime of the Kyoto Protocol. If the negotiations are successful, then it will have an indirect income distribution impact as well – with substantial new income for the national treasury.

Priorities in Ecuador to harness ICT to help markets function for the poor

There were various priorities expressed by the organisations. These are summarised in list form as follows:

- Expanding the socialisation of information and access to updated information in real-time (e.g., prices).
- Facilitating the means for producers to communicate (through databases, websites, online markets, etc.).
- Implementing programmes on digital literacy and to build capacity for thematic applications of ICT (e.g., in agriculture and e-commerce).
- Spreading more InfoCentros¹³ throughout the national territory.
- Concentrating support on infomediaries (and not directly on users or beneficiaries) in order to reach more people.
- Using ICTs for public information campaigns to support sustainable management of natural resources and production methods.

Sectoral recommendations on promoting the use of ICT for pro-poor markets

The organisations interviewed indicated several kinds of actions that could be undertaken by different actors, as follows:

- (i) Government agencies
 - help in providing information management and access
 - support to local administration for ICT adoption
 - finding alternatives to lower the costs of connectivity
 - opening ICT markets to competition

- reaching remote locations with ICT services and transportation infrastructure
- inclusion of local people in the rural areas in plans for education, economic development, etc.
- subsidising training programmes in schools and universities.

(ii) Private sector (particularly from the ICT sector)

- developing the market for free/open source software
- applying the regulations in place
- reaching remote locations.

(iii) Civil society and political organisations

- working on ICT policy advocacy
- promoting the adoption of ICT in areas like health, education and rural development.

(iv) Universities/research centres

- building awareness about the Information Society and generating interest in society about how ICTs can help to solve development problems (e.g., among their own students)
- creating ICT-based content adapted to poor and disadvantaged people (e.g., in multimedia for illiterate people)
- research on appropriate technologies and uses of ICT for development.

Two organisations made a more unified claim. RFR expressed that each of these sectors should have some sort of centre or management unit about ICT use, so that through inter-sectoral cooperation they can maximise the provision and benefits of ICTs for the population. Acción Ecológica made a similar proposal, that these sectors should work together to achieve impact on public policies for improved ICT access.

Livelihoods dimension

The assessment of the relationship between ICT, markets and the poor is completed by focusing now on the people to whom these development efforts are directed. This sub-section of the report contains information directly related to how ICTs are utilised to enhance the livelihoods of the poor. Two key issues should be borne in mind. One, as mentioned in Richard Duncombe's report, is that the livelihoods of poor people tend to be more constrained by lack of income than by what they can obtain in the market in the form of goods or services. The second is that we can use Amartya Sen's conception of poverty, as a significant deprivation of capacities. Consequently, among the aspects considered is the use of ICT to strengthen the capacity of the poor (and so empower them), together with how it is used to satisfy their information needs in the short and medium term.

12 "The President of the Republic of Ecuador, Rafael Correa, has indicated that the first option for the country is to leave the crude oil of Yasuní untouched underground. The idea is to stimulate the national and international society to contribute in this expensive national decision. The government expects, through this mechanism, to recover 50% of the income it would have obtained by extracting the crude oil." www.sosyasanuni.org/en/index.php

13 CAMARI's experience with InfoCentros has gone beyond the initial commercial purposes, incorporating services like (i) e-learning, (ii) content provision (e.g., allying with environmental NGOs), and (iii) community radio.

Managing information resources from a livelihoods perspective

The conceptual review by Richard Duncombe suggests treatment of information as a resource and not necessarily an asset in its own right. From that perspective, a useful approach can be developed concerning how the poor use ICTs to manage information resources, based on a combination of factors related to (i) the time-frame for decision-making and (ii) the format of the information resource, i.e., whether formal (explicit) or informal (tacit). The simple matrix in Figure 7 illustrates this approach, with the resulting roles of information summarised as follows:

FIGURE 7. Typology of information roles for livelihood strategies

		Informal (tacit)	Formal (explicit)
TIMEFRAME	Short-term	Type A	Type B
	Mid/long-term	Type C	Type D

- Type A: Information that is directly accessed and serves the immediate day-to-day decision-making needs of the poor. For example, information on market prices or about remittances from relatives, perhaps accessed via a mobile phone.
- Type B: Information that serves immediate day-to-day decision-making needs, but which is mediated. For example, information relating to markets, government services, rights, entitlements, etc., that might be accessed via local telecentres or other community-based infomediaries.
- Type C: Information that is directly accessed, and serves to strengthen longer-term economic needs through expanded business opportunities and building social capital. For example, “information leads” accessed via social networks that may lead to a new market opportunity.
- Type D: Information that is mediated through organisations that are able to build and strengthen other assets (human, financial, physical and natural capital) of the poor. For example, through the provision of information and resources concerning health, agriculture, education, training, microfinance, ICT or other material and technology infrastructure inputs and services.

TABLE 1. Uses of ICT tools by the organisations in Ecuador for various livelihood-oriented information roles

		Informal (tacit)	Formal (explicit)
TIMEFRAME	For short-term decisions	<p>Voice or SMS messages with price info and market conditions</p> <p>Electronic forums (to get advice)</p> <p>YouTube, Flickr, other repositories for quick access to visual info</p> <p>Community radio (using the internet as a source of information)</p>	<p>Stock management software</p> <p>Commercial database systems (production, purchases, sales, producers)</p> <p>Client database for MFIs</p> <p>Databases with technical information for queries (pesticides, species, etc.)</p> <p>Help-desk (e.g., as part of an agriculture university extension programme), using messaging, VoIP, email</p> <p>E-government services for typical transactions (tax payment, permit applications, laws and regulations, etc.)</p>
	For mid/long-term decisions	<p>Websites/services with market information</p> <p>Digital images (or design files) with design information for clothes, stationery</p> <p>Self-monitoring and testimonies (audio, video tools)</p> <p>Electronic forums</p> <p>Networking platforms for social networks (including blogs), e.g., for diaspora or environmental networks</p>	<p>Commercial database systems (production, purchases, sales, invoicing, producers)</p> <p>Budgeting systems</p> <p>Statistics packages</p> <p>Training modules (agriculture, quality control, ICT applications, etc.), including via e-learning</p> <p>Video (e.g., self-produced, documentaries) as part of formal training courses</p> <p>MFI system (for setting strategies, growth targets)</p> <p>Integration of GIS systems for various uses: planning, monitoring, disaster management, etc.</p>

This matrix structure is then used to report the ICT applications identified by the six organisations for use by the poor, depending on the roles of information, whether directly or through proxies/infomediaries.

Uses of ICT to strengthen the role of the poor as economic actors

There was some confusion during discussions with the organisations in trying to separate elements of capacity-building and empowerment, as in their day-to-day field work it is not easy to distinguish them. Many actions oriented towards building capacity also appear to empower their beneficiaries as a consequence of their improved agency – people are not mere recipients of support or “beneficiaries” but have their own knowledge and initiative which they put into action. For the purposes of this report, the following paragraphs try to differentiate the reported elements in order to simplify reading.

Essentially, the uses of ICT to build capacity are related to the “consumption” of information and to livelihood-related training. CAMARI pointed out that access to information about prices, nutrition and sustainable practices in agriculture contributed to improved livelihoods for its producers. MCCH has trained producer groups (i.e., cooperatives) about basic accounting. C-CONDEM presented the improved processes for conch harvesting as well as fishing techniques as a consequence of multimedia training (digital images, slide presentations, videos), and the introduction of concepts about community tourism for the middle term. Similarly, CEA reported training farmer groups about agro-ecological practices based on videos.

The application of ICTs by these organisations in Ecuador to empower the poor (e.g., to improve participation in markets) is related mainly to strengthening their organisational skills and their knowledge base. However, here the technologies only have a secondary and supporting role, using some particular ICTs to help in training and to engage in discussions with beneficiaries. For example, CAMARI promotes entrepreneurial organisation and management roles for its producers, introducing them to ICT administrative tools. It also induces “associativeness”, to share and initiate collective action. CEA stimulates producers’ confidence in agro-ecological practices by enriching their knowledge about them, using audio-visual content.

From a different perspective, C-CONDEM has dealt more with the cultural aspects of empowerment, where images, sound and video contribute to transmit a sense of local cultural identity to make the “mangrove peoples” aware and proud of their status and traditions. RFR expresses an alternative opinion about how ICTs fuel empowerment and capacity building, indicating that “microfinance serves to combat poverty through empowering end-beneficiaries, by allowing them to exploit the capabilities and potential of each micro-entrepreneur,” and that ICTs play an essential role in microfinance processes.

ICT and the reduction of livelihood vulnerability for the poor

One of the characteristics of sustainable livelihoods approaches is to seek to mitigate the vulnerability of the poor. This corresponds to “reducing unfreedoms” in Sen’s human development concept. It is thus relevant to examine how ICT has featured in the work of the organisations in Ecuador to reduce the vulnerability of the poor in the context of markets.

RFR makes a very specific use of ICT to reduce one of the vulnerability dimensions for micro-entrepreneurs, i.e., their access to capital (microfinance, in their case). Borrowers registered in the system have better guarantees of getting further loans if they comply with the terms of their agreements with the MFIs. For its part, CEA supports practices that diminish agricultural vulnerability, promoting the use of several species to limit pest/disease risk, rotations of cultivated fields, and techniques to promote resistance to droughts/excessive rains – ICT serving in this case as content tools and platforms.

CAMARI and C-CONDEM look to diversification as a way to mitigate the vulnerability of their stakeholders. CAMARI identifies more diverse business opportunities for its producers, so they are less vulnerable to the state of a given market (this is part of the rationale behind expanding internationally), and ICT is central for its search for business. C-CONDEM also works in the diversification of opportunities, through its incipient incursion into community tourism, for which ICT will be a necessary resource – as for any small tourist offering that wants to reach a wide potential audience.

Acción Ecológica follows a different approach, at the same time indirect but strategic: to generate pressure from public opinion, and lobby directly as well as through networks to move policies towards an environmentally and financially sustainable course. Given its recent successes (e.g., stopping the FTA with the USA and oil drilling in the Amazon basin, placing an advisor close to the Presidency or appearing before the Constituent Assembly), this may be an effective way to address issues concerning the vulnerability of the poor, which is complementary to other types of interventions. As was mentioned before, Acción Ecológica uses ICT tools extensively for this type of work.

Livelihood-related priorities for ICT usage for the poor

Unsurprisingly, most of the priorities indicated by the organisations dealt with better access to information through various ICT tools. CAMARI and MCCH emphasised the need for accessing quality, up-to-date information for decision-making. C-CONDEM added the use of tools for citizen involvement, to make practical use of information.

There was also broad agreement about the value of audio-visual content (especially video) in adapting to the circumstances of the poor, who must derive practical use from it (meaning it must be easy to understand) and have spare time to dedicate to it. For ex-

ample, CEA has been able to play a bridging role by tapping into knowledge networks for ecosystem management and then formatting and systematising content to offer it to its members: "We could show them that 90% of the available information about plagues comes from agro-industrial practices that dominate the market", it says, lending credence to alternative proposals. It sees ICTs as being rather useful in creating/modifying audio-visual content for training and awareness-raising of local producers.

This ties into another prioritised aspect of ICT applications, which is the purported benefits of focusing ICT support and attention on social infomediaries (like all the organisations in this research) while internet and ICT penetration is scarce (except for mobile phones). RFR advocates that this is the only way to try to reach many information beneficiaries – ICT's "last mile" being at the infomediary level. This would not even change if internet penetration expanded substantially (e.g., via the PROMEC initiative to install many community telecentres around the country), because under those improved "infrastructure" conditions there would still be a shortage of ICT capacity and skills that would take some time to develop.

ANALYSIS

The analysis will first address the most significant issues and those stemming from the overall consideration of the findings. Then we will examine the findings for each of the three dimensions of the field study, to extract specific meaning in each case.

Perhaps the main overall reflection derived from the findings is that there were significant differences observed in the human and institutional capacity for the use of ICT between those organisations that essentially behave as small or medium-sized enterprises (CAMARI, MCCH and RFR), and the second group, which work on development issues without being involved in production or commercial activities (C-CONDEM, Acción Ecológica and CEA).

For the first group, ICT use is rather more advanced and forms part of the institutional know-how needed to perform their basic functions. Information is a raw material like others which they process to generate their goods and services. They have "clients" that are dependent on those goods/services for their own functioning (e.g., the MFIs that rely on borrowers' credit histories, or the cocoa producers who need price information to set the price they charge to an intermediary like MCCH). These three organisations need ICTs to operate, and today could hardly do without those technologies; in other words, they would be so inefficient without them that they would have to change their business models completely or exit the markets in which they operate today.

For the latter group, information and knowledge are their products, and they use them to support other entities or local groups, as well as for campaigns or advocacy (including to support themselves). While ICTs are useful and important for them as well, they have less pressure to make advanced use of such

technologies, i.e., their survival does not depend on sophisticated systems or applications. They can (and do) function with relatively elementary ICT and information processing skills. Thus, C-CONDEM could print posters or use blackboards to explain sustainable practices for mangrove ecosystems to conch harvesters, and Acción Ecológica can participate in street marches to advocate for a particular environmental issue, or provide a specialised library for people needing technical information. In any event, these entities have much to gain by using ICTs as instruments to complement their work and amplify their reach.

These are admittedly two artificially broad separations in ICT-use profiles, and there are many details and nuances that make the info-technological situation of these organisations more complex and challenging from a research perspective. For example, training is a common activity to almost all of them (RFR to a lower degree), and all benefit from digital content generation (from digital cameras to video editing), a better presentation of the topics, and the possibility of accessing contents from others in a fast and easy manner. Some like CAMARI are going as far as to introduce initial e-learning offerings.

A second important reflection refers to the role of intermediaries and is related to the points above. In this limited study, the organisations that best utilised ICTs played the role of proactive intermediaries, perhaps because they were acting as SMEs in their own right. Their successful use of ICTs supports the notion expressed in Richard Duncombe's report that the poor are better served by infomediaries in order to benefit more from ICTs. This in turn points to a strategic direction for cooperation agencies to increase the impact of ICT for pro-poor markets and better livelihoods for the poor by focusing their ICT4D actions on these type of intermediaries (and more widely on infomediaries). Two main reasons support this notion:

- First, as a means to extend impact to substantial numbers of beneficiaries through direct information provision or value-added information services (the example of RFR is a case in point, with an investment per beneficiary of a little above USD 1).
- Second, as more efficient mechanisms to build the capacity of intermediary organisations, so that they in turn are better able to support poor actors.

A third point has to do with the relation between information flows and trust. To the extent that ICT expanded and democratised information flows in the projects/organisations examined, it contributed to an increased level of trust between those providing and receiving information. For an organisation like CAMARI it is essential that its producers have trust in them. The MFIs lower their risk (on potentially risky borrowers) when they trust that the information provided via RFR's project is used for their common benefit (and not to pass information to their competitors). Acción Ecológica's credibility rests on providing trustworthy information to journalists, activists and even

government officials. This is closely linked to what Richard Duncombe's report refers to as "collective benefits" when discussing ICTs from a market perspective – for example, prioritising collective efficiency over individual efficiencies. In turn, trust is the basis for social capital, one of the indicators and determinants of human development. In synthesis, the experiences in Ecuador indicate that conditions can improve for the poor via collective empowerment fuelled by information.

A fourth overall reflection is that all the organisations investigated place a high value on the integration of ICT for their work, even those with lesser capacities for it. This view is apparently not commonly held among civil society organisations in the country. For these six entities, it is not a matter of *whether* but of *how* ICTs can help them achieve their developmental objectives. This indicates the significance of raising awareness among civil society organisations about the benefits and possibilities that an increased use of ICT would have, affirming the relevance of work done by international organisations in this respect. Furthermore, it points to a slightly different possible role for international organisations to support e-readiness and Information Society policy processes, namely by supporting national institutions that are working on them¹⁴ or multi-stakeholder processes related to the formulation, implementation and monitoring of national Digital Agendas or the like.

Uses of ICT for enterprise operations and to support entrepreneurs

From the enterprise perspective, entities from the first group mentioned (SME-like) were strongly attuned to ICT effects on input, output and management factors. They have tools and systems to facilitate contact and transactions with both consumers and producers. RFR has a very specialised information service, targeted towards the needs of MFIs (its direct customers, some 45 entities) and indirectly benefiting micro-borrowers (140,000, representing an equal number of poor families). They also need dynamic information to manage their inputs, whether in the form of goods, information, finances or human resources. Information and knowledge are in fact inputs for all the organisations. What varies mostly among them are their (main) outputs – e.g., CAMARI sells products, while Acción Ecológica provides value-added information to its members and the public. As far as management factors are concerned, corporate integration of ICT is much more advanced in the first group, to the extent that, as in any modern organisation, they largely depend on ICTs to manage their processes. This is not so evident in the second group.

As for the conditions to ease the permeation of ICT into economic activities, the organisations underscored items like regulatory frameworks, advanced technical professional expertise in ICT and connectivity costs. Regulations appear strict

in some respects (e.g., limiting community connectivity prospects), lax in others (e.g., formulation of national ICT policies). As Richard Duncombe's report points out, ICT professional service support is a real issue nationwide in countries like Ecuador (even in Quito, the capital). For example, MCCH's project partly failed because of lack of expertise about setting up connectivity in remote areas, and RFR discussed the difficulties it faced in finding competent firms to provide advanced ICT services. Another condition, raised by all and a common cause for complaint in Ecuador, has to do with the high cost of internet connection – despite this having fallen by about 30% in the last two years.

Information flows and market functionality

In terms of the market, it became clear for some of the organisations in Ecuador that the use of ICT simplifies market entry and participation for micro-entrepreneurs in the organisations visited, particularly for those outside urban areas. It is not the technologies alone that matter, however, but when they are employed in adequate processes that diminish information asymmetries (both in access and consumption). They also help to make transactions more manageable (not necessarily simple, but more orderly and more automated).

It would be rather difficult for small producers like those associated with CAMARI or MCCH to enter national markets on their own (not to mention international ones). One of the market-related effects of ICTs observed in Ecuador is that, largely through their use, smaller producers can enter markets via their relation with larger enterprises (e.g., CAMARI or MCCH) with some degree of efficacy (efficiency + effectiveness). Eventually, these producers could join into cooperatives and through ICT they could enter markets on their own, but they would need to find the right distribution channels to reach customers and complete the business processes – there is a steep learning curve required, and in the short term this is an improbable prospect.

The research also registered beneficial uses of ICT for markets that function better for the poor in terms of:

- Availability of intermediary services catering for the poor, e.g., CEA helping with knowledge about sustainable farming practices.
- Higher productivity, like the support provided by CAMARI on management practices of the small producers.
- Enhancing social capital, stimulating the establishment and maintenance of market connections based on the transparency distilled from "clean" and open information (the issue of trust referred to above). This is how MCCH stocking centres get their inputs from local producers, whereas in the past, with other intermediaries, there would be mutual attempts to cheat on the weight and quality of cocoa beans.

14 Such as the National Telecommunications Council (CONATEL) or the National Planning and Development Secretariat (SENPLADES).

Another facet of supporting the poor as producers in a market environment refers to using ICT and information-automation processes to allow poor producers to leapfrog some production/income stages, if they can zero in on highly targeted products with added value. Examples are the production of organic cocoa for export, which is contingent on meeting high standards for certification, quality and traceability (true also for coffee, wool products, etc.). CAMARI and MCCH are working on this, as was another IICD-supported project in Zambia.

As far as international markets are concerned, there seems no doubt that ICTs are indispensable tools for these organisations. Whether it is to provide final customers with information on items (arts and crafts) or services (tourism, as in the incipient work of C-CONDEM or the briefly mentioned Federation of Community Tourism, FEPTCE), markets are highly competitive and there is little choice but to integrate ICT strongly in the entire value chain that extends to actors overseas, as explained in the conceptual review. Another way to use ICTs is to sensitise consumers, particularly foreign consumers, about specific environmental or social conditions linked to what they consume. It has worked with issues like dolphins caught in tuna nets, and it is part of the strategy of Acción Ecológica (environmentally sustainable products) and even CAMARI (socially sustainable ones).

However, for markets that function adequately for the poor on a sufficiently large scale (and outside these relatively small pockets covered by the projects and organisations visited), institutional intervention is needed. Using approaches related to the notion of public goods, the government¹⁵ could support an “informationally enabling environment” for all market actors, with inversely proportional support to the information/ICT capacities and possibilities of those actors. This would entail, for example, facilitating the free flow of information (e.g., on prices and real-time market conditions), a basic public infrastructure, and supporting services (e.g., those that can be provided via a national telecentre network like the long-delayed PROMEC programme in Ecuador, or via mobile phones), and providing mechanisms to educate poor people about their rights and entitlements and ICT tools to help enforce them (e.g., at the municipal level of public administration).

ICT and improving livelihoods for the poor

From a livelihood standpoint, there was a wide array of benefits and impacts observed. Whether through obtaining microcredits, or selling products through “friendly” intermediaries, local micro-entrepreneurs can maintain and perhaps increase employment, reducing the need for migration to cities or abroad (an endemic problem in Latin America and most of the developing world). Diminishing information asymmetries increases the income they perceive. And there are possibilities for innovation

as well: the clothes and fabric makers of Otavalo (the artisan capital of Ecuador) are famous for being able to tailor a portion of their production to international patterns and designs – not too dissimilar to the Zara¹⁶ experience in Spain of just-in-time fashion design around the world.

As described in Richard Duncombe’s report, improvements in livelihoods for the poor go beyond economic (income) aspects. C-CONDEM has worked hard to reinforce the cultural and ethnic identity of communities living in the mangrove ecosystem, as evidenced through its extensive literature and events about the “mangrove peoples” (*los pueblos del manglar*). This orientation towards affirmation of socio-cultural identity is probably the first step needed to allow the communities to move out of poverty. Digital cameras are an effective tool to stimulate local monitoring and depiction of their circumstances – and people like taking pictures, and having their pictures taken. They have shown how local agency can be stimulated by making it easier to generate local audio-visual information. Moreover, with the proper supporting organisations, local people can find it easier to participate in governance through e-democracy/participatory tools. It is easy to go from painting a protest mural to posting an advocacy video on YouTube, as C-CONDEM has found. The increase in training opportunities made available has already been mentioned, currently in the few InfoCentros that exist, but which could become much more numerous in the relatively short term.

The conceptual review also pointed out that mobile phones are possibly the single most important ICT that micro-entrepreneurs use directly today, in developed and developing countries alike. This is indeed the case in Ecuador – despite high tariffs for mobile telephony. Yet it may be more difficult to conclude that mobiles have the greatest impact on the poor. The information obtained, processed and transmitted via the intermediary (informationary) organisations is what ultimately enables poor producers to increase their incomes and improve their livelihoods, e.g., for CAMARI or MCCH. The first relates to individual efficiency, while the second relates to collective efficiency.

It is more fruitful from the perspective of the poor, however, to examine which combination of ICTs best serves their information and knowledge needs – another way of talking about technological convergence, but in terms of information requirements, not devices. Community radio can be an effective medium to transmit information in poor, isolated places. But it will be more content-rich if it is used in conjunction with the internet, as has been observed in a number of development case studies – for instance, with the InfoCentros run by CAMARI. Still, large volumes of information, such as those required for video, are best broadcast by television or stored on a DVD (or a memory stick), to be viewed later on a television or computer.

¹⁵ By itself or in association with entities from other sectors (private, civil society, universities, etc.).

¹⁶ Zara is a famous Spanish clothes-maker and distributor which in barely over a decade has become a global brand, largely due to its innovative use of ICT that allows it to control almost in real-time what products are displayed in their stores and to quickly adapt to the tastes of its international clientele.

And all of these are one-way media: if people need to communicate interactively, for example to contact a radio programme host, then a mobile phone (or possibly an email sent from a telecentre) will be needed. PDAs will be very helpful in capturing data for monitoring purposes, including for quality or stock control. And the arrival of digital terrestrial TV, which at least in Ecuador will be common in less than a decade, will bring further possibilities – which need to be incorporated into thinking as well as strategies and plans. ■

People Interviewed (Quito, 11-18 February 2008)

IICD

Wietse Bruinsma – Country programme manager, Ecuador

Infodesarrollo.ec Secretariat

Diana Andrade – Coordinator

Paula Carrión – Communications officer

Paula Arranz – UN Volunteer

IICD PROJECT PARTNERS

Acción Ecológica

Xavier León – Programme officer

C-CONDEM

Verónica Yépez – General coordinator

CAMARI

Homero Viteri – General coordinator

Geovani Castañeda – Operations manager

CEA

Julio de la Torre – Director

FEPTCE

Galo Villamil – Executive director

MCCH

Patricia Castro – Systems manager

RFR

Andres Freire A. – Project manager

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ICT, Pro-Poor Markets and Livelihoods Questionnaire

A. Enterprise dimension

1. Describe how in your project and in the work of your organisation, ICTs are applied (or could be applied) in relation to the following factors:

- Outputs (demand)
- Inputs (money, labour, technology and know-how)
- Management (towards growth, sustainability, etc.)
- Development context (policies, physical location, unemployment, capacities)
- Entrepreneurs (what makes them enter the market, how ICTs contribute to their empowerment, etc.)

2. What present conditions in Ecuador facilitate or hinder the impact of ICT use on companies' performance?

B. Markets dimension

3. On the basis of the concepts of new institutional economics (NIE), from which imperfections of the market system are analysed (e.g., the recognition that information tends to be incomplete, asymmetrical and expensive, both in terms of acquiring it and using it), indicate how your project uses (or could use) ICT in the areas of:

- Relations between producers and consumers of goods and services
- Intermediaries (e.g., infrastructure, services)

- Institutional framework (e.g., policies, regulations, laws)
4. What results and impact has your project generated, stemming from the use of ICT, for more effective markets in terms of needs and opportunities for the poor and disadvantaged?
 5. In the context where your project/organisation is placed, what is the distributive impact of information on markets?
 6. In Ecuador's present situation, which should be the priorities for the use of ICTs to help markets function for the poor? What aspects of ICTs distinguish them from other tools/instruments to help achieve that objective?
 7. What recommendations for action to promote the use of ICT for pro-poor markets would you make for various sectors, i.e., (i) the private sector (particularly the ICT sector), (ii) government agencies, (iii) civil society and political organisations, and (iv) universities and research centres?

C. Livelihoods dimension

8. What actions does your project carry out in which it uses ICT for social and personal factors like the following?
 - Capacities of the poor that allow them to act as producers and/or consumers (from a conception of poverty as the deprivation of the basic capacities of people).

- Empowerment of the poor so they can participate as producers and consumers and thereby improve their livelihood conditions.
9. How have you used ICT to reduce the vulnerability of the poor in terms of income and other means for livelihoods?
 10. What ICT uses have you made in relation to the decision-making capacity of the poor for their livelihoods?
 - Short-term decisions (e.g., access to markets, communication, collaboration, etc.)
 - Mid/long-term decisions (e.g. training, political and citizen agency, market prospecting, etc.)
 11. How have you differentiated the use of ICT depending on the format of information (formal or informal)?
 - Informal (reflected in tacit knowledge), e.g., through contacts and social/institutional networks.
 - Formal (reflected in explicit knowledge), documented and through stable and formal channels/structures.
 12. In the present situation in Ecuador, what could be the prioritised uses of ICT to improve livelihood conditions and the generation of income for the poor?

Description of projects and organisations included in the investigation

<p>PROJECT</p> <p>Impacts of Free Trade on Agriculture</p> <p>Implementing organisation: Acción Ecológica</p> <p>The project is aimed at generating awareness and knowledge about the impacts of free trade (particularly the Free Trade Agreement proposed by the United States) mainly on small and medium farmers, but also overall, in order to develop opposition and campaign for alternatives which are expected to protect national and subsistence agriculture.</p> <p>OBJECTIVES</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Inform producers and commercial agents about the impact of free trade on agriculture, the protection of national and subsistence agriculture, and the exchange of alternative productive experiences. 2. Decentralise access to and use of information by the target beneficiaries (which include peasant and indigenous organisations, alternative production and distribution networks, 	<p>medium-sized producers, environmental NGOs, media).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Design strategies for opposition and campaigns concerning the WTO, FTAA and bilateral free trade agreements. This includes public positioning, documents, and participation in influence-seeking mechanisms. <p>OUTPUTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Periodic bulletin on the impact of free trade, available through the website. • Multimedia material for use by the affiliated organisations for training and campaigning purposes (in PowerPoint, multimedia CDs, DVDs, etc.). • E-forum for dissemination of information and discussion. • Research reports on alternative agricultural policies to support national and subsistence agriculture, taking into account experiences in other countries. • Training of affiliates and journalists on ICT applications, such as e-forums and blogs. • Redesign of Acción Ecológica's website, supported by a database (created internally) for 	<p>better content management – mainly easier updating.</p> <p>IMPACT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased ICT technical capacity of Acción Ecológica to provide services to its constituency. For example, it allows Acción Ecológica to host several websites from associated organisations. • Much of the information and content is more easily available to organisations and the public. • Improved communications capacity (through better internet connectivity) used for campaigning and networking. • Increased institutional capacity to systematise information and for content production, including for some affiliates. • More coverage by media of issues related to free trade policies and their impact on agriculture in the country. • Acción Ecológica is one of the recognised reference points for information on sustainable agriculture (and other environmental issues).
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PROJECT

Manglar TICs – Conservación con producción comunitaria

(Mangrove ICTs – Conservation with community production)

Implementing organisation:

**C-CONDEM (Corporación
Coordinadora Nacional para la
Defensa del Ecosistema Manglar
del Ecuador)**

The project is aimed at strengthening community production initiatives on the Ecuadorian coast based on mangrove ecosystems, through systematising experiences, research processing and socialisation, strengthening organisational capacity in communities, sharing of experiences, and the promotion and dissemination of the supported production initiatives.

OBJECTIVES

1. Increased capacity in local communities that are ancestral users of mangrove ecosystems for natural resource management on the basis of scientific knowledge, as well as the systematisation/sharing of experiences.
2. Institutional strengthening, promoting the exchange of information and knowledge

among its members and with other organisations.

OUTPUTS

- Project staff (including community promoters) trained on Microsoft Office (mainly PowerPoint), internet and basic work with digital images.
- Integrated resource management plan for sustainable development of the mangrove ecosystem, completed and shared with local authorities.
- Use of PowerPoint presentations to familiarise local communities with information and challenges related to the mangrove ecosystem.
- C-CONDEM ICT capacity strengthened by having more equipment (PCs, video camera, projectors), better connectivity (ADSL), and launch of website.
- Some individuals in the communities trained on basic use of PCs.
- Community work practices in the mangrove ecosystem documented.
- Visit to Bolivia of four community promoters to learn from experiences there.

IMPACT

- The image and presence of C-CONDEM has been improved at the national level.
- Communities are better prepared for sustainable exploitation of the mangrove ecosystems. For example, a closed season (*veda*) on molluscs under a certain size (45mm) was successfully maintained in Esmeraldas province.
- Communities are more willing to participate in awareness-raising sessions because of lively multimedia presentations (PowerPoint plus digital photographs).
- Some communities are starting to learn what is needed for community-managed, successful ecotourism.
- Economic opportunities remain limited, so more direct impact at this stage relates to more empowered communities and the organisations (like C-CONDEM and its local members) working to help them advance their human development.

PROJECT

Optimización de la producción, comercialización y socio-organización de los Centros de Acopio Cacaoteros del Ecuador, aplicando un esquema de comunicación y difusión con el uso de las TIC

(Optimising production, marketing and social organisation of the cocoa-stocking centres of Ecuador, applying a communication and dissemination scheme through the use of ICTs)

Implementing organisation:
MCCH (Maquita Cushinshic – Comercializando como Hermanos)

The project aims to support the evolution and strengthening of the Associative Network of Cocoa Farmers of Ecuador, to guarantee the continuity and sustainability of the network on the basis of increased profitability.

OBJECTIVES

1. Implementation of an information/communication system among the entities involved in the socio-productive process of cocoa within the country as well as internationally.
2. Information exchange among the cacao organisations involved in the country and MCCH is ensured at strategic

commercial-productive levels (with a socio-community vision).

3. Analysis and use of the information obtained for decision-making.

OUTPUTS

- Project staff (including local promoters and extension workers) trained on various ICT applications, most notably Word, Excel and Access, as well as web and email.
- A local producers database (in Access) developed and installed in each stocking centre (*centro de acopio*), with a small part of the data entered (out of all the data fields designed into the database).
- A shortwave-based internet communication system in place between the stocking centres, working well for voice (like ham radio) but not for data (allows only short text messages, similar to SMS for mobile phones).
- A main database designed and in the testing stages in the MCCH offices in Quito, to control all aspects of production and marketing (not yet web-enabled).
- Some local producers have been trained in basic PC skills

IMPACT

- Staff in the project's stocking centres are using ICTs for cocoa production control, accounting and marketing.
- MCCH will for the first time in its more than 30-year history have an integrated, national database for better management of all its production and marketing processes (including support provided to farmers, such as training). While it is being piloted for cocoa, it can be applied to other products that MCCH deals with.
- Data communication among stocking centres and with MCCH has improved little, since email is not being used. An expanded mobile telephony network now in the country can be used for voice communications and some data exchange (SMS) among the centres.
- Stocking centres are functioning well as a means of providing fair prices to individual producers and pulling together production for shipping and marketing – but it is not known to what degree the project has contributed to this.

PROJECT

SERVIR – Diseño e Implementación del Servicio Regional de Evaluación Crediticia

(Design and implementation of a regional service for credit evaluations)

Implementing organisations: **Red Financiera Rural** (lead); **Fundación SEDAL**

This project aims to improve the performance and reach of microfinance organisations in Ecuador mainly by creating and making available a credit information system for smaller microfinance organisations around the country (and indirectly to improve the profitability of its micro and small enterprise clients through better access to credit).

OBJECTIVES

1. Implementation of a regional service of exchange of credit information.
2. Higher effectiveness and efficiency of EFLs (Local Finance Entities) for small and medium producers.
3. Systematisation of pilot experience for its promotion and replication in other regions.

OUTPUTS

- Credit information system designed, validated and operational (33 using organisations).
- Connectivity diagnostics performed for all 33 organisations.
- Tailored credit report forms for each of the participating organisations based on their accounting methods and software applications, so that they are compatible with the credit information system's database.
- Analysis of credit methodological and operational flows in 19 organisations.
- Trainings carried out (ten sessions for organisations and six for final beneficiaries).
- Website designed and operational; web server operational (for access to database).
- Six electronic bulletins issued.
- Institutional agreement signed with national Credit Bureau.
- 350 EFLs identified for a possible future network for information and knowledge sharing.
- Forum on demand/supply of microfinance planned.
- Systematisation of project experiences underway.

- Study of social impact of credit underway, to help in re-shaping directions as needed for the remainder of the project.

IMPACT

- All 33 participating entities provide timely monthly credit information and are able to use ICT tools.
- About 45,000 consultations to the credit information service have been recorded during the lifetime of the project.
- Over 20,000 credit records have been input into the database.
- The average provision of credit to less-favoured clients/beneficiaries has improved by 250%.
- The average payment delinquency rates have been reduced by 300% in the participating institutions.
- The Red Financiera Rural has significantly strengthened its technological and management capabilities.

PROJECT

Strengthening an information and training network for producers working with the CAMARI-FEPP equitable marketing system

Implementing organisation:
CAMARI-FEPP
www.camari.org/EN/

CAMARI-FEPP markets agricultural and artisanal products domestically and internationally, based on “fair trade” principles, in order to improve living conditions for small producers. The project seeks to enable indigenous and non-indigenous small farmers to market their products widely, and guarantee increased sales volume by providing information on supply and demand, costs and pricing, and product quality in order to set marketing strategies. The organisations that benefited from the project pilot are located in the provinces of Imbabura, Carchi, Cotopaxi, Chimborazo and Bolívar. The goal is to include eight intermediary organisations representing 35 grassroots organisations and 4,300 families.

OBJECTIVES

Overall objective: To improve marketing of agricultural, processed and crafts products by small producers in CAMARI-FEPP Afro-Ecuadorian and indigenous small-farmer member organisations.

Specific objectives:

- To enable Afro-Ecuadorian and indigenous small-farmer member organisations to learn about market requirements in order to orient production and marketing.
- To establish an information and communication system to link producers with CAMARI, in order to effectively market on the national and international market.

OUTPUTS

To operate an information and communication system to help market the products of small-farmer organisations, by:

- Setting up information and communication sites. The main and regional centres and information and communication sites of second-tier organisations will operate optimally under co-management by CAMARI and the respective organisations. Direct beneficiary organisations are expected to subscribe for and obtain membership, to receive price and service

advantages. During the project's first (18-month) stage, CAMARI and beneficiary organisations will chip in to cover fixed expenses. Resources to finance local contributions will come from the profits generated by marketing products and groups' annual membership fees.

- Training people to be responsible for information and communication in each intermediary organisation.

The information and communication system for national-level marketing will work through the National CAMARI website (already operating), and information and communication centres for marketing at CAMARI branch stores.

IMPACT (EXPECTED)

- Cost-benefit advantages gained by small farmers, by interrelating information with production and marketing.
- Better orientation of their agricultural activities and products.
- Elimination or reduction of middlemen who take unfair advantage of their situation to exploit them, making them feel powerless to deal with the process of getting their products to market at reasonable prices.

PROJECT

Communication to manage sustainable production systems – Pests and diseases

Implementing organisation: **CEA (Coordinadora Ecuatoriana de Agroecología)**

CEA heads a national network with a diverse membership, including grassroots community organisations, NGOs, universities, producers' associations, etc., involved in natural resource management. It aims to inform and build awareness among its members and others about the practices and benefits of solving problems by applying agro-ecology principles, particularly related to pests and diseases. ICT, a hitherto unused tool in these areas, will serve to enhance the dissemination of techniques and technologies that have been validated in small-farmer practice and others coming from academic circles. The project supports small farmers' plot management through systematisation, information exchange, and online advisory support for agro-ecological management of the main pests and diseases. It will be implemented first in four provinces: Loja, Azuay, Chimborazo, and Imbabura, with plans to expand later into one or two provinces on the Ecuadorian coast.

OBJECTIVES

Overall objective: To reinforce sustainable production systems in the small-farm sector of Ecuador, to contribute to improving farmers' standard of living and environmental quality.

Specific objectives:

- Gather and systematise sustainable techniques and technologies applied by farmers and scientific information available on pest and disease management, for the main farming systems in the Highlands and Coastal regions of Ecuador.
- Democratise and disseminate information on managing sustainable systems through info-centres.

OUTPUTS (PLANNED)

- Identify and systematise major current experiences by farmers, emphasising agro-ecological management of pests and diseases.
- Create a database on pest and disease management for the main crop systems in these zones.
- Prepare a CD-ROM with a multimedia presentation on the four main cropping systems.
- Implement and operate the four info-centres on a regular basis.

- Update the website.
- Direct online advisory assistance on demand by farmers.

IMPACT (PLANNED)

- Strengthened human resource training in communities
- Improvement of growing systems through agro-ecological practices
- Additional proposals generated to promote agro-ecological systems for small and medium farmers.

Introduction

DAVID SOUTER

Networking forms an important part of the work of most, if not all, BCO partners. Some partner organisations, such as AMARC and APC, are themselves networks, with memberships made up of different organisations in different parts of the world. Others, while not networks, are engaged in international partnerships with comparable organisations that share common objectives and a common ethos. All BCO partners engage, to greater or lesser degrees, with other development and rights organisations in other networks at national and international level. BCO itself is a network, built around a particular set of relationships between its NGO and donor partners.

The value and effectiveness of networking is, therefore, an important issue for BCO, and one which partners chose to explore through a series of inquiries within the framework of the Impact Assessment. The central hypothesis chosen for investigation was the proposition that *Policy advocacy and networks influence and reshape the agendas of ICT and development policy-makers and practitioners*. This hypothesis was investigated through three pieces of work:

- A general review of the literature on development networking, undertaken by Enrique Mendizabal and Pam Muckosy of the Overseas Development Institute in London.
- A study of the Infodesarrollo ICT advocacy network in Ecuador, which is supported by APC and IICD, undertaken by Manuel Acevedo, who was selected for the work by IICD because of his prior experience with Infodesarrollo.
- A study of gender/ICT networking within the framework of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), undertaken by Heike Jensen of the Department of Gender Studies at Humboldt University, Berlin.

This third study was supported by APC using its own BCO funds rather than BCO's general Impact Assessment resources. It forms part of an intended wider study which, it is hoped, will also consider gender/ICT networking in the framework of the Beijing Women's Conference and its successors. Debbie Budlender of the Community Agency for Social Enquiry in South Africa has been commissioned to oversee this work and has contributed a summary of the WSIS study to this investigation.

The term "network" can be used to describe many different relationships between organisations and individuals. In their study for this investigation, Enrique Mendizabal and Pam Muckosy use a basic definition drawn from ICT terminology, of "two or

more nodes interconnected by communication paths." Interconnection of this kind, they suggest, implies that networks are capable of collective action, alongside the individual action taken by their members. Participation in a network implies willingness to engage with others in such collective action.

Within this definition, however, it is clear that networks can be categorised in many different ways. To take a few examples from those illustrated by the investigation:

- Networks may be built around pre-existing social and professional groupings, or created for a specific purpose.
- They may be made up of individuals or of organisations.
- Their purpose may be instrumental (for example, delivering information and other services to members and/or wider communities), community-oriented (for example, building solidarity and collective resources for members with shared professional needs), purposive (for example, aimed at advocating specific policy change) or serve a combination of such purposes.
- They may draw members from those who share a common ethos or background, which they aim to consolidate and/or project, or from those with diverse attitudes or backgrounds, providing a framework for consensus-building and/or awareness-raising in areas of common interest.
- They may be structured around a central secretariat, or built much more loosely around both multilateral and bilateral partnership.
- They may make collective decisions, which members are expected to endorse, or make a virtue of avoiding choices about contentious issues.
- They may seek permanence or be constructed for a short term and limited objectives only.

These and other categorisations are explored in the paper by Enrique Mendizabal and Pam Muckosy. The characteristics of one particular advocacy network are explored in Manuel Acevedo's assessment of Infodesarrollo, while comparisons between different (civil society and multi-stakeholder, informal and formal) approaches to networking are made in Heike Jensen's study of gender/ICT networking in WSIS.

Networks are often established – and not just in civil society, but also by governments and the private sector – in order to advocate particular policy options. BCO partners were particularly

interested, for this investigation, in the value and effectiveness of networks in advocacy and policy change. In recent years – particularly within internet governance – there has been special interest in the potential of multi-stakeholder networks which draw their membership from different stakeholder cultures (government, private sector and civil society). A number of BCO partners have strongly advocated multi-stakeholder processes within the internet and ICD.

It was an important objective of this investigation to explore what it is that makes networking effective, in what circumstances and conditions that effectiveness can be achieved, and how networks might be most usefully structured in order to secure advocacy and policy goals.

One issue of significance here is the relationship between the value of networking in itself and the value of networking in achieving other goals. Some networks place considerable emphasis on establishing solidarity and building a common understanding and set of common values. This can be introspective but can also build a base for more effective outreach in due course. Other networks pay less attention to internal dynamics and focus more on influencing the attitudes and behaviour of other actors.

Another issue of significance is the relative cost and benefit of networking. These will vary from one organisational member to another. For small and specialist organisations, in particular, networks can provide a mechanism for extending awareness and influence far beyond their natural constituencies. Networking does, however, carry substantial costs. Maintaining communications between network partners can be very time-consuming, particularly where networks are concerned with general issues rather than specific targets. As a result, particularly for larger organisations, it may prove less effective in achieving goals than autonomous activity.

Enrique Mendizabal and Pam Muckosy explore a number of the factors influencing the success (or otherwise) of networks in their paper. Heike Jensen's study of gender/ICT networking in WSIS includes a number of interesting observations from net-

work participants about their perceptions of network dynamics and their influence on effectiveness.

One key question when assessing policy and advocacy networks is, of course, that of how to separate the influence/impact of advocacy from the influence/impact of networks. Would the same policy or advocacy gains have been achieved (or, for that matter exceeded) if they had been pursued by a network or by individual organisations? Where past experience is concerned, this is essentially a counterfactual question ("What would have happened if...?"). It is more important when choosing future approaches to policy advocacy, however, to understand why networking made a difference (positive or negative) than whether it did so. What is it about a particular network experience that added value? What is it about another that dissipated energy and enthusiasm? Assessing these questions, and relating answers to the different contexts of different past experiences and future opportunities, could help organisations like BCO partners to identify the most effective configurations for future advocacy work and future networks.

The final point to make in this introduction concerns the relationship between networks, advocacy and impact. In his paper, Manuel Acevedo draws attention to the "hierarchy of advocacy outcomes" identified by Oxfam, and this way of assessing outcomes was also explored by BCO partners during Investigation 4. Advocacy initiatives, in brief, seek to make a series of (often linear) gains, beginning with awareness-raising and moving through changes in attitudes, policy and legislation to the implementation of new policy approaches and – the final stage, and the only one which represents "impact" in the sense in which many development agencies would use the word – lasting and sustainable change in people's lives. Networking may well have different values and different parts to play at different stages in this chain of advocacy outcomes. Individual organisations may well be better placed, for example, to influence particular stakeholder groups; the weight of networked opinion may be more influential with others. Policy change and implementation may require different strategies. Approaches to networking may, as a result, need to be more nuanced and more variable over time than formal network structures sometimes allow. ■

Addressing the Value of Networks in Development Policy Influence: Lessons for ICT Networks¹

ENRIQUE MENDIZABAL AND PAM MUCKOSY (OVERSEAS DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE)

Introduction and background

World leaders share an optimistic outlook for ICTs and their ability to assist development processes globally. Collective agendas have emerged from international meetings such as the World Summits on the Information Society in Geneva² and Tunis.³ Recent ICT interests have elicited a number of ICT networks that seek to influence development policy. This paper is concerned with these networks that advocate policies which recognise ICTs as a contributor to development. We question whether and how a network structure is a preferred organisational structure.

The literature on networks praises them as horizontal, flexible and sustainable alternatives to isolated, more traditional organisations. Within the Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) group at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), research on networks has focused on what they can do based on the assumption that, when it comes to bridging research and policy, networks can be a positive contributor.

Networks, we argue (Mendizabal 2006a), can carry out various functions that contribute to their role as agent of change: they filter and amplify knowledge, facilitate learning, invest in and provide services and resources to their members, convene different audiences, and ensure sustainability through the development of a community that creates a body of individuals who ensure policy is implemented locally.

However, it is not difficult to find examples of organisations that, acting independently, can carry out the same functions – and possibly do so more effectively, efficiently and with greater impact than many networks. For example, the ODI is a recognised convener bringing together key actors from the public, private and civil society sectors to its meeting series and other public events. The Institute of Development Studies (IDS) has developed an extraordinary capacity for filtering vast amounts of information on various themes and regions through several

web portals. And many campaigning NGOs are excellent at amplifying complex messages to large and broad audiences. So what is the point of networks?

There is a need for greater understanding of the conditions that allow various types of networks to succeed (Church 2002; RAPID). More specifically, there is a need to understand how and why networks are shaping ICT for development policy processes. This paper engages with a number of issues to contribute to this better understanding. Specifically, we seek to contribute to the debate on the following questions:

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of networks in policy influence?
- When are there more desirable alternatives to independent interventions?
- Are there any particular characteristics among ICT networks that might make them more or less desirable as mechanisms for policy influence?

From our analysis we argue that networks have the potential to carry out these functions more effectively, more efficiently and with greater impact than independent organisations. But this potential needs to be contextualised and so, while networks can be a solution, they are not always the best solution to bridging knowledge and practice. Networks, we argue in this paper, are certainly desirable when collective action and knowledge production and exchange are ends in themselves. When this is not the case, then an assessment of the context and the potential network or independent organisation systems, competencies and skills should inform the decision.

The paper is divided into four key sections. First we present a brief description of the methodology. Then we argue that value network intervention can influence development policy – with reference to the Network Functions Approach (NFA) and Value Network Analysis (VNA). The following section uses the NFA to discuss the fine line between collective and independent action and the conditions that encourage the formation of networks in policy influence. Then we address the recommendations from the literature and some of the cases for more efficient and effective policy networks. Finally, we consider these issues in the case of ICT for development networks and offer some final conclusions.

¹ The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the BCO Alliance, individual partners of BCO or *ict Development Associates Ltd*.

² Global commitment was made on the power of ICTs to benefit “millions of people in all corners of the world.”

³ Global commitment was made for “the desire and commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society.”

Methodology

The study was carried out in three stages. A review of general development networks literature was undertaken, from which key lessons were drawn in relation to their relevance to ICT networks. The literature mainly drew from general network theory and was supplemented by organisational theory from management journals, value chain theory value network analysis and political theory.

The literature review was complemented by a brief review of existing network studies (drawing heavily on ODI's recent studies of networks in Ethiopia, Peru and Cambodia) and network websites to identify the advantages and disadvantages of working with networks in a few specific sectors. These studies were developed from existing case studies, while additional information was gathered using official documentation from networks as presented in their websites or key communication materials. The search primarily focused on what networks claimed to be their main strengths in order to address the hypothesis referring to the value of networks as opposed to other forms of organisation.

Finally, a series of key informant interviews with ICT and development networks were carried out to assess the advantages and disadvantages of working in networks and whether independent interventions could have provided more desirable alternatives to their enterprises. The interviewees were identified by *ict Development Associates Ltd* and ODI, based on their experience and potential access to information.

Networks and the Network Functions Approach

First, we must clarify what we mean by a network. In the series of studies carried out by Enrique Mendizabal and RAPID in 2006 on research policy networks, an intentional decision was taken to avoid defining networks and instead focus on describing them. This decision served a practical purpose at the time. Here, however, it is important that we set out clear boundaries to what we refer to as networks. Drawing from ICT terminology, a network can be simply defined as two or more nodes interconnected by communication paths.

Based on this definition we could easily find that networks exist everywhere: teams within an organisation, networks of friends, value chains and production lines, scientific communities, etc. In this study we want to be able to differentiate between organisations that are driven by two or more of the nodes from those that are driven by one of them. Hence we call the former networks and the latter independent organisations or initiatives. To stress the importance of the interconnectivity of the nodes we will refer to networks as capable of collective action, as opposed to the independent or individual actions that their members or third parties might undertake in isolation from the rest.

This definition of networks includes all possible types of collective action structures, for example: communities of practice, epistemic communities, partnerships, learning networks, joint-ventures, etc. We use "networks" as a catch-all term.

However, we are particularly interested in network organisations which seek to influence development policy and bring about developmental change. Hence we deal with networks with a purposive objective and not with networks that exist as a consequence of pre-existing or context-related relations between their members (for example, informal social and professional networks). Here, we also make the decision to exclude from the analysis networks whose primary and ultimate aim is to build a community and not to influence policy. Therefore, we make the assumption that networks are always more desirable when the sole purpose of the intervention is to build a community.

If our intention is to assess the value-added provided by network structures or organisations to policy-influencing enterprises, then we need to determine what parameters or criteria we will use to compare or assess their contribution. Here, the Network Functions Approach (NFA) provides one analytical lens.

The literature on networks is overly optimistic about their ability to make anything and everything possible. In practice, networks face many serious and fundamental challenges that affect the way they operate and the impact they ultimately seek. Research at the RAPID group in ODI has focused on what networks do and not on what they could do. This attention to the functions of networks is important for many reasons. Mainly, as in any organisation, what a network does is related to how it is structured. It is impossible to separate the two. In addition, traditional definitions of networks do not necessarily respond to the great diversity that exists and make assumptions about what different types of network should look like and do. Networks are complex systems without a clear path of development.

Mendizabal argued in two papers published in 2006 that a functional approach to networks (that seeks to describe rather than define different network structures) could incorporate a much broader number of organisations that, in practice, carry out different functions and roles and are organised in many different ways to achieve equally different objectives.

The NFA, further developed in collaboration with Ben Ramalingam over a series of workshops with networks from civil society and the private sector, establishes three basic levels of analysis.

- Firstly, the role that the network defines as its *raison d'être*. The approach suggests that in the case of policy networks, these exist between two extremes: those set up to provide support to their members and those set up to be agents of change on behalf of their members.
- Secondly, the analysis considers the balance of functions that the network will play and that describe what they

do (Portes & Yeo 2001; Yeo 2004; Yeo & Mendizabal 2004; Mendizabal 2006):

1. Filter: “Decide” what information is worth paying attention to and organise unmanageable amounts of information.
 2. Amplify: Help take little-known or little-understood ideas and make them more widely understood.
 3. Community-building: Promote and sustain the values and standards of the individuals or organisations within them.
 4. Facilitate: Help members carry out their activities more effectively.
 5. Invest/provide: Offer a means to give members the resources they need to carry out their main activities.
 6. Convene: Bring together different people or groups of people.
- Thirdly, one can analyse the structure the network needs to carry out the desired functions. This includes its governance structure and processes, competencies or skills, resources, its scope and geographic localisation, its membership composition and structure, etc. All of these components – roles, functions and structure – are in turn affected by the external environment of the network. This, like the network’s evolution, is equally uncertain in its state and impact on the network.

The NFA was developed to describe but not to argue for networks. It relies on the assumptions that the decision to develop a network has been made already and that networks are, indeed, positive contributors to policy influence (Perkin & Court 2005). Depending on the role of the network (support, agency or somewhere in between), it is possible to observe how collective and individual action can gain or lose relevance. To understand the unique contribution that a network type of organisation offers we need to look elsewhere.

The contribution of Value Network Analysis (VNA)

VNA is a business-modelling methodology grounded in the principles of living systems and aims to answer the question: How is value created? To do so it breaks with an “engineering” approach to organisations (which assumes them to be complicated entities, but ultimately made up of clearly definable “parts”) and recognises that organisations are, in fact, complex and dynamic. A system such as this, according to Verna Allee (2002), has five characteristics:

- Pattern: The configuration of the relationships among the system’s components or participants. Patterns help us identify one particular type of organisation from another.
- Structure: The shape or form of the system that describes the various components that make up the organisation.
- Process: The link between pattern and structure. Processes are the activities, or exchanges, that produce the patterns that describe the organisations.
- Learning: A living system is full of feedback loops. These loops allow for learning and adaptation.
- Living: A living system exists on the edge of chaos (Ramalingam et al. 2008). It uses just about the right amount of energy it needs: not so much as to drive it to chaos, not so little as to drive it to inaction.

Based on these characteristics, modelling an organisation requires us to ask questions about pattern, describe structure and understand how learning and change occur. The NFA is compatible with the components of a network-like organisation proposed by Allee. The approach argues that the structure affects the activities that are undertaken to carry out the desired functions (processes). The NFA also places particular emphasis on the way knowledge (or information) flows through networks. The functions themselves relate to how networks produce, store and share knowledge.

In organisations (and enterprises of any kind) the driver of life is exchange. Organisations exchange tangibles and intangibles between their various structural components. These exchanges (their frequency, magnitude and quality) define their patterns. As in any system (a market, a policy circle or a network, for example) these exchanges create value. According to Allee, one of the main proponents of the approach, value networks are “webs of relationships that generate tangible and intangible value through complex and dynamic exchanges between two or more individuals, groups or organisations.” This is a more elaborate definition of networks than the one we have been using in this study so far, yet entirely compatible.

In its very essence, the approach recognises and encourages the feedback loops that allow systems to learn. This is a key advantage of collective, rather than individual, action. Interconnected systems are more capable of creating and sharing intangible value (such as knowledge) than isolated actors and are therefore more efficient, more effective and can have greater knowledge-based impact in the long run.

Collective or individual action?

It is possible, then, to consider the way in which policy networks could shift the degree to which collective behaviour plays a role depending on the relative importance of their functional balance and, therefore, their main roles.

At one extreme of the spectrum, the NFA describes networks designed around strong secretariats with the capacity to draw resources and provide their members with ongoing support. This support includes financial, human and intellectual resources. It could also

involve more specific capacity development activities such as training or mentoring; or support services such as financial, logistical or communication services that the members can draw from to carry out their own work. These networks' functions are entirely inward-looking and the secretariat can be accurately described as a service provider for the network members.

For example, the Consortium for Economic and Social Research (CIES) in Peru may behave no differently from a donor-led grant-making facility like the Ghana Research and Advocacy Programme (G-RAP) in Ghana. If we focus on this supportive role, CIES draws resources from the international community and allocates them among its members through a competitive process (it differs to G-RAP in that it provides grants for specific research projects and not for institutional support as G-RAP is intended to do). The grant-making process is designed, planned and carried out by a team of professionals working in the secretariat that bears little difference from the offices of an independent NGO or G-RAP's secretariat. CIES' board is also no different from G-RAP's, including representatives of the grantees, the private sector and the public sector.

The main difference between the two is that in the case of CIES, the members do have a say in the overall strategy of the consortium, whereas in the case of G-RAP grantees are not members and hence have no say in the overall direction of the facility – beyond their participation in the board and during the programme's evaluations. The relative efficiency with which CIES' and G-RAP's secretariats carry out their grant-making policies, however, is not affected by the existence or absence of a membership.

At the other extreme of the roles spectrum, the NFA describes networks that carry out an agency role. In this case, a secretariat is awarded the responsibility to represent a number of individual organisations; these, unlike support networks, supply it with the resources it needs to be effective agents of change.

CIES carries out a similar role on behalf of its members. Agency networks focus their functions outwardly, away from the members and towards the policy actors that they aim to influence. In 2005, CIES led a national programme to influence the general election process and the content of the main presidential candidates' policy manifestos. CIES designed, planned and implemented a policy influencing process using the intellectual resources of its members (research produced by researchers in CIES member organisations). However, its approach was not very different from that carried out on a daily basis by a think tank like ODI, which targets specific policy processes to influence their outcomes with research produced by ODI researchers and ODI partners. ODI's communications department, in coordination with research teams, designs, plans and implements the policy-influencing strategies in an environment that is not very different from that of CIES. ODI's board and senior management team act like the board of CIES in that they represent the views and opinions of the most direct stakeholders of the research team.

The main difference between the two is that in the case of CIES, again, the members do have a say in the message and influencing approach that the secretariat takes forward – whereas in the case of ODI this can be settled within a single organisation, albeit one with a very horizontal intellectual and management structure. The relative effectiveness and impact of CIES' and ODI's communications departments' strategies, however, is not affected by the existence or absence of a membership.

In all three cases, the existence or lack of membership – which sets a network apart from an independent organisation – is a fact that the organisations have to work with. All three are sufficiently efficient and effective in what they do. Their shortcomings are most likely explained by insufficient financial or human resources, weak management systems and factors related to the external environment – as is the case for many organisations in the development sector.

Of course, CIES' membership does contribute. It makes it easier to attract funds from donors who prefer to work with networks; it has allowed it to develop long-term relations with members, facilitating the supportive and agency roles it carries out for them; and it has awarded the network legitimacy to participate in the policy process based on the credibility of its cadre of researchers and member organisations. However, it is impossible to say that a membership structure would make G-RAP or ODI more effective in their support and agency roles than they currently are in their context (although we could certainly speculate about this).

Between the two extremes, a myriad of functional balance choices produce equally varied combinations of roles with different degrees of importance for support and agency.

CIES is one example of a network that carries out both support and agency to fairly equal degrees. The Outcome Mapping Learning Community (OMLC), on the other hand, focuses mostly on providing support to its members – but pays relatively little attention to its agency role. In the OMLC, however, most of the expert support comes from the members, and the network focuses on facilitating the exchange of knowledge between them. In Ethiopia, the Poverty Action Network of Ethiopia (PANE) has, until now, shown a larger focus on agency while offering its members important support – although its members would argue that the network was created to provide more inward-looking functions. The same is true for one of PANE's partners, the Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations (NEWA), whose main role is to provide a collective voice for the members of the network but which offers support in specific fields.

In all these cases, the common denominator is collective action. CIES' success is also largely based on the fact that its members participate in the decision-making processes that define the degree of support and agency the network will focus on. It is also highly dependent on its membership value for potential donors who favour supporting networks over individual organisations – whether because they want to foster social capital or as a solu-

tion for the challenges that reduced field staff present in managing funds and relations with partners (as we have discovered in ongoing research in Ethiopia).

In the literature, a key argument for collective action is that it leads to greater impact on policy and practice. Yochai Benkler (2006) presents various examples of how networks can bring about significant changes in knowledge and practice in several development sectors. For example, a large proportion of agricultural innovation and medical research and development is carried out through global scientific and policy networks. In agricultural research, Benkler describes the role that the Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) plays. The CGIAR is the convener of more than a dozen national, regional and global centres. Its role – as well as that of the National Agriculture Research Systems (NARS) created around the world – in the development and introduction of new technologies into the agricultural sector is well documented, and Benkler argues that this is largely due to a commons-based research approach (Benkler 2006, 328-330). With the increasing privatisation of agricultural research (currently largely led by biotechnology) the challenge is to preserve commons-based strategies that promote the participation of international and local actors (Benkler 2006, 336).

With similar experiences in the health sector, Benkler argues that “the rise of the networked information economy provides a new framework for thinking about how to work around the barriers that the international intellectual property regime places on development” (Benkler 2006, 354).

The first lesson, therefore, is that when the organisation is called to carry out multiple roles – to different and varying degrees – then a network (or decentralised decision-making structure) that fosters collective action is probably more desirable.

The interviews and the cases reviewed suggest various additional reasons why the development of networks for policy influence would be desirable. Hence, we argue that networks are better than individual organisations or interventions for policy influence when:

- *Knowledge and lesson learning are central to the intervention.*

VNA and the NFA argue for the importance of the creation and communication of knowledge and that networks are better mechanisms to promote this. In epistemic communities (Stone & Maxwell 2005; Haas 1991), knowledge networks (Stone & Maxwell 2005) and communities of practice, where the focus is on sharing and advancing specialised knowledge, this is clear. The OMLC and the Evidence-Based Policy in Development Network (EBPDN) are focused on the production and exchange of knowledge about very specialised themes within development. Independently, ODI, which facilitates both networks, would not be able to

produce enough knowledge on the core themes that the networks focus on. The decision to set up the networks was mainly influenced by the potential for knowledge production and exchange with other actors globally.

- *Community-building is the end in itself.*

In the case of the OMLC, developing a community (community-building and convening functions) is the main purpose of the network. The other functions that the network secretariat carries out serve this purpose: it filters information regarding case studies, projects, toolkits and other resources through an online platform that encourages interaction between members and uses online forums to amplify key messages. The community secretariat facilitates knowledge exchanges, the organisation of events and even research projects designed to promote the development and strengthening of the community.

- *Membership allows members to pool resources (financial, intellectual, human, etc.) to carry out functions and achieve outcomes that would be impossible to achieve through independent action.*

The creation of value through the interactions of the nodes of a system provides the members with access to resources to which they would otherwise have no access to. The EBPDN and the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP) are networks focused on areas that their members consider to be of crucial importance but would often lack the necessary resources to develop them internally. Participation in a network allows the members to benefit from the Open Innovation paradigm.⁴

- *Membership awards legitimacy (credibility and representation) and voice that individual enterprise cannot.*

A key intangible that can be created and shared in networks is legitimacy, either through credibility – often related to the existence of a robust body of knowledge or the reputation of key members – or representation through power by numbers. Credibility networks are often smaller than representation networks. In Peru, Foro Educativo is made up of credible education experts that award the network legitimacy to engage in the policy process. Similarly, the International Forum for Rural Transport and Development (IFRTD) is made up of a core of a relatively small number of individuals working in various sectors and focusing on rural transport. In such a specialised issue, credibility tends to be more important than representation. Trade policy networks provide another example of this (IDRC 2003, 2007). On the other hand, in Cambodia, MEDICAM is a network that brings together all the organisations working on the health sector in the country. They provide a platform for policy influence

⁴ See, for example, information from the Center for Open Innovation at the University of California, Berkeley, which describes it as the “use of purposive inflows and outflows of knowledge to accelerate innovation.”

to organisations that would, on their own, not be able to access the policy process at all. The same is true in the case of Foro Salud in Peru (also in the health sector).

- *Membership awards a stronger voice.*

This is related to the previous reasons but is more closely focused on the agency role of networks. Global public policy networks (now called global action networks) and advocacy networks (Court & Perkins 2005) aim to amplify messages to the national, regional or global level. CIES, for example, amplifies the messages of its researcher members through CIES-funded publications.

- *Outcomes and impact are close to or beyond the spheres of influence of individual organisations.*

Another key reason why networks are desirable is related to their influencing objectives. Independent organisations have a limited capacity to reach spaces where they do not have a direct presence. To do so they may rely on partners or in-person communications. Networks provide individual organisations with access to policy spaces to which they often do not have access (Selwood & Weyrauch 2007). In this way they can benefit from new knowledge but also from expanding their sphere of influence.

Member-focused versus donor-focused analysis

The reasons listed above reflect the perspective of the member. An individual organisation would join or develop a network if membership awarded any of the benefits above. However, when we address the question of whether a network is a better vehicle for policy influence we often face, first, the challenge of creating a network. The perspective of the creator or founder of the network is different. If we focus our analysis from the donor's perspective we find that there are other reasons to establish policy networks. DFID and IDRC are two donors with a strong tradition of support for networks. CIES, for example, is a network supported by both.

In an ongoing study of networks in Ethiopia, ODI and the Catholic Agency for Overseas Development (CAFOD) studied four policy networks including PANE and NEWA. The study, undertaken in collaboration with researchers from the four networks, unearthed a series of insights into the ways in which donors tend to support networks:⁵

- *As funding mechanisms:* The networks found that in all cases funding allocation patterns were disruptive of the development of the community and fostered competition instead of cooperation between the members. In some cases, it even promoted competition between the net-

work and its members. The focus on funding also shifted resources away from other functions more oriented to community-building towards investing functions, thus changing the nature of the secretariat and the network itself. NEWA was a network set up by women's associations in order to provide each other with support and strengthen their voice. The network lost its value-based convening power as a consequence of monetary interests and was facing difficulties in providing its members with capacity development support as their efforts were concentrated on grant management activities.

- *As indirect support for policy influence:* The networks also found that donors perceived them more effective as *ex ante* means of policy influence and demanded upfront policy impact indicators to monitor their success. As a consequence, a new network like PANE focused their efforts on amplifying activities before it was able to establish a strong community among its members. The network has been successful in engaging with policy processes but the participation of its members in the process is contractual and peripheral.

The threat of individual action

In both cases, support for networks fosters individual action rather than collective action and interdependence. The same could be true for members seeking networks for these reasons alone.

A general principle of new institutional economics (NIE) is that individuals operate within a number of institutions, making rational individual choices and responding to incentives (North 1990). Networks can be a viable approach for uniting actors that would otherwise act individually; network members can produce an outcome that is greater than the sum of its parts and be formed in order to benefit from collective voice.⁶

However, individualism presents various challenges for networks, including maintaining a common agenda and retaining membership focus on the core values and functional balance of the network: "Collective systems can exclude and reinforce inequalities, but also guarantee contracts and maintain the trust required to ensure that spontaneous interactions do not break down" (Brett forthcoming). In Ethiopia, interviews with the networks' members and their secretariats often showed different expectations and perceived functional balances. Individual members can have different motives for joining a network. Therefore, collective arrangements that do not manage conflict are unstable (Schmitz 1999).

Sustainability is an issue for many donors, and members fail to reflect properly on this when considering networks. Networks' life cycles include closure and sustainability, and this should be assessed in relation to the relevance of the network to its members and objectives. Certain members may seek involvement only

⁵ The following is based on a document submitted to a group of donors in Ethiopia led by the EC funders of the study.

⁶ Note: Networks such as the Secretariat for Institutional Support for Economic Research in Africa (SISERA) speak for multiple causes.

until specific impacts have been achieved. Such impacts could include the passing of a new policy, forming a relationship with a specific contact or building an individual reputation through the network. Once an individual member's objective is achieved, it may revert to its own priorities. While this is perfectly natural, and networks should invest in encouraging continuous exchange and maintaining the relevance of the network for their members, this drive to independence or the formation of more relevant sub- or new networks with other actors can lead to actions that counteract the network's objectives (and change its roles) or to a breakdown of trust within the network and member fall-out.

Church (2002) argues that individual action within an institutional framework generates efficiency: "The maximum benefit at minimum cost comes when the members work separately but together, pursuing institutional objectives which are affected by the joint strategic thinking of the network, and can be put to the service of the network's shared understanding and analysis." Benkler (2006, 355) agrees with this argument, focusing on individual action within a framework of free informal association. Individualism, in fact, can serve an important purpose in networks or policy-influencing enterprises. The speed at which culture is transferred from one group to another is increasing at unprecedented rates (Castells 2001, 53). Within networks this can have the effect of an intellectual gentrification forcefully or voluntarily homogenising the community and the policy message. This, in view of the potential for value creation that networks hold, is counterproductive. Networks' capacity to manage conflict and advance knowledge requires a healthy degree of independent action.

However, as some of the network facilitators interviewed suggest, this, in turn, demands a great many resources to encourage and maintain the network's shared understanding and analysis. For example, NIE posits that institutional mechanisms such as incentive systems can significantly shape behaviours. In a network, individual incentives can encourage action and cooperation. Where financial support is minimal, recognition, awards, direction, contacts, information and promotional opportunities can act as incentives.

In conclusion, the value added that networks offer to members and supporters is greatly linked to the creation and sharing of knowledge. Therefore, networks must be able to facilitate learning. Equally, networks must have the capacity to foster collective action through the pooling of resources in pursuit of societal change.

We face then a new challenge. How can development policy networks deliver these benefits for their members and supporters? The interviewees agree that networks owe their existence in great part to the facilitation functions of their secretariats or key members. Following the arguments of the NFA, the structure of the network should follow the functions because it can have a significant effect on them. Once the structure of the network is established this will greatly affect its capacity to

carry out its desired functional balance. As Jeremy Seligman, Director of Organisational Development of the Ford Motor Company, put it at a workshop organised by the Society for Organisational Learning, getting the structure right is the most important thing. Once it is in place, there is nothing else for the organisation to do but to work within its framework – it is the shell on the tortoise.⁷

The contribution of networks to policy influence

What is then the contribution of networks to policy influence? As mentioned above, networks provide solutions to some of the main challenges faced by civil society organisations (Court et al. 2006). They address challenges related to the mobilisation of resources, access and use of knowledge, the strengthening of voice and communications capacity, access to policy spaces and the limitations presented by the policy context.

Networks can be highly effective mechanisms to address these challenges but cannot guarantee success. Developing a network, as described above, is complex. A network that effectively creates value (hence becoming a contributor towards policy influence – either through agency or support) is even more so, as many of the interviewees acknowledged.

Networks' contribution to policy influence, therefore, greatly depends on each network's (or its members') capacity to become a functioning network.

Characteristics for success – the lure of the handbook

The literature on networks is full of descriptions that highlight the flexibility and horizontality of network structures. Ashman (2001), for example, discusses the flexible nature of networks, reflecting a common view among the general public. Try to draw a network diagram and you will see how difficult it will be to move away from the idea of horizontality, dynamism and unpredictability. This is a likely influence of network concepts related to the internet and social and informal network structures.

However, if networks, as we have argued in ODI (RAPID), emerge organically, what is the value of prescribing their structural features? Among the interviewees, members of networks that are undergoing a structural change were the first to acknowledge the many challenges and uneasiness that come with overtly planned change. Brett (forthcoming) argues that transitions are sparked by agents of change and transitions themselves create contention.

⁷ Decision-Making Workshop V – Decision Making and Ethics: Jeremy Seligman, Ford US and Philippa Foster-Back, 6 December 2007. www.sol-uk.org/event/2007/decision_making_workshop_v_decision_making_and_ethics_jeremy_seligman_ford_us

It may be possible to minimise the uncertainty of change by, first, being responsive to members in order to realise gradual change and, second, being aware of structural characteristics that have contributed to the success of other networks. On the former, networks can increase responsiveness by establishing a secure platform for voicing opinions. Less continuous monitoring could result in divergence and agents of change will suggest more drastic changes.

Looking at the latter, the literature is replete with recommendations about what networks should do to be successful. Some address their structure; others focus on the processes they ought to follow; yet others on the importance of individual responsibilities. Based on a thorough literature review, Mendizabal (2006b) has suggested that there are a series of factors that could be used to describe the form or shape of the networks – and that these should differ from network to network depending on their functional balances. He identified six categories mentioned in the literature: governance (including the capacity to strategise and adapt), localisation and scope, capacity and skill, resources, membership, and communications.

In general, recommendations from the literature could be classified according to various structural characteristics: governance and processes, membership, the role of individuals, and intention. If we understood these better we would be better able to say whether a network structure is preferable to an individual one for carrying out certain functions. The literature is still unable to present clear linkages between form and function.

However, RAPID, IDS, the IDRC and other collaborating bodies have been researching and documenting network case studies. The experience of these networks is beginning to suggest a number of trends that contributed to Court and Perkins' ten success factors. Expert interviewees, network literature and case studies reflect these factors.

Based on this and on Julius Court and Emily Perkins' (2005) literature review, ten commonly cited keys to success for policy networks emerge:

- Clear governance agreements – to set objectives, identify functions, define membership structures, make decisions and resolve conflicts.
- Strength in numbers – the larger the numbers involved, the greater the political weight given to networks.
- Representativeness – is one key source of legitimacy (and thereby influence).
- Quality of evidence – affects both the credibility and legitimacy of arguments.
- Packaging of evidence – is crucial to effective communication.
- Persistence – influence often requires sustained pressure over a long period of time.

- Membership of key individuals – especially influential figures in the policy arena.
- Making use of informal links – these can be critical to achieving many network objectives.
- Complementing official structures – by their nature, networks add most value by complementing rather than duplicating official structures.
- Good use of ICTs and other networking opportunities – ICTs are opening up much new potential for networking.

The “keys to success” or recommendations described above should not be taken to be absolute (in fact, many alternative positions can be found). But they reflect some of the factors mentioned by interviewees and illustrate some of the key issues highlighted in the literature. In fact, these recommendations are as relevant for networks as for civil society organisations of any kind. In another study by RAPID, the authors reviewed the literature and surveyed civil society organisations to address potential solutions to the challenges they face when attempting to influence policy. They argue that CSOs need to improve the production and use of evidence, strengthen and develop partnerships and networks and take advantage of the policy context, among other recommendations (Court et al. 2006).

Firstly, key informant interviewees and analytical experts call for clear governance agreements. Governance should include a clear strategy and message, well-defined membership, and established decision-making and conflict-resolution processes. Networks place tremendous value on maintaining their flexibility. Flexibility is required in order to respond to the dynamism of membership, policy influence and the environment where networks work. However, we have noted a tendency for many networks to transition towards formality. Experienced networkers believe that a formal framework provides a strong base upon which membership, ideas and initiatives can exercise flexibility. In the case studies developed for the RAPID networks programme (from Peru, Ethiopia and Cambodia), flexibility was defined as both the capacity of the networks to undertake more than one function and to adopt new functions in response to changes in the internal and external environments (Mendizabal, Griffiths & Vichuta unpublished 2006; Mendizabal unpublished 2006).⁸

Creech and Willard (2001, 82-88) suggest that networks should consider the following issues when developing a governance agreement:

- Vision, mission and principles
- Roles of members and decision-making parameters
- Network structure

8 These studies can be found at www.odi.org.uk/rapid/projects/ppa0103

- Approval of network project proposals and results
- Roles for special interest committees, task forces and advisory groups
- Documenting the functions of the secretariat
- Procedures for withdrawing from the network
- Dispute resolution
- Clarity on intellectual property rights
- Clarity on assets and liabilities
- Limitations on advocacy positions and other public statements and
- Clarity on who has the authority in member organisations or the lead organisation to make decisions related to the network.

Effectiveness requires a carefully managed secretariat that seeks clarity and relevance and ongoing redefining of mission (James 2002). These factors contribute to central value systems. A very clear strategy and message are instrumental to the overall strength of any network, and this contributed to the success of the SISERA network. A lack of clarity in the intention and values of the network, on the other hand, can contribute to the fragility of some networks, as in the case of one of SISERA's member networks, the African Economic Research Centres (Yeo & Mendizabal 2002).

Secondly, networks should seek to complement official structures. By their nature, networks add most value by complementing rather than duplicating official structures. Their creative use of information and the employment by non-governmental actors of sophisticated political strategies in targeting their campaigns are paramount for impact (Keck & Sikkink 1998). The success of networks in promoting and facilitating change is largely linked to their ability to compliment and support existing processes, as suggested by Benkler (2006) in the cases of agricultural and health research and practice.

Thirdly, policy networks can benefit from strength in numbers. Putnam (1993) argues that a focus on associationism, trust and cooperation is relevant here. Numbers are useless if they do not lead to collective behaviour. However, when it is possible to foster a collective agreement or common identity, then the larger the number of members involved, the greater the political weight given to networks. Flexible and open network structures are generally conducive to the generation of a critical mass. However, formal policy networks like those which are the focus of our study need to consider the costs associated with the management of a large collective and the benefits that loosening the structure might bring.

A more detailed focus on the membership can help unpack the value that large numbers afford networks. In all the cases studied for this and other studies, membership emerges as

one of the most important factors contributing to the success or failure of policy networks to bring about knowledge-based change. This relates to the way in which representation or credibility contributes to the legitimacy of the network. However, networks' focus on the membership often relates more closely to the challenges that emerge in managing it. In Enrique Mendizabal's (2006a, 2006b) papers linking function and form of networks, he presents a series of trade-offs between individual and organisation and between homogenous and heterogeneous memberships. The choice is linked to the functional balance of the network – and to the capacity it has, for instance, to convene highly heterogeneous members.

In any case, building trust among the members is crucial to focusing the individualistic forces suggested by Church and Benkler above towards the common good of the network. Perkin and Court (2005) identified this in the literature and suggested that it requires special attention (Ryan 2004). Trust and legitimacy within a network context highlight the issue of the terms under which members come together. Global policy networks need to address not only differences in the members related to organisational structure, resources or commitment but also in the external factors that influence their participation and contribution to the network. In North–South networks or partnerships, the relationships that exist between the members can become increasingly complex (Mancuso 2001).

Giddens' (1976) structuration concept suggests that local conditions (e.g., culture, religion, tradition, values) govern how people or groups organise as networks and therefore how individual members could differ from each other as a result of their own environments.

Regardless of the context, successful cases can be quick to highlight the importance of key individuals. Dynamic leadership and influential figures are especially important in the policy arena. The SISERA evaluation refers to the critical role of the member think tanks' directors and how the network's success was largely due to their dynamism and charismatic personalities (Yeo & Mendizabal 2002, 6). Personalities are so important that when secretariats change, the first challenge they face is to motivate the membership to accept them as the new leaders. The role of leaders, and of individual as opposed to collective action among the membership and the secretariat are, therefore, paradoxically important. Individuals are particularly important because they often have the capacity to build links between the network and the policy process (Bebbington & Carroll 2000).

The use of mentoring to support individuals (in a network focused on building institutional capacity) had great success in the SISERA network. Advice and guidance was provided to the directors of the least developed member organisations, as well as to their staff, alongside other technical support. In line with Church and Benkler, the support of individuals can contribute to the strengthening of the network.

Information and communications technologies

ICT for development policy networks seek to influence key actors on a range of issues including an enabling policy and regulatory environment, basic infrastructure access, basic ICT human capacity-building, development of appropriate content, and innovative solutions and applications for developing-country contexts (Adam et al. 2007, 4). Two questions arise: Is there anything that makes ICT networks more effective on policy influence? And what contribution may ICT itself make to this?

Strengths

On one hand, ICT networks' understanding and experience with ICTs suggests strength in their ability to create and communicate knowledge effectively; their topical specificity; tight connectivity to the private sector; and ability to convene in unconventional ways.

Simon Hearn from the OMLC argues that ICT networks practice what they preach by using new ICTs to reach new audiences and strengthen relations with and understandings of the key themes of the networks among the current community. Further, those ICT networks that have policy-minded and politically-connected members can communicate and translate network ideas to policy-makers.

ICT4D networks may benefit from the key recommendations for success described above with limited cost. Their memberships tend to be homogenous and highly motivated due to the high specificity of the subject (as in the case of trade negotiation or scientific networks, for example). The thematic focus makes it easier for these networks to find like-minded and equally interested counterparts in the policy space or in other policy networks.

Specifically in terms of policy influence, ICT networks benefit from their ability to creatively leverage interaction online. This could take the form of online forums, generating public support through awareness and offering rapid connections between stakeholders.

The private sector has routinely played a role in ICT networks. Unlike other development networks – which may struggle in understanding and forming public-private sector partnerships (PPPs) – some ICT networks have emerged with the inclusion of the private sector and a variety of other actors. KICTANet provides a clear example of a network with a large private sector base within its membership.

Challenges

The prevalent discourse on networks and ICT is based on Castells' work and presents a positive relationship between the

two. ICTs can support the formation and work of networks and contribute to their impact on policy (Paalbrerg 2004; O'Brien 2002; Rutherford 2000; Narayan & Shah 2000; Niombo 2003; Mendizabal 2006b). However, concerns about the way in which ICTs could negatively affect development policy networks are starting to be articulated.

A number of risks can be identified: an over-commitment to ICT tools; an undervaluing of face-to-face interactions; a need for flexibility; and only recent attention to gathering case-based evidence can contribute to the demise of an ICT4D network.

ICT networks experience an inherent pressure to use – and not only advocate for – ICTs. This can lead to ICT overuse and misuse, and distraction from a policy-influencing purpose. If the network supports ICT tools without due consideration of context, it can lose sight of advocacy, filtering and knowledge-sharing objectives.

Similarly, overconfidence in ICTs can lead to tendencies favouring online communication and undervaluing face-to-face networking. Thoughtful network facilitators and members recognise that face-to-face interaction is an essential factor for building trust. Networks such as APC are virtually based (without a physical headquarters) but the organisation overcomes the geographical divide through annual meetings and regional events. The OMLC, on the other hand, has devised elaborate member profile pages to encourage a more personal relationship between the members, albeit virtual.

Flexibility is crucial for ICT networks. Given the high innovation and rapid development of ICTs, networks should be structured to respond quickly to this dynamic environment. This requires support from an open network structure.

Finally, ICT networks advocate on untread territory. ICT tools, ideas, systems, policies and evidence are only now maturing and have only recently proved their true worth in developed countries. ICT networks are exploring ICTs and communicating how they can be best adapted to developing-country contexts. Due to the relative youth of the sector, there is currently a strong role for shaping ICT policy discourse and establishing strong national ICT policies.

Progress

This tension between opportunities and challenges for impact of ICT networks can be addressed by understanding their evolution. Policy advocacy in ICT has expanded from traditional awareness activities to complex formal structures advocating for policy change – often in the global context. As a consequence, Nancy White proposes that “networks need to have connectors” and are increasing their recruitment of people who have a foot in both the technology and the development worlds.⁹ Leading networks are actively seeking out boundary partners and individuals who

9 Personal communication.

know how to access them. Potentially, these actors should be able to position networks to realise greater impact on the ground, disseminate findings to a greater audience, apply network knowledge to specific contexts, and link to local policy-makers.

A natural consequence of this change is that while secretariat and members are able to demonstrate greater awareness of development thinking, this is not necessarily the case for their members whose focus is still on ICTs.

Emerging trends suggest that given the high innovation and rapid development of ICT, networks in this sector should be structured to respond quickly to this dynamic environment. Naved Chowdhury (former facilitator of the EBPDN) suggested that ICT networks are equipped to fill the ICT gap between developed and developing countries.¹⁰ Because of their expertise on the technologies that they use to network, they can more effectively contribute to changing the policy environment.

Conclusions

It is difficult to present conclusions from this study. Our findings are based (as is the literature) on the collective experience of networkers and researchers to date. This paper, however, has allowed us to make the following assertions about the contribution of networks to bridging knowledge and practice:

- Networks are particularly valuable when the intervention demands the fulfilment of multiple roles (support and agency) and the active participation of actors beyond the control of one single organisation.
- It is also quite clear that when developing a community is an end in itself, as well as a means to achieve policy influence, then developing or joining a network is unavoidable.
- Community-building in itself affords significant benefits to the members or allies of networks. First of all, it facilitates the pooling of resources (financial, logistical, human and intellectual, for example). It can also foster legitimacy by bringing together a wide range of members that can afford representativeness to the network.
- Community-building can both contribute to and benefit from knowledge production and exchange within a network. A key driver for the formation of networks is their capacity to facilitate learning among their members, thus creating value.
- Finally, networks can provide individual members with access to knowledge and policy spaces beyond their own sphere of influence and as such are ideal bridges between knowledge and practice.

These drivers are particularly relevant for ICT for development networks, given that ICTs are critical in fostering community-building and carrying out all the other functions identified in the paper. Global networks, in particular, greatly depend on ICT to function. ICT networks are further supported by the specificity of the issues they address, which encourages active participation in the community and fosters stronger linkages between the knowledge and policy spaces through well-informed and focused individuals.

A key challenge for these networks, however, is finding the right balance between a focus on ICT tools and development policy.

It is particularly relevant to stress that structural recommendations are highly irrelevant if taken separately from the context of the networks themselves – specifically, if the stage of development in which the network finds itself is different from those with which it is being compared. There are some issues to which it is worth paying attention, however:

- Clear governance structures, regardless of their degree of formality.
- An appropriate membership composition and attention to facilitation of community-building activities to promote a balance between collective and individual action that advances the network's goals.
- A flexible structure capable of adopting new and managing multiple functions simultaneously.
- An appropriate use of ICT tools to strengthen the key functions of the network.

As a final word of warning, it is important to recognise that the reasons for joining or supporting networks differ from actor to actor. In the paper we have addressed the donor's perspective to highlight that, while members might seek intangible benefits, donors might prioritise utilitarian motives. Both are legitimate objectives that networks and their members must address, albeit free from the pressures that donors could impose. ■

10 Personal communication.

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Assessment of a Policy Advocacy Network in Ecuador¹

MANUEL ACEVEDO

Introduction and research methodology

The term “network” is used for a diversity of structures, but essentially it refers to a set of interconnected nodes. Organisational network structures, in comparison with more hierarchical or linear ones, tend to be more flexible, modular and agile. Castells (1998) proposes the concept of a “network society” as the new social structure for the “information age”, based on networks of production, power and experience.

Development work, and especially development cooperation, is increasingly done through and within networks. Networks amplify possibilities for participation, and ICTs considerably facilitate connections and transactions among nodes. In fact, the internet can be viewed as the nervous system of the network society. At least in theory, networked structures and processes can increase choices, the principal tenet of the human development paradigm, because they offer greater access to information and possibilities for making greater use of human capacity.

It is thus appropriate to promote specific networks that seek the integration of ICT into national development, as do some members of BCO (e.g., IICD, APC, OneWorld, Hivos). The “Information Networks” (INs) that form part of IICD’s national programmes have precisely this purpose. The INs act to influence national-level policy discussions as well as to generate awareness about member activities and increase their overall ICT capacities.

This study was conducted in the framework of Investigation 3 (Networks) of the BCO Impact Assessment – Component 3. It is aimed at examining the degree to which institutional networks carry out effective policy advocacy, influencing and modifying ICT for development (ICT4D) agendas of countries, entities and decision-makers. It also considers how such networks serve their members to enhance their work on ICT4D objectives. Ecuador was selected as a site for field research because of the support provided to the Infodesarrollo network by BCO Alliance members IICD, APC and Hivos.

Research methodology

The study’s methodology incorporates aspects of evolving research in third sector network analysis (Anheir & Katz 2005; Moreno et al. 2006; UNSO 2000; Wellman 2001).² It aims to characterise the Infodesarrollo network along various network analysis dimensions so as to construct a holistic picture of what it does and how. For this purpose, it inquires into:

- Its overall functionality, to get a sense of its “functional identity” (composed of various identity elements).
- Its structure or morphology, to understand the types of connections among and roles for different nodes in the network.
- Its management style, to capture its operational orientation (e.g., towards more of a representational or an enabling network).
- Its performance and level of participation, to identify what results have been achieved and how members of the network have been involved, with particular attention to the level of networked action actually taking place.

The intention has been to make the inquiry into the first three points essentially descriptive, to make it easier to characterise the network in a way that would be easy to tabulate. The fourth dimension included a larger number of questions and required verbal, open-ended answers, so as to examine the members’ perception of how Infodesarrollo is functioning and their level of satisfaction with the network. The Findings section is based on these four network analysis dimensions. The Analysis follows a similar approach, differing only in grouping the first two points to extract an understanding of the Infodesarrollo network, and combining aspects of the findings analysed where relevant for a more coherent and compact presentation.

A questionnaire was formulated on the basis of the described methodology. This was filled in directly by representatives of the organisations during the course of visits to them in Quito. This served two purposes: first, to ensure that the questionnaires would be completed and returned in time; and second, so that the questions could be explained and discussed in person as part of the ensuing dialogue held during the visits. Notes were taken by the author during the meetings, reflecting information

¹ The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the BCO Alliance, individual partners of BCO or *ict Development Associates Ltd*.

² Including the author’s own ongoing doctoral research activity, developed in conjunction with Moreno, Mataix and others at the Polytechnic University of Madrid.

and impressions that complemented what was included in the questionnaires.³ Questionnaire responses came from the following organisations: FFLA, Nueva Red, CEA, RFR, FLACSO, MachángaraSoft, Fundación UVIA, C-CONDEM, CAMARI, and the Infodesarrollo coordination team.

A desk review of Infodesarrollo documentation provided by its coordinating office, IICD and the Infodesarrollo.ec website was conducted, mainly following the visit. Further documentation was consulted related to the state of the Information Society in Ecuador, recommended by several of the people interviewed, from which the contents of the following section are extracted – particularly the Ecuador country report in Global Information Society Watch 2007 (Betancourt 2007).

In addition, the author was familiar with the Infodesarrollo network, as it had been part of an evaluation conducted approximately two years before for IICD-Hivos activities in the country, and it was thus possible to contrast current findings with earlier information to examine consistency and levels of progress.

THE INFORMATION SOCIETY AND ICT CONTEXT IN ECUADOR⁴

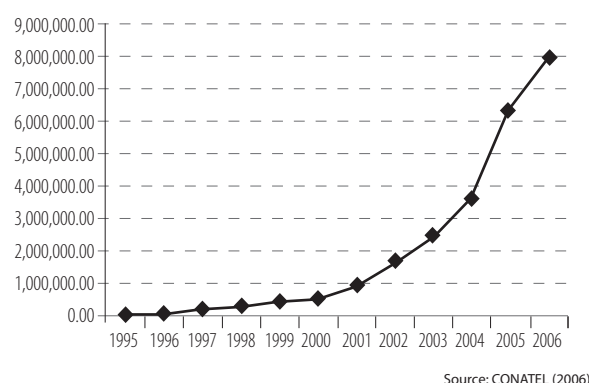
The telecommunications sector in Ecuador has grown rapidly since 2000, when the telecommunications market was liberalised through legal reforms that tended to increase competition. But the sector has evolved in a complex context which has not generated the conditions for a majority of the population to benefit from the transformative potential of ICTs. Despite liberalisation, it is reported that an oligopolistic market structure predominates.

Fixed telephony lines in Ecuador grew slightly from a teledensity⁵ of 10.0 in 2001 to 13.1 in 2006. But it is the staggering growth in mobile telephony that has represented the true measure of the improvement in access to telephone services: whereas in 2001 there were 859,152 users, the numbers had grown to 7,590,063 by October 2006, or a mobile teledensity of 57.4. Combined, then, teledensity stood at 70.5 by the end of 2006. This is in spite of high costs: local telephone calls via both landline and mobile

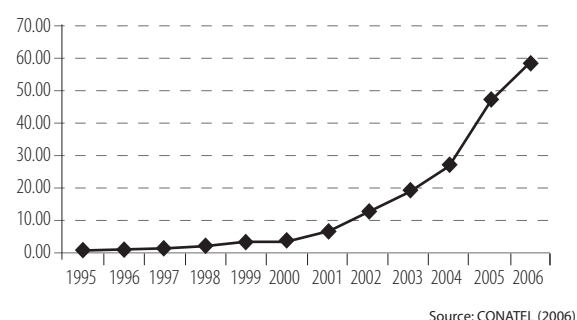
telephones were USD 0.028 and 0.50 a minute, respectively; the cost per minute for a local call in a public phone booth is USD 0.10 (Betancourt 2007).

FIGURE 1. Rise in access to mobile telephony

1A.
Mobile service subscribers



1B.
Mobile penetration



The growth in internet access has not been so impressive. A popular claim that Ecuador's internet access rates are the most expensive in the world may be exaggerated, but they were certainly quite high until quite recently,⁶ as indicated in Figure 2.

There are differing data for internet use in the country. According to the Internet World Stats (IWS),⁷ Internet penetration in 2006 reached 5.1% or 616,000 internet users,⁸ with a 242.2% growth between 2000 and 2006. CONATEL⁹ data indicates for 2006

3 Besides providing an interpretation of the information received, it was also considered important to reflect as accurately as possible the diversity of points of view from the various actors involved (some 15 organisations were visited). Moreover, not all organisations provided the same level of feedback: RFR did not see itself as a member of Infodesarrollo, and hardly answered any questions; Acción Ecológica and CEA answered few questions on performance. The diversity of claims and opinions, even if essentially impossible to verify under the research study framework, are valuable in their own right and it was felt pertinent that they also figure in the research results – together with the information processed by the research team. As such, the findings and to a lesser extent the analysis include a combination of objective and subjective content.

4 This section draws extensively from the Ecuador country report in the Global Information Society Watch 2007 Report, prepared by Valeria Betancourt (of APC). www.globaliswatch.org/en/node/454

5 Expressed as the number of lines per 100 people.

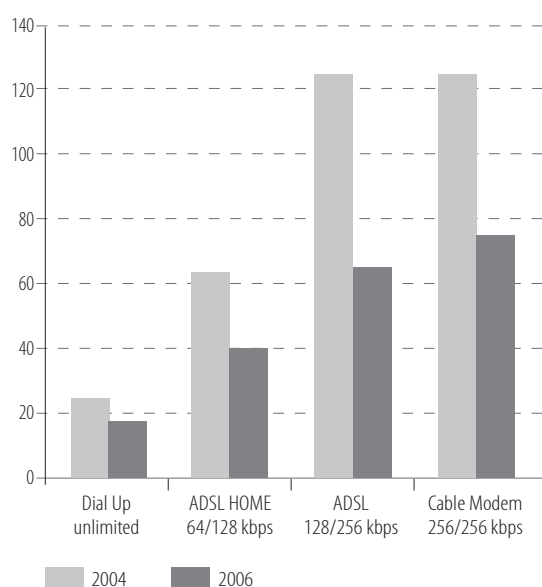
6 The advocacy work of the Infodesarrollo network may have played a part in the lowering of internet tariffs, as will be explored further on in this report.

7 www.internetworldstats.com/stats2.htm

8 On the basis of a total population of 12,090,804.

9 www.conatel.gov.ec

FIGURE 2.
Comparison of internet access costs, 2004 and 2006



Source: National Plan for the Development of Telecommunications 2007-2012*

* www.conatel.gov.ec/website/Plan_Desarrollo_Telecomunicaciones/presentaciones/Plan_Nacional_Desarrollo_Final.pdf

a penetration of 10.1%, a similar figure as that provided in an ECLAC study,¹⁰ amounting to some 1.3 million internet users in Ecuador in November 2006. About 80% of those connected are concentrated in the two major cities, Quito and Guayaquil. There are, however, no indicators that show how ICTs are being used and the impact they are having. At any rate, regardless of the methods of measurement employed, in terms of connectivity Ecuador is significantly lagging behind the rest of Latin America, where the average regional internet penetration in 2006 reached 15.1%, according to Internet World Stats.

There are few public access points (e.g., community telecentres), but that may be changing soon. A large-scale government programme (PROMEC)¹¹ is set to introduce some 1,100 community telecentres in rural and marginal urban areas of the country. However, the process has been delayed for over five years (it started in 2002), following frequent governmental changes. This is one of the major initiatives in which the Infodesarrollo network has tried to effect some influence, as will be seen later in this report.

National ICT policies

The formulation and execution of policies, as well as the regulation and control of telecommunications and ICTs, falls to four

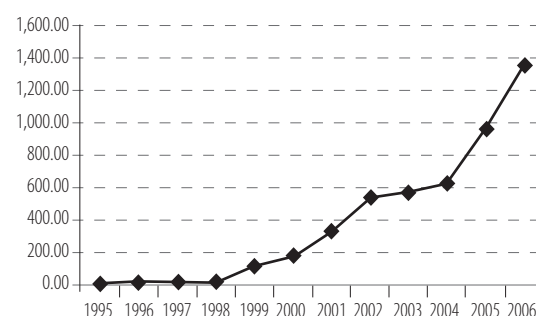
agencies which reportedly sometimes issue contradictory directives: the National Telecommunications Council (CONATEL), the National Television and Radio Broadcasting Council (CONARTEL), the National Secretariat of Telecommunications (SNT) and the Telecommunications Superintendent's Office (SUPTTEL). In addition, SENPLADES (the National Planning and Development Secretariat) is also becoming involved in the area of Information Society policy and programmes.

An earlier attempt at a National Connectivity Agenda, approved in November 2002, which had a seemingly reasonable structure and orientation,¹² was described by all people consulted as inoperative, due in part to lack of political will and awareness, combined with low e-readiness and a severe economic crisis.

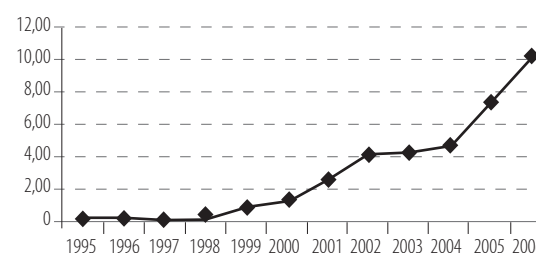
The World Summit on the Information Society provided a stimulus to advance anew on the policy front. The Ecuador country report in the 2007 Global Information Society Watch report (Betancourt 2007) says that CONATEL became involved in June 2005 in the global and regional WSIS processes. It then began to take the first internal steps towards reconfiguring the national strategy for the Information Society by incorporating the involvement of various sectors. Participation became one of the criteria for the formulation of proposed ICT policies.

FIGURE 3.
Internet penetration in Ecuador

A. Internet users (in thousands of users)



B. Internet penetration (as % of population)



10 www.elcomercio.com.ec (23/11/2006) "Uno de cada 10 ecuatorianos se conecta a la Red", Redacción Negocios.

11 PROMEC stands for Power and Communications Sectors Modernization and Rural Services Project.

12 It included the following five issues as strategic topics: (i) Infrastructure for Access, (ii) ICTs for Education, (iii) e-Health, (iv) e-Government and (v) e-Commerce. Each of these includes a number of projects. Additionally, there were also projects related to the regulatory framework.

CONATEL called national actors together in May 2006 for a public discussion of a proposal for a national strategy, as well as to reflect on the focus, components, objectives and goals appropriate to national ICT needs and priorities. It also initiated discussion for the design of the White Paper on the Information Society, in light of new regional and global benchmarks offered by processes such as WSIS and eLAC2007, a regional plan for an information society. The new strategy was put forward as a replacement for the National Agenda for Connectivity.

Insufficient national coverage was shown at the presentation of the National Strategy for the Development of the Information Society (2006). It was shown that Ecuador was not well served by networks (copper and optical fibre), that there was duplication of installations, wide zones which were neglected and few incentives for private investment.

In short, CONATEL acknowledged the lack of a comprehensive state policy, and in doing so, it predefined a thematic agenda that sought to align efforts in the ICT sector with broad socio-economic and developmental goals. Its principles included encouraging multi-stakeholder involvement and a transparent and democratic process. CONATEL's proposed methodology revolved around three axes: infrastructure, access and universal service; social appropriation and an enabling environment; and local innovation, content and applications.

The White Paper on the Information Society was formally issued on December 2006 by CONATEL, presenting it as a contribution to the government administration beginning its term in January 2007. According to most people consulted, it has had limited applications so far, with 2007 being a particularly intense year in institutional terms, including a new government taking office, and the referendum on and convening of a new Constituent Assembly. Reportedly, it has never been officially incorporated into the new government's policies.¹³ At any rate, some of its most positive aspects were as follows:

- The convening of different actors, especially CSOs, is a step forward in the creation of multi-sectoral interactions and public-private alliances. The adoption of participatory mechanisms and the incorporation of human rights and development perspectives in the construction of public policy are the fruit of the pressure applied by CSOs.
- A vision, drawn in good measure from the effective advocacy by CSOs, that public policy should aim to achieve "a country in which all of the population participates in and benefits from the potential of communication and knowledge, without barriers and in equal conditions, through the access, use, capitalisation and appropriation of information and communications technologies, to en-

sure comprehensive development and the improvement of living conditions" (CONATEL 2006).

- The possible creation of a multi-sectoral commission for the information society (still on hold). It would be mandated to formulate public ICT policies and guide their application, beginning with ensuring and overseeing the implementation of the White Paper. CONATEL and SENPLADES are seen as the main candidates to lead or coordinate such a commission.
- The efforts to follow the guidelines from WSIS and eLAC2007 in the White Paper, designed in turn to respond to the commitments of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Challenges remain for the dialogue initiated in the White Paper process to truly become a multi-sectoral national exercise in pursuit of development objectives. There is considerable scepticism within civil society about the real end results of this new policy, which is now over two years old and still only exists on paper. Critics of the government within civil society argue that there have been few instances of participatory processes at a national level, and abundant practices of government unilateralism and of ignoring citizen groups in decision-making.

According to Belen Albornoz,¹⁴ the representative of FLACSO in Infodesarrollo, there is also a lack of understanding and awareness within civil society about the possibilities of ICT. Valeria Betancourt, of APC and author of the Global Information Society Watch 2007 section on Ecuador, says that expectations in terms of capitalising advancements in multi-stakeholder participation that were held at the time the White Paper was finalised have not been reached yet. She furthermore expresses the view that one of the main goals in terms of ICT policy is to get text in the new constitution recognising access to ICT as a right, something on which Infodesarrollo is placing significant emphasis.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF INFODESARROLLO (ECUADOR'S IICD INFORMATION NETWORK ON ICT4D)

Infodesarrollo¹⁵ was formed in 2004, with the support of IICD, by a group of organisations interested in advancing the developmental use of ICT in Ecuador. It defines itself as:

... a network that works to influence the design and implementation of public policies that guarantee the validity of citizen rights for access to communication and information through ICT to promote equitable social development, as well as to promote and facilitate sharing experiences among their members on the use and application of ICT for development (Infodesarrollo 2008).

¹³ For example, the National Telecommunications Development Plan 2007-2012, prepared by CONATEL and SENATEL and published in July 2007, does not make explicit mention of the White Paper.

¹⁴ lac.derechos.apc.org/es.shtml?apc=i1635478eAnalysis1&x=5038943

¹⁵ The appropriate full name is Infodesarrollo.ec – we use Infodesarrollo for simplicity.

Its objectives, stated in the same document, are defined as being:

- To disseminate, exchange and share information, knowledge, methodologies, best practices and lessons learned on the use of ICT for development in Ecuador.
- To promote multi-stakeholder participatory processes on public policies about the application of ICT in the various development sectors.

It operates on three basic foundation principles:

- That all human beings have a right to communication and information.
- That the promotion of ICT should be a function of development and the construction of an equitable society.
- That ICT will be considered as a means to strengthen democracy.

The membership of Infodesarrollo is composed of 34 organisations (as of February 2008), mostly in civil society, with a small number of members from the academic, business and government sectors. Some of them are specialised in ICT, while others (including IICD project partners like CAMARI and C-CONDEM) are development organisations interested in the wider use of ICT in the country. It also has three formal strategic allies: IICD, UNESCO and APC. In 2008, Infodesarrollo will become registered as a non-profit organisation in Ecuador, to facilitate, among other things, its access to funding (it has been supported mainly by IICD and member dues up until now).

Its main line of activities has been in the national ICT policy arena. For example, Infodesarrollo took part in consultative meetings called by the government about the large PROMEC national telecentre programme. Knowledge-sharing has taken second place, but has been gaining strength since 2007, when a new strategic plan (2008-2010) was devised in mid-2007 to respond more effectively to members' needs and interests. The coordinating office, which until then was essentially a "coordinator" hosted by differing organisations (UNESCO since 2006, for instance), brought in a communications officer and has also included for the last six months a UN volunteer (to work on business model and sustainability issues).

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Network functional typology

The investigation first inquired about the network types that could best describe Infodesarrollo's functional identity, i.e., what brings the members together in terms of focus and purpose. Four commonly appearing networks in development were selected, which according to previous knowledge of Infodesarrollo and other ICT4D networks could in principle cover most of its functional identity characteristics:

- Organisational networks. Their members are organisations (as opposed to individuals, such as in social networks) that share information and resources in the network, and can use the network to represent them (in negotiations with a government, in a campaign, etc.).
- Knowledge networks. They focus on some specific theme of interest to their members (environment, human rights, microfinance, etc.). One of their online expressions are the "virtual communities of practice".
- Project networks. They link projects with something in common (topic, geographical location, funding agency) and promote collaboration.
- "Open source-like" networks. Inspired by the ways that open source/free software is produced, these networks are composed of volunteers with expertise on a particular topic, and their work is geared towards the generation of concrete products.

Infodesarrollo members (including the coordination team) were asked to consider the network in light of these four types and provide a percentage for each to express how much of its overall functionality could be described by that particular type. The four marks had to add up to 100%. By doing this, the investigation obtained a quick assessment by Infodesarrollo's own membership about what combination of functional attributes best describe it. Members were allowed to indicate a different type of network besides the four proposed if they thought this was necessary (none did so).

The averaged results were:

- | | |
|--------------------|-------|
| • Organisational | 47.8% |
| • Knowledge | 21.8% |
| • Project | 26.8% |
| • Open source-like | 3.5% |

This means that in general terms, Infodesarrollo is viewed by its members primarily as a place to access/share information and resources, as well as for representative purposes (half of its functionality). Its other main attributes, with roughly equal weight (approximately a quarter of total functionality each), are for knowledge generation and project collaboration. The joint production of products was negligible in their view.

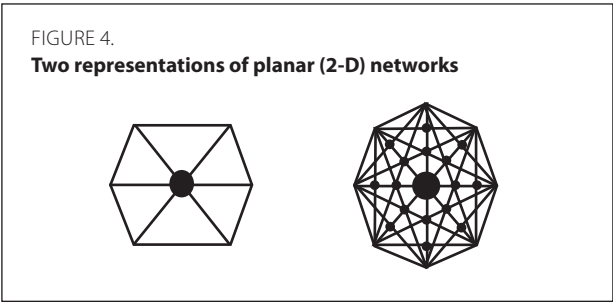
While there were significant differences in the figures provided by the various organisations (except for the "open-source" category, in which none gave it above 15% and most gave it zero), none of the organisations gave more than 50% to either the "knowledge" or "project" network types. Four of them did go above 50% on the organisational network category. Also, there was only one entity (RFR) which selected only one type of network, neglecting all the others (awarding them zeros). Thus, the shared sense is that Infodesarrollo responds to a variety of pur-

poses, which in fact is consistent with its stated objectives as seen in the introduction.

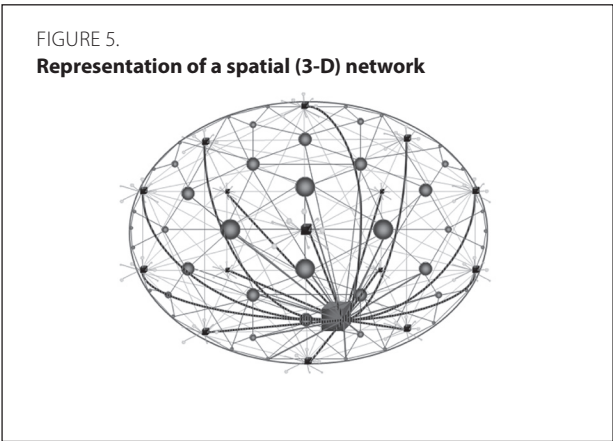
Network structure (morphology)

The importance of examining a network structure resides in assessing how well suited its design is in relation to its objectives. In the case of Infodesarrollo, the investigation provided a very broad simplification of operational geometries to simplify the responses, offering two categories and asking organisations how closely Infodesarrollo resembled each one, again on a percentage basis. They could also specify alternative models if desired (none did). The two basic structures were:

- a. Planar networks (2-D). Their geometries are essentially based on two-dimensional grids. The nodes interact with nearby (similar) nodes, as well as with the central node. Figure 4 provides two rough sketches to illustrate this kind of network.



- b. Spatial networks (3-D). They have the highest degree of freedom and flexibility, because a given node interacts with any other one, regardless of proximity (similarity or prominence). Central nodes may still play a leading role, but they are not essential for the network to function. Instead there may exist several “strong” nodes that share responsibilities over the management of the network. Members do not have to pass through a central node or hub to communicate or collaborate. A smaller number of transactions will include the central node in spatial than in planar networks. Figure 5 provides a graphic illustration.



In the opinion of the network’s members, Infodesarrollo strongly resembles the characteristics of a planar or 2-D network (82% on average), and only slightly those of a spatial or 3-D network (18%). There was little variation, with only one organisation (Fundación UVIA) taking the view that it was less 2-D than 3-D (40% – 60%). In fact, none of the others gave more than a 30% share to the 3-D category.

Network management

The way of managing a network depends both on its objectives and structure, and it is part (together with its structure) of the network’s functional design – even when, as is often the case, a network is neither designed nor planned but evolves over time.

TABLE 1. Attributes of institutional vs. enabling networks	
Institutional network	Enabling network
<p>a. The central node acts as the network coordinator; it determines/influences which nodes will carry out what actions, and it will have previous knowledge of such actions.</p> <p>80%</p>	<p>a. The principal node (if there is one) functions as the network promoter/ animator; it will develop resources and tools to favour networked actions among any of the nodes.</p> <p>20%</p>
<p>b. The normative is rather important: the functioning of the network is based primarily on a series of norms that order and regulate its activities.</p> <p>80%</p>	<p>b. The functioning of the network occurs mainly in “ad-hoc” manner, given the freedom and ease for establishing relationships among nodes, based on a minimum of guiding principles.</p> <p>20%</p>
<p>c. Planning is very important, since the central node must orient and manage resources/ efforts towards compliance with the actions in the plan.</p> <p>90%</p>	<p>c. Periodic monitoring is essential, to know how the network is functioning, since it is not possible to plan all the collaborative actions among the nodes.</p> <p>10%</p>
<p>d. The network prioritises access to information, and in fact the central node promotes the availability of information and access systems.</p> <p>70%</p>	<p>d. The network prioritises access to knowledge, through communication among its nodes, relations with external organisations, and the systematisation of information; the principal node (if there is one) works on the basis of shared criteria for knowledge management, and to provide tools and services that support it.</p> <p>30%</p>

One way to categorise a network's management approach is based on whether its functional behaviour is oriented largely towards its own institutional strengthening, e.g., for the purposes of representing and advancing the interests of its members (an institutional network); or rather, if it is mainly aimed towards strengthening the capacities of its individual members so that they can interact and collaborate more effectively (an enabling network). Given the relation between management and structure, institutional networks tend to exhibit a planar (2-D) morphology, while enabling networks flourish in spatial (3-D) reticulated environments. Networks often display behavioural aspects from both modes, depending on their changing needs and membership make-up.

The members of Infodesarrollo were presented with a set of characteristics typical of each one. They were asked to mark one out of a pair of contrasting characteristics closest to the actual behaviour of the network, so that their composite responses would point towards the style that better resembles how the network is managed. These attributes are shown in Table 1, and for ease of reference, their frequency of results is noted below each one.

The results therefore show ample agreement that the management style is markedly institutional with few enabling characteristics. Among the institutional traits, one that was noted by almost all entities was related to central planning, which is not surprising given the role of the coordinating office. From the enabling traits, the one most noted (30%) referred to the prioritisation of knowledge generation and access for its members. Moreover, the results are highly consistent with the prior question about structure, thus showing a strong correlation between network management and its underlying structure.

Network performance and members' participation

This was the central aspect of the ICT4D network research exercise in Ecuador. It was based on a list of questions which allowed

members to express in open-ended manner their views on how Infodesarrollo operates and the kind of concrete results and impact it is having. It also included two tables to depict (i) the type/level of benefits accrued to the members from their participation in the network, and (ii) the level of influence the network has reached on specific perceived achievements from its advocacy work.

This section on findings shows first the results from the tabulated questions. Following this, it summarises the responses to the open-ended questions (grouped roughly by topic). The analysis section then integrates and systematises the information.

Infodesarrollo results

Member benefits

A number of the most common benefits resulting from belonging to an organisational network were identified. Infodesarrollo members were asked which of them they recognised as benefits for their organisation, and to rate them as being of low, medium or high benefit. The results were as follows:

FLACSO (a university) also mentioned as a benefit the identification of research opportunities relevant to real-life issues, and the convenience of working with NGOs.

Access to information was by far the most cited benefit (88% deemed it of medium or high benefit). A little over half (55%) ascribed medium or high benefit to collaboration with other members, higher credibility in ICT4D, and collaboration-based improvements in operational agility.

Those with the least recognition were mutual support and risk reduction (77% found it either of low benefit or not applicable), closely followed by both shared use of resources and decentralisation of activities, with 66% showing little or no benefit resulting.

The whole set of benefits was deemed positive on average by slightly less than half (46%) of the organisations interviewed.

Type of benefit	n/a	low	medium	high
Access to information		11%	44%	44%
Representation and defence of our interests	22%	33%	33%	11%
Shared use of resources (financial, knowledge, etc.)	22%	44%	22%	11%
Collaboration with other members	11%	33%	22%	33%
Decentralisation of activities	33%	33%	22%	11%
Mutual support and risk reduction	22%	55%	11%	11%
Higher credibility in relation to the network's theme (particularly among the smaller members)	33%	11%	22%	33%
Operational agility through collaboration	11%	33%	44%	11%

This is not a bad result, because it is possible for an organisation to be satisfied by its participation in a given network simply by drawing one substantial benefit. What emerged most clearly is that almost half of the members reported profiting on average from any one benefit specified. Moreover, 67% of the organisations reported at least one high benefit, while only one organisation (RFR) did not find any benefit positive at all (one low, the rest non-applicable).

Advocacy and its impact

The research project has a strong interest in the advocacy side of ICT4D work. Thus it was important to identify advocacy achievements in the most concrete terms possible, together with their actual impact. For impact, the investigation used Oxfam's hierarchy of advocacy objectives/outcomes as follows (in increasing order of impact level):

- Heightened awareness about an issue
- Contribution to debate
- Changed opinions
- Changed policy
- Policy change is implemented
- Positive change in people's lives

While only the last of these represents "impact" in the fullest sense, since it goes beyond the boundaries of the initiative, most impacts are only achieved gradually in discrete increments (if they are achieved at all), and it can take many years from the beginning of an initiative for this to happen. Thus any degree of impact, some four years into the real operation of the network, is encouraging and worth comment.

Table 3 contains the summarised information about impacts. The organisations were asked to identify two or three possible achievements which they could link to Infodesarrollo's efforts, and how influential those achievements have been; and in addition, to express how valuable those achievements had been for their own organisation. The table contains concrete identified achievements, and where they were placed in the influence scale. Often two different members would give a different level of influence to the same achievement.

The achievements identified are explained in the analysis section, including a brief consideration of their importance from the perspective of this evaluation.

"Could these achievements have occurred without networked actions/methods, or are they essentially direct results from them?"

While the value of networking for advancing these efforts is generally recognised, most members find that there was little networked action *per se*, and that the achievements were guided by a hand-

ful of organisations, as most were truly not involved. Nevertheless, the importance of appearing publicly under the Infodesarrollo "banner", however minor the collective involvement, was noted.

"What real impacts on digital inclusion/the digital divide have emerged thanks in part to the work of Infodesarrollo, particularly for the poor/disadvantaged population? What would other organisations (external to the network) think about it?"

It is too early to tell, because Infodesarrollo itself is fairly new, and because most impacts take time. The impact has been very limited except in small pockets (some rural areas where CAMARI is active with the InfoCentros). Perhaps the only notable impact has been over the decrease in internet costs, drawing from a highly publicised public event organised by Infodesarrollo, the Forum on Internet Costs.

It is felt that the efforts invested and the seeds already in place will provide impacts in time, e.g., with initiatives like PROMEC, the InfoCentros, the possible inclusion of measures in the new Constitution, and the more localised examples of ICT appropriation derived from the organisations' increased ICT capacity as a result of their projects supported by IICD and Hivos and the learning that takes place through Infodesarrollo.

"How is monitoring done in Infodesarrollo?"

The Coordinating Office performs this task, reporting results on a periodic basis to the Governing Committee, and annually to the Members' Assembly. There is no explicit monitoring strategy or system for Infodesarrollo. IICD does carry out its own M&E strategy, including its focus group meetings, during which members exchange and share information, but only a portion of those focus groups have to do with Infodesarrollo proper. Monitoring is not particularly participatory, at least not formally so. Recently (in 2007) the thematic committees have provided feedback to the Coordinating Office.

Member Participation

"How is Infodesarrollo organised?"

The work of the network is channelled through the following mechanisms:

- Management Committee: debates issues, takes decisions and directs the Coordination Office.
- Coordination Office: it has two full-time professionals and temporary support, such as one or two interns and presently one UN volunteer. It provides all the support to the members, maintains the website, and organises most of the network's activities. It reports to the Governing Committee and to the Members' Assembly.
- Members' Assembly: all the members are represented here, and it meets one or two times per year. It decides the direction of the network, receiving recommendations and

TABLE 3. A sampling of Infodesarrollo achievements and their relative impact level		
Level of influence (in ascending order)	Achievement	Value for the member
Greater public awareness about the issues or topic (i.e. ICT4D)	PROMEC (national telecentre programme) – FFLA Use of free and open source software – CEA	FFLA – high CEA – medium
Contribution to debate (i.e. Infodesarrollo becoming a main participant in it)	Appearing before the Constituent Assembly – FFLA/Machángara Internet Costs Forum, with key authorities and policy-makers among the 150 participants – FLACSO Public discussion over regulation of wireless community networks – CAMARI More calls from specialised and general media; more instances of support sought by the government – Coordinating team	FFLA – high Machángara – high FLACSO – high (“it truly put the issue on the public agenda”) CAMARI – medium
Changes of opinion (among policy/decision makers)	Public forums on (i) Governance and ICT; (ii) Youth and ICT – FFLA Expanded use of ICT in rural development – CAMARI ICT interest shown by Association of Women from Rural and Parochial Municipalities – Coordinating team	FFLA – high
Policy changes	Request from Constituent Assembly for proposals for text of the new Constitution – Coordinating team White Paper on the Information Society (chapter VII a product of Infodesarrollo) – FLACSO	
Policy changes implemented	Technical norm on quality for connection of internet backbone to a submarine cable – Machángara	Machángara – medium
Positive changes in people’s lives	Lowering of internet connectivity costs, only a few weeks after their public forum on Internet Costs – Machángara / FLACSO / CAMARI / <i>Coordination Team</i>	Machángara – medium CAMARI – high

reports from the Governing Committee and the Coordination Office.

- Various thematic committees (after 2007): presently these are on education, governance, rural development and connectivity; other *ad hoc* committees can form as well. They are normally undertaken by four to eight members.

Infodesarrollo presently has 34 members, with ten joining very recently (in early 2008) including some from outside Quito – part of a strategic effort to expand the network outside the capital. A handful of members were said to be leaving this year (like RFR), but they had not been active at all and apparently did not find the network to suit their interests.

“What level of real participation existed in the process of designing the network’s strategies? Did such participation occur in a ‘networked’ fashion?”

A new strategic plan was devised in 2007, to guide Infodesarrollo for the 2008-2011 period. It was a highly participatory process, including a two-day planning workshop facilitated by APC,¹⁶ with ongoing information exchange and periodic consultations.

¹⁶ As part of consultancy work for Infodesarrollo.

IICD’s support and influence was visible during the process. The coordinating team reported a marked change (for the positive) in the work of Infodesarrollo as a consequence.

“What formal status does your organisation have in Infodesarrollo? What real role do you play?”

Most organisations are simply “members”, although the “associated member” category is being studied, either to avoid paying fees (for some, USD 120 is a considerable sum) or because their status does not allow them to formally join other organisations.¹⁷ As mentioned earlier, IICD, UNESCO and APC have the status of “strategic allies”.¹⁸

There appear to be two tracks of participation. One is the “core” group, which includes FLACSO, Nueva Red, MachángaraSoft, Acción Ecológica and CAMARI (and perhaps one or two more),¹⁹ all founding members, which have been truly involved on a regular basis. The other track involves organisations such as CEA, C-CONDEM, Fundación UVIA, MCCH or FFLA, with lesser involvement,

¹⁷ The case of APC, for example.

¹⁸ The full membership list is available at www.infodesarrollo.ec/content/view/85/331/lang,spanish (except for the ten new members).

¹⁹ Such as UNESCO or E.dúcate (www.e-ducate.org).

typically amounting to participating in one thematic committee (if that) and attending Assembly meetings. Almost all the organisations that joined at the invitation of IICD because of forming part of its national programme belong to this second group, with the exception of CAMARI, which now holds the presidency.

“What level of representativity does Infodesarrollo have? Does it include organisations that have not been involved previously in ICT, information or communications for development networks?”

It is felt that the level of representativity is high, given the complementarity among organisations – some have significant expertise on ICT4D but most have more limited knowledge and capacity on it.

It is a multi-stakeholder group, with universities, NGOs, companies, and even government entities. According to the Coordinating Office, for some 60% of its members Infodesarrollo represents their first involvement in any ICT4D initiative. Some organisations, however, joined and continue their involvement primarily from “perceived” pressure from IICD – though this is probably more perceived than real, at least in terms of staying in the network.

“What networked actions has Infodesarrollo carried out? In which ones has your organisation participated?”

There are diverse opinions about what a networked action involves,²⁰ but the general perception is that few networked actions have been carried out so far, and of those almost all took place in 2007. Most actions under the Infodesarrollo banner are parallel initiatives undertaken by one or two members, with hardly any collaboration from a significant portion of the members.

Some examples of networked actions are as follows:

- Some of the forums hosted or supported by Infodesarrollo, like those on Internet Costs and Governance and ICT, as well as the e-Learning Fair, where the work involved was distributed among members.
- The participation in the White Paper on the Information Society during 2006, as an example of participating in an instance of public policy-making. Specific contents were provided to CONATEL, prepared by some members and involving at least two group meetings to debate the contents (besides providing comments on successive draft versions).
- The process of putting together the new Strategic Plan (as described above).

²⁰ From the author’s perspective, this is admittedly unclear in general. What was explained during the interviews is that a networked action should involve the participation of a number of entities, each with a given responsibility towards achieving the final objective and/or generating a product. To clarify, an example was provided of what would fall short of a networked action in the context of the research: a document (e.g., a proposal to the government) drafted by one or two organisations, where comments were sought from other members and incorporated into the final version.

Operational aspects

“What limitations/errors does your organisation think that Infodesarrollo has had?”

A great diversity of answers were provided by the members on this point, but there were a few more commonly expressed criticisms. One is that the network should provide more services to its members, particularly those implementing development projects. These organisations feel that today Infodesarrollo essentially provides information on ICT issues and gets involved in influencing national ICT policy.

Another limitation arises from very different levels of involvement and commitment, which skews the projection of the network. Those who participate only rarely claim that the reason for this (besides a lack of time and human resources) is because the more policy-oriented issues dealt with by Infodesarrollo do not concern them much; those who are more active complain that they have to do all the work, or very little would be done. There is a grain of truth in both.

A related problem is that some organisations were perceived, at least until quite recently, to “own” or at least to “drive” the network, and that neither the Coordinating Office nor IICD has been able to reduce their excessive influence.²¹ The placing of CAMARI in the presidency appears to be a step in the direction of bridging the “policy” and “projects” sides and to make the network more inclusive and balanced. This move is consistent with the more equitable approach pursued in the new Strategic Plan between advocacy and services.

Finally, another criticism shared by a sizable number of organisations, particularly those among IICD project partners, is that some of the members only joined and stayed in the network at IICD’s explicit or implicit behest, particularly those in the Country Programme. This also appears to be sorting itself out, as some members have left and there has been an aggressive drive to attract new ones, even outside the Quito area – as mentioned above, a group of ten new members joined in early 2008.

“In which ways has experiential learning changed the way that Infodesarrollo works (particularly how it works as a network)?”

The realisation of the ample diversity in the membership (i.e., in terms of ICT knowledge/capacity, interest in policy, focus on projects, size and resources, etc.) has led to more efforts to ensure benefits to all. There is a more deliberate attempt to provide information in practical ways for all members. There has also been an effort to seek more collaborative approaches, for example, by instituting the thematic committees now in place.

²¹ A couple of organisations indicated that IICD had used different norms in their relationship with different members, allowing albeit unwittingly an unfair advantage/influence by some.

Moreover, there is awareness that network tools, like the intranet and discussion forums, as well as some Web 2.0 tools (wikis, blogs) need to be better used to enhance collaboration.

The Coordinating Office and some others pointed out the need to stimulate more trust at the personal level – the network may be an organisational one, but the relationships take place between individuals. In this regard, it was also pointed out that more than one person should represent an organisation in the network, or in other words, that the organisations should feel a more corporate commitment to the network.

“What could be the main disagreements among the members about achievements, weaknesses and the impact of its (networked) work?”

One of the ongoing points of tension between focus on “policy” and focus on “services” has to do with the differentiated value placed on processes versus products, which cannot be directly extrapolated from the corporate focus of an organisation – i.e., a project-based entity may recognise the importance of processes and strongly support them. In this regard, participation in itself is not (yet) seen as a result of the network.

There is a different assessment of the work of the Coordinating Office: a few are highly critical (even at a personal level), while most are supportive. At any rate, the Coordinating Office is seen by some as the “managing unit” with an unrealistic level of power, which is not truly the case. The level of leadership exercised by the Office is a sensitive issue, and one that needs to be clearly accepted and consented to by the membership, as it has the difficult challenge of aligning different corporate interests to common network purposes.

Relations with networks

“How does Infodesarrollo interact with other networks in the country or outside?”

This type of interaction does not appear to be actively pursued by Infodesarrollo. There are however links to networks like APC, ALAI²² or TIC Bolivia (IICD’s Bolivian information network), but they are mainly sporadic and do not seem to have any specific orientation.

The exception is the case of APC, which as a strategic ally of Infodesarrollo has had various instances of collaboration with the network, such as (i) supporting policy advocacy, (ii) providing content and maintaining frequent communications, (iii) contributing to some of its internal functions (e.g., two thematic commissions), (iv) providing strategic advice and recommendations, and (v) participating in some of its activities, such as publications and events.

The relationships of individual members with other networks²³ do not seem to have sufficient relevance to Infodesarrollo as a whole, nor is there evidence that those members with enough bridging capacity (or interest) are proactive in establishing such bridges in order to lead to fruitful arrangements or agreements with those other networks.

“What are the differences between Infodesarrollo and other networks of which your organisation is a member?”

The members pointed out the following differences:

- The theme (ICT4D), which is relatively new.
- The diversity of the membership and its multi-stakeholder nature, with varying levels of expertise on the theme of the network.
- The aims of generating awareness and direct intervention, as well as supporting projects.
- Minimal use of ICT networking tools (e.g., in comparison to the free software community).
- The motivation to join – some do it because they are part of an international organisation programme.

ANALYSIS

IICD’s national information networks tend to have as a priority their involvement in ICT policy issues, for which they serve as mechanisms of advocacy. Infodesarrollo in Ecuador is no exception, as it has focused on policy advocacy since its founding, and continues to put the majority of its effort there, albeit with a growing array of services to its members (primarily in knowledge sharing and training). Infodesarrollo has already managed to become a national player on the ICT policy and institutional fronts. However, at the request of its members, most of whom are involved in specific development sectors (agriculture, education, environment, governance, etc.), and some of whom are not so keen on working on the policy angle, it is now paying more attention to providing support and services to its members.

In fact, this growing emphasis on services was reflected in a new Strategic Plan approved in 2007 to guide the network’s operations from 2008 until 2011. The Plan includes a series of measures on the services dimension which are aimed at balancing its work between two stated objectives: policy influence and knowledge services to members. These measures include:

- Five thematic ICT forums planned (on rural development, governance and education)
- Training and educational material on telecentre management
- A web 2.0 course

22 Agencia Latinoamericana de Información: alainet.org

23 For example, CAMARI also participates in Tricalcar, which deals with community networks.

- A workshop on political impact on ICT policy
- Three technical ICT workshops for the IICD-supported projects.

Network functional design

The part of the questionnaires dealing with the descriptive side of the network provides a largely coherent view of the functional design of the network. Firstly, Infodesarrollo is characterised as being mainly an organisational network that serves primarily as a source of information for its (institutional) members and to carry out actions in their representation. Within the sample of members interviewed, this view is held more strongly among project-implementing members than by the others. Infodesarrollo also serves, to a lesser extent, to generate knowledge for its members and to facilitate exchanges about ICT4D for its projects. The basic reason seems to be that the network has not succeeded much yet in fostering productive communications among its members.

The particular variability and distribution of the figures reflects a shared perception among the members that Infodesarrollo responds to a variety of purposes, which is in fact consistent with its stated objectives. However, it is telling that the Coordinating Team was the only respondent with a substantially different view: they held the view that the network serves mainly as an exchange platform among projects, with its lowest priority function being that of information access/representation. Perhaps this Team believes that the shift towards more services for projects marked by the 2007 Strategic Plan has already reached a substantial degree – but it is certainly not the opinion of almost all other member organisations.

Secondly, corresponding to that functionality, Infodesarrollo exhibits a strong planar (2-D) structure in comparison with a spatial (3-D) one, almost on a 4 to 1 ratio (82% vs. 18%) according to the respondents. This is consistent with the management approach, which is significantly closer to that of an institutional network than to an enabling one (coinciding in almost the same margin of 80% to 20% based on the attributes listed). These characteristics reflect the role of the Coordinating Office as a strong central node which largely runs the network – probably out of sheer necessity during its first few years, in order to keep it both “active and proactive”.

It also evidences constrained communications among members, particularly those who are not close within the network (in terms of relevance and/or interests). Few tools or processes are provided to enhance networked action. Most communication flows to and from the Coordinating Office node. Planning is therefore essential for good performance (and performance, as we will see, is rather acceptable), since the collaborative culture of the network is weak. This strong planning profile is maintained even in the case of a number of events and actions which occur on an ad hoc, responsive basis (as reported by some of the members as well as the Coordinating Office). Monitoring runs

a distant second to planning in this network, both in effort required and even more so in shaping the work of the network.

The most important consequence of this functional structure of Infodesarrollo is probably that the network does not presently prioritise strengthening its members as its key *raison d'être*. This is typical of many development networks, since enabling networks require a substantial degree of maturity. It is, however, not only more consistent with the overall context of the Information (Network) Society; it also refers to the demands by many of its members and probably the underlying nature of some of the main problems observed. Therefore, it could be argued that a strategic challenge ahead for Infodesarrollo is to evolve towards becoming more of an enabling network, reaching in the short term at least a more balanced picture between supporting institutional network objectives and supporting individual member objectives.

Infodesarrollo outcomes

Infodesarrollo is a young network (not yet four years in existence), and its evolution has been uneven and with its share of problems. At the same time, it has managed to demonstrate some interesting results.

The Findings section showed that most of the organisations have received some significant benefits as a consequence of participating in the network. More than half of the organisations interviewed indicated four specific benefits (related primarily to access to information, increased knowledge on ICT and collaborative experiences). Only one organisation, RFR (implementer of the SERVIR project on information services to MFIs), reported not having any significant benefits.²⁴ While there have been a handful of resignations in the last year (probably because of a similar sentiment to RFR), it is natural that as a network matures its membership becomes better profiled to its objectives and culture.

IICD probably intended Infodesarrollo to have a dual track on ICT policy and knowledge services, as seen in its founding objectives and with the explicit agreement of its initial members.²⁵ However, in the way it has operated, it appears to be *de facto* (mainly) managed for ICT policy purposes, and this is where its key outcomes are found. The list of reported impacts (while empirically unfeasible to verify) gives a good snapshot of what those advocacy activities have been, and transmits the impression of Infodesarrollo evolving and becoming increasingly more effective and influential. The Findings section listed them and matched them to a level of influence; the most significant ones are described next (together with the highest level of influence reached).

²⁴ Not altogether surprising, as on the one hand it has high ICT capability, and on the other it has hardly been active in the network from the start.

²⁵ Before Infodesarrollo, IICD already supported a number of knowledge-sharing activities in Ecuador (website, newsletter on ICT4D, etc.) and then organised an envisioning workshop with partners and stakeholders to plan for the ICT4D network which became Infodesarrollo.

PROMEC: This is an ambitious national telecentre project, which has run up against typical problems of an unstable political environment. Already under some type of planning/implementation since 2004, it came to a halt in 2006. Infodesarrollo (and even IICD, directly) became involved by providing advice to government departments on how to move the project towards a successful implementation course, as well as outreaching for public awareness. The project has not resumed implementation yet. However, Infodesarrollo members say that the network helped raise public awareness and involve more parties in the debate. If it ever becomes implemented, this project could be strategic in reducing the digital divide in Ecuador, and if civil society is given any role in its planning or shaping, it is likely that Infodesarrollo would have some degree of influence on it.

Use of free and open source software: Some Infodesarrollo members are strong advocates of free and open source software, and they have promoted its wider use in the country in network events and other communication channels. They only claim to have made a modest contribution to raising public awareness about the topic – yet it should be noted that President Correa declared in April 2007 that the widespread use of this software (particularly in state institutions) would become state policy, and in the discussions of the Constituent Assembly it seems likely to become so.²⁶

White Paper on the Information Society: The introductory section contains a description of this strategic document. While it has yet to be applied, it became the first comprehensive policy work on the Information Society in Ecuador, and it was created in an extensively participatory fashion. This was perhaps the first time that Infodesarrollo became strongly involved in a specific policy initiative. FLACSO said that Infodesarrollo practically wrote chapter VII on the role of the media (i.e., communications) in the development of the Information Society. This is a good example of influence at the level of changing (or establishing) policy.²⁷

Constituent Assembly: Ecuador is in the process of drafting a new constitution. Various commissions (*mesas*) have been set up to prepare separate sections, and they allow organisations to appear before them to make proposals and for assessment purposes. Infodesarrollo has engaged with three of ten *mesas*:²⁸

- Mesa 2: Organisation, Social and Citizen Participation, and Representative Systems
- Mesa 7: Development Regime

- Mesa 9: Sovereignty, International Relations and Latin American Integration²⁹

In addition, Infodesarrollo has been requested to provide some brief text about digital inclusion and ICT for development. Its involvement, however modest, is clearly part of a process to change policy.

Internet Costs Forum and its effect: Infodesarrollo held a highly publicised Internet Costs Forum in 2006, attended by many high-level authorities and policy-makers. Weeks afterwards, there was a generalised lowering of connectivity tariffs. Infodesarrollo continues to advocate for lower costs (they are still among the highest in Latin America), and a second forum was held in May 2007. Most of the members consulted agreed that the 2006 forum was a determining factor in achieving the improvement. If that is the case, it would be an example of impact taken to its more direct level, i.e., effecting positive changes in people's lives.

Impacts on poverty are not discernible yet, at least on a national scale, unless one includes the benefits of cheaper internet access and better service (including more coverage). It is however possible, even likely, that the advocacy efforts invested in areas like the Constituent Assembly, PROMEC, or the White Paper on the Information Society will eventually be reflected in a wider integration of ICT into national development policy and thus have an impact on poverty. More certain effects on poverty/livelihoods occur on a more localised scale, where the projects of some of the members are implemented (e.g., CAMARI, MCCH, SERVIR, C-CONDEM), as was shown in the research component on ICT, Pro-Poor Markets and Livelihoods (included in Investigation 2 of the BCO Impact Assessment – Component 3).

Infodesarrollo modus operandi

Infodesarrollo is a network “not accustomed to networking”, at least in a dynamic and productive sense. In this regard, it reflects to some extent the still limited networking culture in the country. In fact, this is one of the challenges that IICD reportedly faces in most countries with its ICT4D networks, and which point to one of the key relevant purposes of such initiatives: a long, sustained effort for capacity development (institutionally, network-wise) which goes beyond capacity-building for a given organisation and seeks to provoke effects at the societal level and the national scale.

But more can and should be expected of a “modern” network established with international guidance, and which in fact deals with ICT and the state of the Information Society in the country – the very technologies that serve as the essential network-

26 There is a YouTube clip in which President Correa supports the adoption of free software: youtube.com/watch?v=Hy5yAk4dYOk&feature=related

27 It is worth mentioning that other members of Infodesarrollo participated individually in the process too, such as MachángaraSoft, FLACSO, UNESCO, CAMARI, Nueva Red and E.dúcate. Infodesarrollo under its name was part of the commissions on Education and Tele-Education, as well as the Role of the Media.

28 A copy of the base texts provided to the three mesas is available at: www.infodesarrollo.ec/content/view/full/656/272/lang,spanish

29 On 8 February 2008, Hugo Carrión and Roberto Roggerio made a presentation to Mesa 9 on electromagnetic sovereignty and free software: asambleaconstituyente.gov.ec/minuto-a-minuto/10h33-en-la-mesa-9-de-soberania-relaciones-internacionales-e-do

ing instruments today. While some of Infodesarrollo's actions have involved networked tools and practices, it is not the norm. A handful of members have been responsible for most of the activities and initiatives. While they could hardly be blamed for taking the initiative, given the extent of digital exclusion and the many possibilities for action during that period in Ecuador (including the drafting of a new constitution), it does not seem healthy for the network in the mid and long term. As such, Infodesarrollo would benefit from generating "network capital", a type of social capital that emerges from collaborative practices based on e-enabled human networks (Acevedo 2007).

The need for more extensive networked functions has been recognised, and present efforts established by the new Strategic Plan 2008-2011 are geared towards inducing a wider level of participation. The new thematic commissions are an example of this; Belén Albornoz of FLACSO went as far as saying: "The commissions have changed the network."

The new Strategic Plan, in itself drafted in ample participatory fashion, clearly points to a new phase for Infodesarrollo. It reflects a more balanced orientation between advocacy on ICT4D and services to its members, two lines of work which after all can and should be complementary. Developmental expertise on the use of ICT is the best guide for policy, while policy and conceptual knowledge of ICT issues will benefit development projects that integrate ICT.

The Plan also directs the network towards sustainability. Infodesarrollo will become registered during 2008 as an organisation free to raise funds and organise itself as fitting to the members. It will continue to need IICD financial support for some time, but less support in the form of procedural guidance. Perhaps the most appropriate avenues of support by IICD come in the form of techniques and tools for effective networking (including collaborative arrangements and knowledge networking).

One of the challenges that can be turned into an opportunity is the extreme diversity of the network's membership. Few ICT4D networks combine members with such different ICT capacities and such ample opportunities for direct developmental applications of the technologies. The Strategic Plan provides measures to strengthen the capacity of project-based organisations, necessary to get concrete results applied to various development areas. In time, organisations which really do not see the point of belonging to the network will filter out, and those remaining will provide Infodesarrollo with an enviable membership of ICT-experienced organisations together with developmentally experienced organisations, all with the common goal of expanding ICT integration into development, wherever it is effective, both upstream (policy) and downstream (field level).

Infodesarrollo needs to place still greater emphasis on knowledge exchange, collaborative/joint projects and technical ICT4D training, for example. As the number of organisations in the network grows, their collective pool of experience and the possibi-

ty for productive collaboration will also grow. Basic digital literacy training can be provided by any local computer academy, but few institutions would ever specialise in ICT4D training, tailored to the needs and capabilities of even small NGOs, and including courses on ICT for agriculture, e-governance and digital democracy, setting up simple e-learning platforms, effective use of GIS for managing community resources, etc. Those courses could be delivered by third-party organisations if needed, through an institutional agreement. It could be done partly through virtual learning environments.

Lastly, as Infodesarrollo matures, it will probably enter into collaborative arrangements with other networks, gaining an additional identity as a node of larger networks. This would widen its horizons, amplify opportunities for action (both policy- and project-oriented), and thus expand benefits for members and increase its appeal for donors and entities who could pay for some services (e.g., the government requiring technical advice, a donor organisation needing to carry out an evaluation, a private company looking to expand its CSR portfolio, etc.). Even in Ecuador, the potential number of organisations that could be interested in the work or services of Infodesarrollo is high – and the advantage of Infodesarrollo, by virtue of being a network, is that it can be more flexible and grow in a more modular fashion than traditional "linear" organisations. This is particularly true if we think that as a network evolves it can deliberately do so towards the enabling modality discussed earlier – which means that its central or coordinating node does not need to grow proportionally, since most of the work would be assumed by members.

Infodesarrollo has entered into a crucial stage in which it can stabilise, reorient its priorities and work on them in a more focused way. Despite its teething problems, it is moving in a productive direction that can benefit members, regardless of their area of work. And it is doing so at a time of significant socio-political change in Ecuador: a time when ICT is making inroads in the country, when some kind of true Digital Agenda is probably a matter of months (not years) away, and a new institutional course is on the verge of being set with the new constitution, with a government that has placed social inclusion and developmental objectives at the top of its priorities. This is a time in which it is possible to make significant inroads to firmly place ICTs as strategic tools for human development in Ecuador, and Infodesarrollo is poised to make significant contributions to doing just that. It is thus a time appropriate for continued support, not only financially, but also technically and in the search for sustainability. ■

People interviewed

(Quito, 11-18 February 2008)

IICD

Wietse Bruinsma – Country programme manager, Ecuador

Infodesarrollo.ec Secretariat

Diana Andrade – Coordinator

Paula Carrión – Communications officer

Paula Arranz – UN volunteer

Infodesarrollo members

E.dúcate Ecuador

Ivan Fernández – Vice president

Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO)

Belen Albornoz – Associate professor

Fundación Futuro Latinoamericano (FFLA)

Gabriela Villamarin – Area officer

Fundación UVIA

Mónica Vásconez Vaca – Executive director

Giancarlo de Agostini – Academic coordinator

Imaginar

Hugo Carrión Gordón – ICT and telecommunications consultant

MachángaraSoft

Ana Chaparro

NuevaRed.org

Roberto Roggiero, Director

IICD PROJECT PARTNERS (Infodesarrollo members who also took part in the ICT, Pro-Poor Markets and Livelihoods investigation)

Acción Ecológica

Xavier León – Programme officer

C-CONDEM

Verónica Yezpe – General coordinator

CAMARI

Homero Viteri – General coordinator

Geovani Castañeda – Operations manager

CEA

Julio de la Torre – Director

FEPTCE

Galo Villamil – Executive director

MCCH

Patricia Castro – Systems manager

RFR

Andres Freire A. – Project manager

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Gender Networking and Advocacy in the Context of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS): A Summary¹

DEBBIE BUDLENDER

Introduction

The impact investigations commissioned as part of BCO included one which focused on gender networking and advocacy in the context of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS). This investigation, which was undertaken by Dr Heike Jensen, was intended to test the overarching BCO hypothesis that *Policy advocacy and networks influence and reshape the agendas of ICT and ICD policy-makers and development practitioners*. More specifically, the guiding questions for the gender assessment were:

- In what ways have gender and ICT networks influenced agendas of ICT and ICD policy-makers and development practitioners in integrating gender perspectives and women's empowerment concerns?
- To what extent have the gender/ICT networking interventions resulted in gender-responsive policy and process changes, implementation and delivery at the national level?

WSIS and the gender thematic groups

The findings of the investigation need to be understood against the background of WSIS, its format and purpose, and the structures and processes that were involved. In terms of process, WSIS encompassed two summit events, one held in Geneva, Switzerland in December 2003 and the other in Tunis, Tunisia in November 2005. The mandate of WSIS was to generate a vision of the "Information Society" and to identify strategies to bring it about. As is generally the case with UN summits, the WSIS documents were agreed upon by the representatives of UN member states. However, the WSIS was expressly mandated to follow a multi-stakeholder approach and invite other stakeholder groups into its process, namely the private sector and civil society.

Civil society responded actively to this invitation. Throughout the years of the drawn-out WSIS process, civil society negotiated at the level of both procedure and substance so as to promote its diverse concerns. The most basic organising unit of civil society was an ever-increasing range of thematic and regional groups, which went by different names such as caucuses, working

groups or families. For the thematic area of gender, there were two groups: the WSIS Gender Caucus (WSIS GC) and the NGO Gender Strategies Working Group (NGO GSWG). The former was open to members of all stakeholder groups, while membership of the latter was restricted to members of civil society.

Both gender groups were founded early in the first WSIS phase. The WSIS GC was formed at the invitation of the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) at the African regional preparatory conference held in Bamako, Mali, during May 2002. It differed from other thematic or regional groupings in the WSIS process in at least two respects: its financial base and its make-up. In terms of its financial base, the GC was funded throughout the entire WSIS process by UNIFEM and various European official development agencies. In terms of make-up, like WSIS itself, the GC was a multi-stakeholder group open to representatives from governments, the private sector, and civil society.

The NGO GSWG, like most other regional and thematic groups, constituted a civil society alliance. It was established at the first WSIS PrepCom Meeting in Geneva in July 2002. The GSWG was active during the first phase of WSIS but dissolved when its main supporting organisations de-prioritised WSIS at the beginning of its second phase. Individuals who wished to keep working in the WSIS context then joined the WSIS GC. This early dissolution is noteworthy for this impact investigation given that it was the second phase that was meant to focus on implementation.

The two gender groups tried to coordinate their input at particular points of WSIS phase I. There was also some overlap regarding the regular membership of the two groups, although not with respect to the leading women. Both groups sought to obtain a reaffirmation of provisions derived from UN contexts and processes such as those that had generated the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Both groups lobbied for the dual strategy, promoted since the Beijing Conference of 1995, to mainstream gender and simultaneously to obtain special measures for women. Both groups stressed the importance of understanding gender in relation to other systems of social differentiation such as race, ethnicity, or geographic location. This approach was in keeping with many other interventions undertaken by civil society constituencies during the first WSIS phase, which jointly sought to broaden the WSIS agenda into a comprehensive

¹ The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the BCO Alliance, individual partners of BCO or *ict Development Associates Ltd*.

platform for addressing media and ICT issues in the normative context of human rights and (human) development.

The BCO assessment

The BCO assessment was based on reading of written documents and responses to email questionnaires, as well as the personal experience and knowledge of the researcher, who had participated in the WSIS process. Given the focus on impact, the main emphasis was on hearing opinions of those who had not themselves been centrally involved in gender advocacy and networking at WSIS. Informants from three groups were thus targeted, namely:

- Gender advocates in the WSIS process.
- Participants in the WSIS process involved in non-gender advocacy.
- Individuals not directly involved in the advocacy efforts of the global WSIS process.

A total of seventeen responses were received in the short time available for the research. The responses were evenly spread across the three target groups. No responses were received from representatives of the private sector. This is an important gap given the role proposed for the private sector in taking WSIS forward.

Findings

Impact can be assessed at the level of immediate outputs of the process, such as the official documents. It can be assessed in terms of the growth in the size of the gender lobby and the extent to which those outside the lobby learned to understand gender issues and think they were important. It can also be assessed in terms of impact on the lives of ordinary women and men living in countries scattered around the world.

At a broad level, virtually all the responses received provided support for the main hypothesis that “Policy advocacy and networks influence and reshape the agendas of ICT and ICD policy-makers and development practitioners.” However, the more detailed assessments presented contradictory views on the scope, quality and usefulness of the changes effected in the official documents.

All respondents agreed that gender advocacy and networking had resulted in changes in “language” of the documents. The impact of these changes in language was less clear. Several responses questioned what impact one would expect from an official international document. The report on the research uses the concept of “advocacy chain” to refer to the fact that gender (and other) outcomes of the global WSIS context will not simply be implemented – they need to be renegotiated in other global contexts as well as regional and national contexts. This, in turn, raises the question of whether those doing the

advocacy at national level are the same as those who did it at the global level.

The responses from Latin America tended to be most positive about national impact and in this region it seemed that the advocates were, indeed, often the same ones who had participated in WSIS. More generally, many responses highlighted the extremely small size of the core of gender advocates active in the field of media and ICTs. In this respect, the many responses that indicated that WSIS networking and advocacy had attracted new advocates into the fold highlighted a potential intermediary step to ultimate impact. Responses indicating such growth in the number understanding gender issues came from both those who were themselves newly convinced and those who attempted to draw in new actors. The pattern of the responses suggests that WSIS had more success in winning over new believers in the gender cause among those already involved in the ICT field, than it had in winning over new believers in the importance of thinking about ICT among existing gender advocates. There were several responses from the gender advocates which observed that many gender advocates in other fields saw ICTs as a relatively elitist concern.

In terms of non-gender ICT people, several responses suggested strongly that some initial outsiders to WSIS gender networking and advocacy ended up with a feeling of ownership of the gender perspective and its results at WSIS. For the most part, this seemed to happen through positive personal interaction with the WSIS gender advocates and an incorporation of their networking and advocacy work into the outsiders’ own work. This happened across different types of work, and at different levels – global, regional and national. In contrast, the responses did not show any evidence of indirect forms of involvement with WSIS gender networking and advocacy, such as tracking of its outcomes online, leading to involvement or ownership among outsiders. This finding is particularly interesting given the sometimes strong claims that are made for the potential impact of making information available electronically. However, some informants who were off-site said that the ability of the insiders to use ICTs allowed them to participate in the advocacy. The lesson here is perhaps that ICTs are useful when someone is already an insider, but are less useful in attracting new advocates.

While positive personal interaction with the WSIS gender advocates encouraged impact on outsiders, some of the non-insiders reported feelings of exclusion because of the way in which the gender advocacy worked. Indeed, even some gender advocates reported feeling excluded. The complaints were directed, in particular, at the multi-stakeholder gender group. The reasons given included closed working structures, sharp disagreements and undemocratic and untransparent decision-making processes characterising the WSIS GC. These weaknesses were partly offset by the high visibility, integrity and commitment to outreach and collaboration of certain gender advocates in the WSIS process.

Many respondents suggested that beyond the documents and stronger networks, further important outcomes of WSIS gender

networking and advocacy included intellectual contributions to the field of gender and media/ICTs, heightened legitimacy of this field, and greater skills among the WSIS gender advocates and their networks.

The responses suggested that gender networking and advocacy with respect to ICTs was deepened and broadened through the WSIS process, and that the process spurred new collaborations, deeper insights, better capacities and hence a more solid establishment of this field as legitimate and useful. The fact that far more people involved in ICTs no longer saw gender as a “fringe” issue has made it more difficult for policy-makers to ignore gender issues and gender advocates.

The final questions of the email questionnaire asked:

- Whether the respondent knew of any examples where gender aspects of WSIS had been reflected in implementation at the country or regional level.
- What impact – in terms of lasting change in the lives, behaviour, potential, etc. of those beyond the WSIS process, in particular (i) women in general and (ii) poor women in developing countries – could be attributed to WSIS gender networking and advocacy.

These questions get to the heart of impact as it is commonly understood in development circles.

In terms of the former question, the responses again often focused on policy documents. Countries obviously do not take up WSIS provisions as is in their own policy documents. Instead, a further process of policy development must be expected, which would involve different actors in each context. One informant noted that a particular difficulty in this respect was that the women’s national machineries – women’s ministries or their equivalent – were generally not involved in ICT policy-making. A further difficulty for this assessment in finding impact is that many countries will not have engaged in substantive policy-making in respect of ICTs in the few years since WSIS.

There was, however, some evidence of such ICT policy processes commencing and being accompanied by further gender networking and advocacy. Most examples came from Latin America. In this region, respondents noted the gender elements of the eLAC 2010 plan and the creation of a Gender Working Group. Further, in both Chile and the Dominican Republic, the women’s machineries were involved in the ICT policy-making process.

One informant also reported that UNDP had made some efforts to link gender and ICT in the formulation of National Information Society Policy documents, especially in the Western Balkans countries, and to some extent in other strategic frameworks such as national Poverty Reduction Strategies. For the most part, however, informants said that they had no evidence of impact on implementation. One felt that many governments do not read the WSIS documents after returning home and that

gender elements, alongside others, could not be expected to have impact. Some informants did point out, however, the difficulty of ascribing particular aspects of policy to WSIS or any other particular factor. They argued that lack of evidence could thus not be assumed to mean no impact.

With respect of impact on (poor) women in developing countries, many respondents could not cite any impact. One of these observed, however, that the “overall encouragement” was a factor which should not be excluded in impact assessment. Others felt that there might be greater awareness, but it was probably too early to expect impact. One of those referring to greater awareness spoke, in particular, of increased interest in “the seemingly tech area” by women’s groups. Latin America was again cited as a region where there probably had been impact, although the respondent who raised this could not give specific details. Another Latin American said that students in research projects used “that famous paragraph that we did”, namely paragraph 12 of the Geneva Declaration of Principles.

Among the negative responses in relation to impact was one which noted: “Given the limited impact of the WSIS as a whole, and how abstracted it was from the reality of most people, it would be a tall order to expect any [gender] impact.” This echoed a refrain in some other responses which referred to the general challenges facing civil society engagement in WSIS, and noted that any assessment of gender impact must take this into account.

One respondent felt that one could not make “instrumentalist” linkages, but that the lives of poor women would be affected by the “massive penetration of ICTs, especially cellphones, into developing countries,” and that WSIS gave legitimacy to this process. The same respondent felt that WSIS encouraged some governments to make changes to their regulatory processes, but did not elaborate on the relevance of this for poor women. Several respondents again said that WSIS more generally raised awareness among policy-makers about the importance of considering gender issues. Further, the challenges posed during the WSIS process to a market-led model could result in policy being shaped in ways that were more beneficial for poor women.

On the negative side, one informant noted that WSIS did not even have “enough political clout to sustain aid in ICTs.” The informant went on to give examples of various sources of aid that had been cut back since WSIS, including UNDP’s closure of its ICTD thematic area on the assumption that ICTs should now be “mainstreamed”. Again, this is a general comment rather than one directly related to gender impact, but it obviously affects the possibilities of gender impact.

Despite these more general difficulties, overall there was consensus among respondents that the gender advocacy and networking at WSIS succeeded in shaping official documents in some way, and strengthened and broadened the network of people and organisations interested in gender and ICTs. To a more limited extent, there were also some emerging signs of impact at the national level. ■

Gender Networking and Advocacy in the Context of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)¹

HEIKE JENSEN

Introduction

The impact assessment on gender networking and advocacy in the context of the UN World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) presented here forms part of a larger impact assessment undertaken by the Building Communication Opportunities (BCO) Alliance in relation to policy influence, advocacy and networking. The overarching BCO hypothesis which the research is intended to address is that *Policy advocacy and networks influence and reshape the agendas of ICT and ICD policy-makers and development practitioners.*

The two guiding questions for this gender assessment are as follows:

- In what ways have gender and ICT networks influenced agendas of ICT and ICD policy-makers and development practitioners in integrating gender perspectives and women's empowerment concerns?
- To what extent have the gender/ICT networking interventions resulted in gender-responsive policy and process changes, implementation and delivery at the national level?

To prepare the ground for this assessment, the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) will be briefly described. The United Nations in 2001 decided to hold this summit under the auspices of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU). The WSIS process thus inaugurated encompassed two summit phases. Phase I led up to a summit in Geneva, Switzerland in December 2003, and phase II ended with a summit in Tunis, Tunisia in November 2005. Thematically, WSIS was mandated to generate a vision of the "Information Society" and to identify strategies to bring it about. It complied with this mandate by holding a number of regional and thematic meetings as well as a series of Preparatory Committee Meetings (PrepComs) for discussion and negotiation of political agreements during both phases.

WSIS ended up issuing four central official documents in the context of its summits: the Geneva Declaration, the Geneva Plan of Action, the Tunis Commitment and the Tunis Agenda. As is generally the case with UN summits, the WSIS documents were

agreed upon by the representatives of UN member states. However, WSIS was expressly mandated to follow a multi-stakeholder approach and invite other stakeholder groups into its process, namely the private sector and civil society. Civil society responded actively to this invitation. Throughout the process, it negotiated at the level of both procedure and substance, trying to maximise its abilities to input into the process and to promote its very diverse concerns and policy recommendations. For these purposes, civil society organised itself into a complex and evolving structure of coordinating bodies and working bodies. The most basic organising unit of civil society was an increasing range of thematic and regional groups, which went by different names such as caucuses, working groups or families. The present assessment focuses on the thematic area of gender, which was represented in the WSIS process by the WSIS Gender Caucus (WSIS GC) and the NGO Gender Strategies Working Group (NGO GSWG).

Methodology

This assessment is mainly based on questionnaires, which were sent out early in 2008 (see the Appendix for the open-ended questions employed). It explores insider and outsider perspectives on the strengths and weaknesses, achievements and failures of WSIS gender networking and advocacy. Since the main interest of this assessment is in perceptions of outsiders, three groups were invited to fill in the questionnaires, of which groups (2) and (3) represent outsiders:

- Group (1) is made up of members of the WSIS GC and the NGO GSWG.
- Group (2) consists of representatives of civil society who involved themselves heavily in the WSIS process as chairpersons or focal points of other caucuses beyond gender.
- Group (3) is made up of individuals not directly involved in the advocacy efforts of the global WSIS process. This group encompasses representatives of UN agencies, representatives of women's networks, and representatives of foundations.

A total of seventeen responses were received, spread evenly over the three groups. The answers obtained were coded to indicate the individual respondent in relation to the group they

¹ The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the BCO Alliance, individual partners of BCO or *ict Development Associates Ltd.*

belonged to, e.g., (1a), (1b), (1c), etc. When quoting from the responses, the most obvious language mistakes are corrected to allow for easier reading.

Three main parts follow this methodological section. The first offers background information on the gender networking and advocacy that took place in the course of WSIS. This part draws on published background information and also on the first-hand experience of the researcher, who participated in WSIS gender networking and advocacy from 2003 until 2005.

The second main part analyses how the individuals invited into groups (2) and (3) positioned themselves vis-à-vis WSIS gender networking and advocacy and how they engaged with it. This part will not only look at the responses to the questionnaires, but will also address the kinds of email replies received and provide some additional background information on the respondents.

The third main part concerns itself with the respondents' impressions of WSIS gender networking and advocacy. "Networking and advocacy" was not defined in the questions but rather left open to see how respondents from groups (2) and (3) would address it. Several respondents not only referred to networking and advocacy as such, but also spoke about intellectual contributions and legitimacy as well as skills, which are all addressed in turn in this report. In addition, given the main objectives of this assessment, a subsequent section is devoted to a discussion of the responses obtained with respect to the questions of WSIS implementation and possible impact on (poor) women. Each thematic section of this part is structured in the same way. Responses from groups (2) and (3) are discussed first and then summarised. Following each summary, the responses from group (1) are analysed to contrast the outsider perspectives on WSIS gender networking and advocacy with insider perspectives. The assessment ends with a concluding section.

Gender networking and advocacy in the WSIS context

The thematic area of gender was represented in the WSIS process by two groups, the WSIS Gender Caucus (WSIS GC) and the NGO Gender Strategies Working Group (NGO GSWG). Both groups were founded early on in the first WSIS phase. The WSIS GC was formed at the invitation of the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) at the African regional preparatory conference for WSIS in Bamako, Mali in May 2002. It was unlike most of the other thematic or regional groupings in the WSIS process because of its financial base and makeup. Funding for the entire process came from the Norwegian and Swedish development agencies, the Finnish and Danish ministries of foreign affairs and UNIFEM. Like WSIS itself, the WSIS GC was conceived as a multi-stakeholder group open to representatives from governments, the private sector, and civil society.

The NGO GSWG was formed shortly after the WSIS GC at the first WSIS PrepCom Meeting in Geneva in July 2002 by gender

advocates who preferred a civil society-only working context. The initial members were the Association for Progressive Communications Women's Networking Support Programme (APC WNSP), the African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), Agencia Latinoamericana de Información (ALAI), International Women's Tribune Centre (IWTC), and Isis International-Manila. The NGO GSWG was only active during the first phase of WSIS, when there was some overlap regarding the regular membership of the two gender groups. The NGO GSWG dissolved when its main supporting organisations such as APC WNSP de-prioritised WSIS at the beginning of its second phase. Individuals who wished to keep working in the WSIS context then joined the WSIS GC.

Like all other thematic and regional groupings in the WSIS process, the WSIS GC and the NGO GSWG centrally concerned themselves with the development of political recommendations and associated advocacy, which they sought to coordinate during phase I. The normative concepts of "gender equality", "women's empowerment" and "women's human rights" were the central ones to be promoted, and this kind of advocacy led to the inclusion of one normative paragraph on women and gender in the Geneva Declaration of Principles and in the Tunis Commitment. In addition to this norms-based framework, both groups lobbied for the dual strategy, promoted since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, of mainstreaming gender and simultaneously obtaining special measures for women. This tactic was partially successful. While gender was not mainstreamed in the WSIS process itself, a number of WSIS provisions agreed to in phases I and II call for gender-sensitive approaches and for special measures for girls and women, particularly regarding education, training, jobs and careers.

Apart from this norms-based and dual strategy stance, both groups stressed the importance of understanding gender in relation to other systems of social differentiation such as race, ethnicity, or geographic location. This approach was central to the attempts of both gender groups to promote perspectives and issues of the global South. Beyond advocacy, the WSIS GC and the NGO GSWG engaged in networking and information sharing via mailing lists, websites and print products; national and regional meetings and capacity building workshops on gender advocacy and WSIS; the sponsorship of research on gender and ICTs; and a large range of summit side events in Geneva.

The second WSIS phase centred on internet governance and financial mechanisms to bridge the digital divide, for which two multi-stakeholder groups were created. One member of the WSIS GC and one former member of the NGO GSWG participated in the group concerned with internet governance. However, no broad recognition of gender issues could be achieved in this context, and the same was true in relation to financing and to WSIS implementation, which were discussed late in phase II.

In the wake of WSIS, two new forums have arisen at the global level: the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) and the UN Global

Alliance for ICT and Development (UN GAID). The creation of the IGF constitutes the implementation of a WSIS recommendation to this effect. Gender networking and advocacy in the IGF is formalised in a “dynamic coalition”, which consists of more or less the same civil society representatives who were also active during WSIS. UN GAID is the successor organisation to the UN ICT Task Force, originally founded in 2001, and its reinvention was only discussed informally in the WSIS context. Gender networking and advocacy within UN GAID is structured in two “Communities of Expertise”, one entitled “Gender, Development and Information Society Policies” and the other “International Task Force on Women and ICT”. The former is in large part built on the core WSIS networking and advocacy circle, while the latter continues networking that was for the most part carried out beyond this circle.

Feedback for the assessment

A total of seventeen people answered the questionnaires, and the breakdown according to the three groups is as follows. Of the twelve gender advocates contacted for group (1), seven participated in the assessment, but one of them preferred to be included in group (2) even though she was a founding member of the NGO GSWG. One responded to the questions in a telephone interview and the others filled in the questionnaire. For group (2), twenty prominent representatives of other thematic or regional advocacy groupings in the WSIS process beyond gender were chosen, three of whom could not be contacted due to problems with the email addresses. Of the remaining seventeen individuals, five responded in time. Adding the person originally contacted for group (1), there are thus six responses for this group. For group (3), sixteen individuals not directly involved in the advocacy efforts of the global WSIS process were contacted, including representatives of UN agencies, representatives of women’s networks, and representatives of foundations. Five responded by filling in the questionnaire, and one sent a book chapter on civil society involvement in WSIS instead. To augment group (3) while the study was in progress, all respondents were asked if they could suggest any individuals who had directly or indirectly been involved in implementing WSIS provisions as further possible interviewees. Following the suggestions obtained, eight more persons were contacted but no answers were received in the tight time frame allocated for this assessment.

Taken as a whole, the answers obtained represent a multifaceted view of WSIS gender networking and advocacy and its potential for impact and implementation. Before discussing the opinions that were voiced in these respects, however, it is instructive to look at the perspectives which informed them in more detail. In particular, since this assessment focuses on the perceptions of outsiders, it is important to understand how these outsiders engaged with WSIS gender networking and advocacy and what kinds of influence it had on them personally.

Assessing at the level of the individual: The positioning of outsiders

The first reactions of several members of outsider groups (2) and (3) to the invitation to comment on WSIS gender networking and advocacy were unease and reluctance. Disclaimers such as the following characterised many email replies: “I would be pleased to help as best as I can, but I am not sure how much use I can be. Looking over the questions, I can’t answer most, and where I can provide comments those comments are not likely to be very detailed.” For group (2), this reluctance might be explained by the complex nature of the WSIS process, which kept many people completely focused on their own issue area.

However, it is important to note that a stronger reluctance to participate was voiced within group (3) than within group (2). It was expressed even by representatives of women’s networks or organisations with ties to the area of gender and ICTs, who might have been expected to have had some interest in the WSIS process. From the outside, interest in the achievements and impact of WSIS gender networking and advocacy might consequently be seen as something predominantly entertained by those “specialists” who were personally involved in the process. This could indicate that no broad ownership of the gender-related results of WSIS has developed so far beyond the circle of gender advocates who achieved it.

Outsiders to WSIS gender networking and advocacy might additionally hold the insiders responsible for implementation, or at least think that the insiders and their networks also concern themselves with implementation at regional, national or local levels. An indication of this view can be seen in some of the responses to the final question of the questionnaire, asking if the respondents could suggest any individuals who have directly or indirectly been involved in implementing WSIS provisions as further possible interviewees for this study. Some respondents, who knew the researcher from the global WSIS gender networking and advocacy context, responded along the lines of “I think you know them all!” (2c). Similarly, a number of respondents named individuals active in the WSIS process, including in gender networking and advocacy but not limited to this field, as possible further interviewees.

Other respondents, however, volunteered further contacts. While the intended snowballing effect with regard to the subsequent invitations to participate in the assessment did not happen, it is nevertheless instructive to take a closer look at what kinds of contact were mentioned. Most centrally, these referred to collaborators in the respective regions, in the sample predominantly the Latin American region and the Arab region. They sometimes remained within one stakeholder group, such that representatives of civil society organisations or UN agencies recommended their peers, but they also sometimes crossed stakeholder lines between civil society and UN agency.

While it remains open how knowledgeable about or involved in WSIS implementation the recommended individuals are, at

least with respect to the answers and cross-referrals from the Latin American region a tentative sense of networking activities around the WSIS gender results emerges. Since there was no feedback from individuals based in Africa for this assessment, despite twelve questionnaires being sent to people working in this region, nothing can be concluded about networking for implementation of the WSIS gender achievements there. This constitutes a problematic “silence”, particularly given the fact that the WSIS GC was founded in Africa with a clear predominance of African founding members. As for the Asian participants in this assessment, they did not implicitly suggest any concrete WSIS-inspired networking for implementation through cross-referrals, so that the question remains open at this stage if any such development might be underway.

Situating respondents from group (2)

The answers obtained from members of group (2) attest to widely varying degrees of engagement with WSIS gender networking and advocacy or, put differently, widely varying degrees of influence of these undertakings on the informants. At one end of the spectrum, represented by respondent (2a), there appears to be only the most rudimentary of ideas about what was involved in gender networking and advocacy and no indication of personal interaction with it. This respondent only stated that, “Over 50% of the participants involved were women.” He answered one more question with “Don’t know” and left the other questions blank. In his reply, gender networking and advocacy are thus only associated with the female-to-male ratio of participants in the WSIS process.

Two respondents, (2b) and (2c), can be located in the middle of the influence and engagement spectrum. Both explained that they cooperated with the WSIS gender activists. Informant (2b) spoke of a “good interaction” between the gender group and her own group and of the establishment of some links. Significantly, regarding the question of which specific results WSIS gender networking and advocacy achieved, her answer was: “I can’t point to any specific outcome. And regarding the follow-up mechanisms (IGF, etc.), I still find the gender balance relatively male-biased, e.g., in panels.” Thus the only gender issue she named, just like respondent (2a), is the female-to-male ratio. Respondent (2c) attested to slightly more intensive and diverse interactions with WSIS gender networking and advocacy. He explained that he had been associated with an NGO that promoted it, and that he had engaged with and approved of written and other forms of gender advocacy positions. He even expressed ownership regarding gender advocacy positions because these had informed the stance of his own group, stating, “gender was well built into our concerns through the efforts of the gender activists.”

Three of the six respondents from group (2) can be situated in the high involvement and influence range of WSIS gender networking and advocacy. All display a fairly comprehensive understanding of gender networking and advocacy and an interaction with

it on several planes. This cluster suggests that individuals who felt themselves knowledgeable about WSIS gender networking and advocacy were more likely to participate in this assessment. Yet it is interesting to note that the three respondents at issue here nevertheless occupy very different positions with respect to WSIS gender networking and advocacy. Respondent (2f) is a long-time gender and media/ICTs advocate and was a founding member of the NGO GSWG. During WSIS, however, her principal involvement lay beyond gender and with the larger civil society process. Respondent (2e) is a co-worker and friend of one of the principal gender advocates at WSIS. This information about respondents (2e) and (2f) constitutes contextual knowledge that they did not include in their answers. Respondent (2d), in contrast, described her interactions with WSIS gender networking and advocacy in some detail, mentioning several planes. During WSIS, she entertained “a personal interest in some of the issues and personal relations with engaged gender activists.” And in the post-WSIS phase of her country, she was “invited to a couple of meetings and seminars, organised within projects focused on ICT and women” to share information on WSIS with them. Lastly, developments of the post-WSIS phase such as the IGF, including its gender networking and advocacy, constitute areas of inquiry that this respondent has been involved in from an academic point of view.

Situating respondents from group (3)

All respondents from group (3) who filled in the questionnaire can be considered gender-sensitive individuals at present. Yet their experiences with WSIS gender networking and advocacy varied tremendously, and so did their assessments of it. In particular, two respondents, (3a) and (3b), represent extremes in terms of positive and negative emotions and judgements. Respondent (3a) explained that she had not been gender-sensitive when she entered the WSIS process, but had experienced a conversion. She appeared very enthusiastic about gender networking and advocacy and showed a high degree of ownership of its achievements due to personal involvement. She was a member of a governmental WSIS delegation and explained that her government and she were instrumental in achieving the inclusion of gender paragraphs in the Tunis documents. She enthusiastically explained how the gender perspective opened new vistas for her and how she will engage herself academically with it in the future: “For me as the [national] negotiator, after Tunis I discovered a whole new dimension in gender, that in my case was not present before. Such is the case that I will coordinate in 2010 a special track on women and engineering in the World Engineering Congress to be held in [my country].”

Respondent (3b), in sharp contrast to respondent (3a), was an established gender specialist prior to WSIS. Not only that, but she is the administrator of a prominent gender and ICT mailing list. Her experiences with WSIS gender networking and advocacy left her deeply disappointed, and she displayed a complete lack of ownership of its achievements. In several of her responses, she mentioned how she unsuccessfully sought access to the

WSIS GC, for instance stating, “I think if you are in the network already, you were welcomed and included, but it felt very cliquish to me and my colleagues and I never found a way to gain access or be supportive.” Possibly as a consequence of the disinterest or rejection she felt from the WSIS gender advocates, she displayed no deeper interest in the achievements of gender networking and advocacy at WSIS and the implementation process. Regarding the latter, she stated that “This should be a question for the gender network folks who did the work.”

The other respondents in this group did not narrate any such dramatic experiences of conversion or rejection stemming from WSIS gender networking and advocacy. Their backgrounds reflect different stakeholder groups, with respondent (3c), like (3a), having been a member of a governmental delegation to WSIS, respondent (3e) a representative of a UN agency at the time of WSIS, and respondents (3d) and (3f) rooted in civil society, the former in a national context and the latter at the global level. Hence their gender-sensitivity and/or previous involvement with gender networking and advocacy encompassed very diverse perspectives.

Summary

As the previous sections have illustrated, it is instructive to take a closer look at how the outsiders to WSIS gender networking and advocacy situate themselves, and to try to understand what kinds of relations they entertained with WSIS gender networking and advocacy. The following conclusions can be drawn from this step in the assessment, which have an important bearing on questions of implementation and impact:

- The influence of gender networking and advocacy, traceable through the respondents’ interactions with it and understandings and evaluations of it, was not uniform but varied tremendously between the respondents.
- The interaction of outsiders with gender networking and advocacy happened at several levels. The most prominent of these was the level of global advocacy in the WSIS process, and others include the academic context, the national civil society context, the national political context, and the interpersonal context.
- The degree of influence of gender networking and advocacy on outsiders matches the quality of the personal interaction of these outsiders with gender advocates.
- A lack of personal interaction led to a reluctance to take part in this assessment. This was even true for gender and ICT specialists, who might have been supposed to have had a strong professional incentive to familiarise themselves with WSIS gender networking and advocacy and its achievements even from a distance.
- If personal interaction with WSIS gender networking and advocacy appears so paramount for engagement with it and its results, no broad ownership of the gender-related results of WSIS, achieved by an indirect engagement with it, can be presupposed.

- Concurrently, implementation at the regional and national levels seems to have remained associated with the gender advocates who worked at the global level and their networks.

We will now turn from the assessment of the individual involvement of outsiders with WSIS gender networking and advocacy to an assessment of what this networking and advocacy entailed and achieved in the eyes of the respondents.

Assessing at the content level: Unpacking “networking and advocacy”

The summary term “networking and advocacy” was used in the questions without further definition. It is therefore important to analyse which dimensions of networking and advocacy the responses covered. Since this assessment is meant to concentrate mainly on the outsider perceptions of WSIS gender networking and advocacy, it will be guided by the answers received from groups (2) and (3). Answers from group (1) will be considered subsequently to each theme raised by groups (2) and (3) in order to re-evaluate the issues from insider perspectives.

At the outset, it can be observed that the respondents from group (2) tended to mention more dimensions of networking and advocacy than those from group (3), which could be taken to suggest that group (2) was closer to it in the course of WSIS and thus more familiar with it. The crucial dimensions mentioned can be grouped into networking proper, advocacy, intellectual contributions and legitimacy, and skills. They will be discussed in turn.

Networking

The activity mentioned by almost all respondents from groups (2) and (3) is the one of networking proper, implicitly defined as the creation, maintenance or strengthening of ties and exchanges between individuals and/or groups of people. The prevalence of this aspect as such in the responses is not very surprising, given that two questions were explicitly about the influence of the WSIS process on the relationship between networks focused on media/ICT and gender issues and other networks. What is noteworthy, however, is that many respondents of group (2) stressed that networking in general represented the most important achievement in the course of WSIS and possibly the most important result for the post-WSIS period. For example, respondent (2f) stated, “In general, I think the WSIS experience helped to build connections and bridges among groups and networks working on widely different issues in relation to communication and ICTs, and many of those relationships have continued in other spaces and at other levels. As with previous UN world conferences, this is possibly one of the most important outcomes of WSIS.” Perfectly echoing this use of terminology, respondent (2d) also saw networking as the most important “outcome” of WSIS, as distinct from the “output” of the final documents. It needs to be emphasised that in this usage, output

and outcome designate qualitatively different results that arose simultaneously from the WSIS process and that by extension could generate different impact trajectories.

When respondents turned from networking in general to the internal and external networking of the gender groups in particular, their views were somewhat more differentiated and much more contradictory. Positive assessments by members of group (2) stressed the internal strengthening of gender and ICT networks, sometimes in relation to an increased understanding of the importance of ICT issues within the broader gender networks. For example, respondent (2d) stated that, “as far as the outcome in terms of strengthening social connection [is concerned], the WSIS experience has probably contributed in consolidating that sector of the women’s transnational movement that has a specific interest and expertise in information and technologies.” Regarding networking with non-gender groups, however, this respondent stressed that individual gender advocates rather than the WSIS gender groups as a whole played a decisive role.

The same point was made by respondent (2e), who observed that “many sub-groups and individuals did manage to develop a good range of connections with non-gender tech and development groups and these connections are very helpful in post-WSIS work.” He also saw the importance of networking for impact with respect to gender and ICT networks themselves, for which he described the possibility of a snowballing effect thus: “A couple of women’s groups have begun to see the seemingly tech area in a new socio-political and developmental light. And these groups are connecting with other groups and evangelising. And all this may develop into some momentum to engage with both the IS opportunities and challenges in a way to give women, and especially the poor women, some headway in the new social structures of the Information Society that are emerging.” Yet he was also quite explicit in pointing to the rifts that occurred within gender networking in the WSIS context, stating that, “The main gender group – let me clarify with this I mean the gender caucus – did not work, and broke in almost a dramatic fission.” Thus his response points to the positive proliferation of gender and ICT networking as well as its negative opposite, ruptures in gender and ICT networking.

The views on networking expressed by members of group (3) are slightly different from those expressed within group (2). Thus while respondent (3c), who was a member of a governmental delegation to WSIS, reiterated the point made above about the value of the WSIS process for networking, in her responses networking is linked to the multi-stakeholder process. She stated, “Overall, I think that probably the most valuable outcome of the long and often cumbersome process was all the networking taking place across so many borders.” And she went on to remark that “I think there is a growing recognition that work within these areas requires collaboration between different stakeholder groups, whether one likes it or not.” Similarly, respondent (3e), who was with a UN agency at the time of the WSIS process, linked networking and the multi-stakeholder ap-

proach: “In my view a well thought through collaboration between UN agencies, specialised civil society organisations and select governments was an important driving force.” However, this respondent implicitly questioned the sustainability of the networks. In contrast, respondent (3a) seemed to believe in the sustainability of gender and other networks. She, like respondent (3c), was a member of a governmental delegation to WSIS and drew on her own experiences of the multi-stakeholder approach in her answers. She exhibited a strong focus on national and local gender networks and their ongoing work, stating that the national “networks are working towards a long-lasting change in society, technology and gender; this change was strengthened after WSIS.”

Respondent (3d) was the only one to state that she did not view networking across certain thematic areas as useful: “I felt that the human rights, women’s advocacy (rights), freedom of expression, etc. networks were present and positioned as an extension of the WSIS gender initiative. I personally do not see that this linkage is constructive or fruitful.” Finally, there is respondent (3b), who runs her own gender and ICT network. As explained earlier, she remained an involuntary outsider of the WSIS gender network. Consequently, she perceived it as “cliquish”, but was able to draw important lessons from the experience. WSIS, she stated, helped her map the relevant organisations and improve her own networking: “WSIS was important for my network because it helped us to become more aware of the groups already working in the space and gave us a better opportunity to learn and grow our efforts in a more knowledgeable, sophisticated, and inclusive process.”

To sum up the responses from groups (2) and (3) concerning networking:

- Networking constituted the activity that appeared most crucial to almost all respondents. It was seen as a result of WSIS that is not only distinct from the advocacy results that were simultaneously achieved but also more important than these.
- Multi-stakeholderism was affirmed as an important new and appreciated quality of networking by the members of governmental delegations and the member of a UN agency included in this sample.
- One respondent went against the grain of the implicit assumption that any kind of networking is good by calling into question the usefulness of gender networking across specific thematic areas.
- There is a question of how sustainable the WSIS-inspired networks will prove to be, with tentative assessments ranging from not sustainable to sustainable.
- In some contexts, gender and media/ICT networks may have been strengthened on account of WSIS. However, ruptures also occurred, fracturing gender and media/ICT networks in other contexts, most notably WSIS itself.

- The gender and media/ICT networking that took place during WSIS may have helped the larger gender networks to recognise the importance of ICT issues.
- It was not the gender groups of WSIS as a whole, but instead some of their individual members and sub-groups that were instrumental in reaching out to and networking with non-gender-focused groups.
- The chances perceived for an impact of the WSIS gender provisions were seen to depend on how sustainable the gender networking spurred by WSIS will prove to be.
- The importance of national or local gender networks for impact was stressed.

Turning now to group (1), it is surprising to see that the preoccupation with networking and the high esteem for the overall WSIS networking results expressed by groups (2) and (3) do not have a clear parallel in this group. Most centrally, members from group (1) voiced their preoccupation with a continuing gap between traditional gender networking around established “women’s issues” and networking around new gender and ICT issues. Respondent (1a) spoke of “a gaping hole in the networking,” and respondent (1d) saw this gap as “one of the failures of the process.” Participants (1c) and (1e) mentioned the pressing tasks to “build bridges” and explain to women who are not in the ICT field how ICT issues feature in different areas of concern to women and are not an “elitist” preoccupation.

The one networking area in which many respondents from group (1) credited WSIS with positive results is networking among gender and ICT advocates at the global and regional levels. For example, participant (1e) saw WSIS as a starting point for networking around women and Information Society issues in her region. She explained that WSIS accelerated the process of identifying people working in this area and of beginning a dialogue and taking strategic decisions. According to her, WSIS may also have increased the number of women working in this field, because there is now more awareness of gender and ICT issues.

Similar experiences of WSIS as a catalyst for a network of gender and ICT advocates were voiced by respondents (1d) and (1f). However, unlike the previous respondent, they did not unequivocally attest to the sustainability or coherence of this group. Thus respondent (1f) said that, “I think what we’ve collectively achieved is the formation of a ‘gender, women and communication’ constituency that advocates around gender/ICT issues.” She also noted that “the most active and committed core of gender advocates still remain connected with each other and have started a process of reflecting and consolidating to grapple with the post-WSIS challenges.” Yet she felt that “the broadening up of the gender/ICT network has in some ways made the network more dispersed. [...] In the WSIS follow-up it has not been possible to recreate a single, active and dedicated gender network that participated in the global and regional processes.” Respondent (1b) described the formation of the UN GAID Communities of Expertise on gender as a result of the networking following

the WSIS process, and respondent (1a) pointed to “alliances that continue to engage with the global policy processes post WSIS” concerned with internet governance and UN GAID. In contrast, respondent (1d) shared that “the WSIS process did bring together gender advocates and created a sense of community. Unfortunately that seems to have dissipated since 2005.”

In sum, it appears that groups (2) and (3) focused on the networking aspects of WSIS gender networking and advocacy much more than group (1) and saw it in a more positive and more diverse light. Group (1) was very preoccupied with the gap between traditional gender networking and the new gender and ICT networking, because this situation marginalises their concerns within the women’s movement, which apparently constitutes their primary point of reference. A tentative conclusion might be that exclusive attention of gender and ICT advocates on the broader women’s movement may not be the most productive course of action for impact and implementation. This is because the observations about the importance of personal involvement summarised in sections 4.1.1 and 4.1.2 suggest that this kind of involvement can be facilitated in quite diverse interpersonal contexts, as most starkly expressed by the “conversion” of one of the members of group (3) to gender sensitivity in the political and academic realms of ICTs. Additionally, it has become obvious how important the internal networking among gender and ICT advocates is for continuing work at regional and global levels.

Advocacy

Advocacy, implicitly understood as lobbying for the adoption of specific political positions and “language”, was mentioned almost as often as networking in the responses. Again, this is not very surprising on the face of it, given that the questionnaires addressed “networking and advocacy”. Of interest is rather how advocacy was described and evaluated by the respondents. With respect to this issue, as opposed to the issue of networking, the answers of groups (2) and (3) are quite similar and will hence be discussed jointly.

As mentioned, a central finding is that the respondents see the significance of WSIS not so much in the achievements of advocacy but of networking. While virtually all respondents agree that the gender provisions would not have appeared in the final documents without the gender advocacy, the advocacy influence of civil society on the substantive WSIS process is seen as quite small in general, with gender issues forming no exception to this rule. For instance, respondent (2b) stated, “It is my impression that despite their relatively professional way of working, the results in terms of e.g., concrete proposals in final documents were still fairly limited. However, the same may be said about other thematic areas, such as e.g., privacy.” While respondent (3e) explained the limited influence of the advocacy with reference to the prevalence of general political disagreement, respondent (2c) saw the complex nature of the issues as another difficulty associated with the WSIS process: “It was dif-

difficult to make a few simple, clear demands that could be rallied around and acted upon – or so it appeared to me. This was in the nature of the WSIS itself, I think.” Consequently, he assessed the gender advocacy arguments as “solid” but also as “detailed and complicated”. Contradicting this view was respondent (2d), who praised the gender group as “very effective in making itself visible and its statements and goals clear.” In addition, respondents (3a) and (3b) appeared quite satisfied with the advocacy results. The latter for instance stated, “I understand it was a very powerful network and really ensured that gender was included in the language of the documents that came out of the event.”

Beyond these generalised assessments, several respondents considered the content and achievements of the gender advocacy in more detail. Those who differentiated between norms and concrete actions generally found the former acknowledged and the latter insufficiently addressed. Thus respondent (2d) explained that “At a first glance it seems that in spite of a general recognition of the need to mainstream gender-centred perspectives, not many concrete proposals have entered the documents and the diplomatic language remains very vague as to how and by whom efforts in the right direction should be taken. But this could be said for a number of other issues.” While this respondent thus seems to blame this result on the overall WSIS process, others saw it as a shortcoming of the gender advocacy. For instance, respondent (3e) opined that, “As far as the goals of the advocacy activities were concerned, these were seen [...] in the realm of bringing attention to the gender equality issue though less clarity existed on what exactly this should mean and what are the priorities and target beneficiaries.” Also, he mentioned that beyond the “traditional ICT access and skills issues” there was a lack of a “clear-cut gender agenda” regarding the “more democracy- and participation-oriented topics”.

Sweepingly negative assessments of the gender advocacy came from respondents (3d) and (2e). For example, the latter remarked, “How well they expressed their main goals – not at all well enough.” He further elaborated that, “There was no clarity of goals nor a basic minimum agreement on gender-related thinking and ideology.” Yet even this respondent pointed to a qualified success of the gender advocacy: “I think the outcomes that are there consist in having the bare minimum language in the texts, so women and gender words do keep occurring in the text. And even if not enough, their presence is important. Some benefits are more clear – like the text on gender disaggregated data, which can be used to insist on compliance as the numerous post-WSIS data collection processes are on.”

The quotations presented so far concern the gender advocacy directed at the intergovernmental process and the official WSIS documents. Beyond this, a few respondents also spoke of the gender advocacy addressed at civil society. Respondent (2f) distinguished the two gender groups in this context thus: “I think both groups worked to introduce gender content to the civil society proposals and WSIS documents, but the latter group [the NGO GSWG] was more involved with the civil society process

and proposals as a whole.” She saw the following drawback in this arrangement: “This meant both a lack of input from some (though certainly not all) gender activists on issues not directly perceived as ‘gender issues’, and probably less opportunity to voice their issues among broader civil society.” Interestingly, there was only one respondent, (2b), among groups (2) and (3) to mention that the existence of two gender groups as such “appeared a bit confusing for ‘gender-outsiders.’” Respondent (2c) illustrated the positive influence of gender advocacy on non-gender groups within civil society, stating that in his group, “gender was well built into our concerns through the efforts of the gender activists.” Respondent (2d) concurrently attested to the success of gender advocacy at this level, assessing that “the message they were able to convey was straightforward, in terms of key concepts that sounded like the outcome of a consolidated advocacy practice; in terms of capability to convey the message and make it recognised and accepted by the broader stakeholder group.”

Finally, respondent (2f) attested to the fact that on the way to implementation at the regional or national level, further advocacy is necessary. Asked for examples of implementation, she stated, “In the Latin American eLAC programme (2005-2008), and in the [national] white paper on the information society (2006), we were collectively able to lobby to introduce specific gender content. In the case of [my country], it remained on paper, so it’s hard to talk of implementation.”

One explanation for the contradictory assessments regarding the quality of the gender advocacy could be that these were implicitly based on different standards, encompassing both strategic and intellectual considerations. Strategic considerations mean an evaluation of the advocacy content in terms of how well suited it was to gain recognition and adoption, i.e., how useful it was within the given political context, and how useful it might be for further advocacy or implementation. Intellectual considerations, on the other hand, mean an assessment of the advocacy content in terms of scope, explanatory value, coherence and the like.

To sum up the responses from groups (2) and (3) regarding gender advocacy:

- Advocacy constituted the second main dimension addressed by respondents, and generally referred to the official negotiations.
- Regarding the official documents, the prevalent sentiment was that the achievements of civil society in general, including those of gender advocacy, were fairly limited. The advocacy results were consequently considered to be of less importance than the networking results.
- Nevertheless, the gender advocacy is broadly credited with having been visible and successful in bringing considerations of women and gender to the official documents, which would otherwise have been devoid of any such considerations.

- The existence of two gender groups involved in advocacy was not a major concern for most respondents.
- The more detailed assessments of the gender advocacy were very contradictory. It was variously seen as clear and unclear, sufficient and insufficient. Some saw it as too general, with serious gaps regarding concrete proposals and whole issue areas. Whether the basis for these assessments was formed by strategic or intellectual considerations remained unclear in most replies.
- A few respondents also addressed the gender advocacy that was directed at civil society. Interestingly, no other forms of advocacy among civil society constituencies were mentioned, which raises the question whether it was specific to the realm of gender.
- The gender provisions achieved through advocacy at the global level do not automatically inform policies at the regional or national levels, but require renewed gender advocacy at these levels to get reaffirmed. This means that global gender advocacy does not have any direct implementation and impact trajectory at the regional or national levels.

In contrast to groups (2) and (3), respondents from group (1) evidenced a much higher preoccupation with the gender advocacy that took place in the course of WSIS. They consequently provided a substantial number of nuanced reflections on its content, organisation and larger political context. To begin with, respondent (1b) remarked that WSIS has so far only constituted the second global policy arena for women and media/ICTs issues: "There really wasn't another global policy-making space on women, media and ICTs apart from WSIS and Beijing and its reviews." Several respondents commented on the advocacy challenge that WSIS posed on account of its preoccupation with ICT issues, which made the feminist legacy of media advocacy from Beijing insufficient. Thus respondent (1c) spoke of "the Information Society concept" as "a new political arena". Respondent (1a) diagnosed the emphasis and shortcomings of the advocacy positions accordingly, mentioning "an excessive media orientation in the gendered conceptions of the Information Society; not incorrect but partial in its analytical frameworks" and hence "conceptually inadequate to address the nature of issues on the one hand, and the politics involved on the other of what became bones of contention in WSIS 2."

Respondent (1c) similarly mentioned a "lack of feminist approach" with respect to ICT issues, but explained that the gender advocates at WSIS, given their low numbers and the unfavourable overall political climate, had no other choice but to resort to the Beijing Platform for Action to guide them. Respondent (1b) in contrast felt that the recourse to advocacy concepts that had been previously agreed upon at forums such as Beijing held the comparative advantage of constituting a basic common denominator: "We had a basic agreement about what was unnegotiable in terms of language while other civil society networking was sometimes a quite complicated thing."

Crucial challenges for gender advocacy were not only seen in the main WSIS themes, but also regarding the participants in the process. Thus respondent (1b) pointed out that WSIS constituted "a mixed-gender space", and that the multi-stakeholder approach turned WSIS into "the global policy-making venue where I've seen the greatest visibility of the private sector." As for the challenge of the mixed-gender space, or rather the absence of an overall focus on gender, this meant that gender advocates had to lobby both the intergovernmental process and civil society. In the estimate of respondent (1c), civil society groups at times posed the bigger problem: "I must say I was in shock! Indeed civil society sometimes was more problematic than the government text proposals. It required much more attention from the women to ensure that the advocacy work could reach both sides." The lack of an overall gender perspective meant that women were treated as one "problem group" among others. As explained by respondent (1a), "Women jostled along with 'older persons, indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, and remote and rural communities' to find mention in the text in an 'inclusion' based, share of the pie approach which effectively reduces gender discourse to an 'also women' rhetoric."

Regarding the challenge of the multi-stakeholder approach, it needs to be recalled that the participation of representatives of the private sector in the WSIS GC was a main reason for the subsequent creation of the civil society-only NGO GSGW. Apparently, there was no comparable disagreement among gender advocates about the effects of inviting governmental representatives into gender advocacy spaces. And importantly, it can be noted that no questionable compromises between gender advocates and the private sector were reported, so that the exclusion of the latter appeared as a matter of principle rather than bad experience for some of the gender advocates. At the same time, several gender advocates were unhappy about the lack of common strategy and saw it as a major weakness, particularly given the low overall numbers of gender advocates at WSIS. For instance, respondent (1b) remarked, "I believe gender advocacy at the WSIS was still weak. This is because there were very few of us and also largely due to the division created by having two gender networks."

The scarcity of gender advocates was not explained only with reference to "the absence of the broader women's movement" in ICT contexts. Respondent (1c), for one, also mentioned the ongoing debate within "the women's movements about the effectiveness of the gender advocacy work at the global level." Additionally, she linked the low number of gender advocates "onsite and also at national and regional levels" to the difficulty of obtaining funding because the main funds had already gone to the WSIS GC. In partial contradiction with the prevalent view of the scarcity of gender advocates, respondent (1d) stressed several times that due to the strategic use of ICTs, the group concerned with WSIS gender advocacy was quite large and from many regions, which positively influenced the advocacy. She stated, "I think the biggest difference with WSIS was that we were able to communicate frequently through the use of email and internet. This has made

a major difference to how people interact, who interacts (e.g., it is much more multicultural than in the past) and most importantly, how we define and select the issues for advocacy.”

As for its results, the gender advocacy was broadly credited with having achieved the inclusion of important normative paragraphs on women and gender. Respondent (1c) also stressed that another achievement was that certain text proposals that were detrimental to gender equality were erased from the draft documents. Echoing assessments voiced in groups (2) and (3), a lack of achievement was diagnosed with respect to more concrete stipulations and was either blamed on the WSIS negotiations or on gaps in the gender advocacy itself. Regarding advocacy strategies, respondent (1a) was the only one to point out explicitly “the lack of clarity about what strategic lobbying and tactical feminism means in a global policy process.”

Interestingly, several responses indicate that the normative gender content in particular has proved to be strategically useful for subsequent gender advocacy at the regional and national levels. Thus respondent (1f) explained that, “Our advocacy was certainly successful in raising awareness about gender equality and women’s empowerment in the WSIS process. [...] The discussion around gender opened up a process of similar discussion in national processes.” The respondents from the Latin American region in particular had concrete evidence to share in this respect. Respondent (1c) explained how the advocacy gains at WSIS were either drawn on or duplicated in their regional endeavour: “The gender advocacy ensured that at least one paragraph was agreed in the regional conferences/documents [...] It gives to the WSIS implementation phase tools which the gender advocates can use for the inclusion of gender perspective and women’s rights in information society policies. This is what has happened in the Latin American region; after the fight against the resistance of the male delegates, the women have achieved the creation of a Working Group on Gender within the eLAC 2010 action plan.” Participant (1e) concurrently pointed out that the creation of the Working Group on Gender was made easier by the achievements of the WSIS gender advocacy because the gender paragraph constituted “a point of reference” and now the argument could be made that “we cannot move backwards” but must build on WSIS.

In essence, groups (1), (2) and (3) hence raised comparable issues, but differed in their emotional connotations or judgments. Members of group (1) took the results of the advocacy in the final documents much more seriously than groups (2) and (3); they did not mention that they saw it as taking a back seat to the networking enabled through WSIS. Criticism regarding the quality of the gender advocacy was more widespread in group (1). But the feeling of a job well done was expressed as well, particularly in conjunction with a fuller account of the unfavourable circumstances under which the WSIS gender advocacy had to operate. Also, the need to advocate within civil society was not just mentioned, but noted as an additional burden imposed by the WSIS process, as was the prominent presence of the private

sector, which created a central strategic challenge for gender advocacy. There is hence significantly less celebration of the multi-stakeholder approach in group (1) than in group (3).

The notion was bolstered that the gender provisions achieved through advocacy at the global level do not automatically inform policies at the regional or national levels, but require renewed advocacy at these levels to get reaffirmed. Responses from group (1) made it clear that, indeed, the same people may involve themselves at these different political levels. Interestingly, the ambivalence about whether advocacy content should be informed and judged by strategic or intellectual considerations that was detected with respect to groups (2) and (3) appeared to be also implicit in many responses from group (1). Yet importantly, members of group (1) attested to the usefulness of the normative WSIS gender approach, in particular for regional advocacy.

Intellectual contributions and legitimacy

In the responses of members from group (2), a third dimension in which WSIS gender networking and advocacy was evaluated by some can be detected, and that is the issue of intellectual contributions, often tied to the issue of legitimacy. For instance, respondent (2f) gave the opinion that, “I think one of the main strengths was the identification of power issues in relation to the gender digital divide.” She implied a tie between this knowledge and the perceived legitimacy of gender and ICT issues within the gender context when she talked about the difficulty of “raising awareness among other women’s/gender networks that communication and ICTs are strategic political issues that directly concern them, and are not just a matter for specialists. I think WSIS is some ways helped to raise that awareness, but only marginally.” Concurring with the notion of a spread of the gender and ICT theme is respondent (2e), who observed a snowballing effect with regard to women’s groups that “have begun to see the seemingly tech area in a new socio-political and developmental light.” Similarly, but with reference beyond the gender context, respondent (2d) explained that “gender networking has certainly contributed to a more sophisticated understanding of a gender-oriented dimension of knowledge societies both within the process and outside.”

Staying more within the WSIS context, respondent (2c) saw the arguments of the gender advocacy as “solid”, and may have implied that this quality influenced their perceived legitimacy positively: “The arguments (though often detailed and complicated) were solid [...], and the gender issues enjoyed quite wide support among intergovernmental organisations as well as some governmental people (as well as NGOs).” Finally, respondent (3e), when discussing the question of impact, mentioned that, “The overall encouragement was a factor which should not be excluded in impact assessment.” This encouragement may refer to the increased legitimacy and hence validation of the gender and media/ICT approach at any kind of level.

To sum up the responses from group (2):

- Interwoven with the issues of networking and advocacy, but also going beyond them, is the dimension of intellectual contributions and legitimacy achieved by the WSIS gender networking and advocacy.
- Some respondents suggested that new intellectual ground had been broken by the WSIS gender networking and advocacy.
- These intellectual contributions heightened the legitimacy of WSIS gender networking and advocacy and of the preoccupation with gender and ICT issues at different levels: within the WSIS multi-stakeholder approach; in networking contexts, particularly with respect to non-ICT-focused gender networks; and possibly also among the gender advocates themselves.

The intellectual contributions hence appeared as a vital step in establishing the political field of gender and ICTs.

Respondents from group (1) provided an echo of this stress on intellectual contributions and heightened legitimacy, but generally felt that much more work needs to be done. Respondent (1a), despite her detailed criticism of WSIS gender advocacy, granted that an intellectual endeavour had started, even though it apparently had got stuck again: "The beginnings of a discourse on community-centric and people-shaped socio-technical models were seen in WSIS 2 that looked at appropriation of technology and since then not much has really happened in terms of a feminist re-visioning of the digital paradigm and the Information Society." Similarly pointing out unfinished tasks, respondent (1c) suggested that the issues of private sector involvement in gender advocacy and of the relationship between different networks including gender and ICT ones should be approached through research.

Respondent (1f) diagnosed educating others as a success of WSIS gender networking and advocacy: "I do think that for many government representatives, the WSIS was where they first got their 'education' about gender equality and women's empowerment and why gender matters in ICT." But governments were not the only ones to learn this lesson according to her: "I think this whole process also resulted in more awareness within the ICT/information society community about gender differences and inequalities within the sector." The same point was made by respondent (1b), who said, "I think it has increased the technologically focused networks' understanding of gender issues." Somewhat conversely, respondent (1d) assessed that, "I don't think that gender issues are more prominent now in the ICT area than they were before WSIS." And participant (1e) remarked on an overall heightened legitimacy of gender issues through WSIS, saying, "What we did opened the possibility of including this topic in the conversation." She went on to stress that the work in the WSIS process hence brought women and ICTs to the agenda of feminist or-

ganisations and scholars, it raised the interests of some and created the possibility for others to listen.

To sum up, several outsiders remarked on the intellectual contributions and increased legitimacy achieved by WSIS gender networking and advocacy. While group (1) again appears quite critical of itself and its influence in this respect, the overall credit given to WSIS gender networking and advocacy can be seen as an important precondition or asset for implementation and impact.

Skills

The discussion of specific skills constitutes the last main dimension of WSIS gender networking and advocacy that some of the respondents from group (2) touched upon. Respondent (2f) introduced this topic in the form of questions, saying she would need more data, but to assess the results of the WSIS gender networking and advocacy, she would not only look at the official documents but "would also look at issues such as: did women (as a group) gain leadership within the process and has that empowered them to influence policy at other levels? If so, in doing so, were those women able to bring in new (e.g., feminist) perspectives on the issues dealt with?"

Respondents (2b) and (2d) explicitly touched upon the use of ICTs as a skill of WSIS gender networking and advocacy. Respondent (2b) said, "They seemed more than average organised and able to utilise ICT for networking and communication, not least due to strong APC presence." And respondent (2d) similarly stressed their "quite open cooperative attitude, realised through outreach activities and the creation of cooperation spaces," which she explained in historical terms: "I would suggest this was also the outcome of consolidated experiences, including experiences in the outreaching and inclusive usage of ICTs which, as we know from testimonies and literature, have been strategically deployed since the UN Beijing conference precisely to strengthen networks of cooperation and share information, data, ideas."

At the most basic level, even the short reply of respondent (2a) that, "Over 50% of the participants involved were women" could be interpreted to signify women's increased skill and determination to work at the global level. Conversely, a lack of skills within WSIS gender networking and advocacy was clearly stated by respondent (2e), who mentioned an insensitivity to "needs of democratisation of the [WSIS gender networking and advocacy] space, and of developing mutual respect, trust and consequently comfort."

To sum up the responses from group (2):

- The issue of skills came up in several responses.
- The question of a possible gain in leadership qualities and influence, which could subsequently come into play at other political levels, was seen as important to pursue.

- Positive mention was made of the inclusive use of ICTs for WSIS gender networking and advocacy.
- Negative mention was made of the lack of skills to democratise WSIS gender networking and advocacy and to develop respect, trust and comfort.

When we now turn to the responses obtained from group (1), we find similar issues raised, with criticisms of the organisational and personal failings within WSIS gender networking and advocacy understandably forming the most consistent theme. For instance, respondent (1b) said that, "The lack of transparency, accountability, clarity in decision-making within the Gender Caucus was a major weakness. The mere fact that there were two gender groups – NGO GSWG and WSIS GC – was already a major weakness. [...] There was competition for resources, credit and prestige." The issues of the split and competition within WSIS gender networking and advocacy were also raised by respondent (1c), who stressed that this "caused the waste of opportunities" to influence the process. Respondent (1a) was similarly outspoken about the internal failures within WSIS gender networking and advocacy, even stating, "The earlier UN contexts did not see as much a 'failure' of feminism as the WSIS did."

Regarding the question of how skilled the gender advocates were in working at the UN level, two opposing views were expressed. Respondent (1b) listed as a strength the "knowledge of UN processes", but participant (1e) instead mentioned as a weakness that few gender advocates had previous experiences with the formal procedures of an international conference. Respondent (1d) specifically mentioned the productive use of email and internet for networking and advocacy. And respondent (1c), echoing respondent (2f), addressed the issue of leadership in a positive light: "The women who were playing a leadership role learned a lot and became political actors in this field at national and regional levels. They became a voice in this field, working so that the women's rights perspective could be raised in such arenas as well as in the post-WSIS process."

In sum, WSIS was seen as having provided a context in which some skills already prevalent in gender and ICT networking and advocacy could flourish, other skills could develop, and major lacks of skill became so glaringly obvious that they can now serve as examples of what to avoid in the future. While the internal failings strongly preoccupied group (1), they were obviously not visible to many outsiders. Leadership skills were stressed as important for continuing the gender advocacy work at regional and national levels.

The questions of implementation and impact on (poor) women

The questions of whether there are any examples of gender aspects of WSIS reflected in implementation at the country or regional level and of an impact of the WSIS gender networking and advocacy on (poor) women (in developing countries) are important to consider independently, given the guiding questions of this impact assessment.

Regarding implementation, it has become obvious that the WSIS provisions have not been taken up seamlessly in the regional and national contexts. Instead, each of these contexts has its own political processes. In the Latin American region, where the negotiation of an ICT strategy happened after WSIS, this translated into the necessity for gender advocates to engage in renewed advocacy efforts to either promote the WSIS gender provisions or other gender provisions, as explained earlier. Concurrently, respondent (3a) from Latin America remarked that: "The [national] networks are working towards a long lasting change in society, technology and gender; this change was strengthened after WSIS." In addition, respondent (3e) shared, "Can't say with any precision but some efforts were made by UNDP to link gender and ICT in the formulation of the National Information Society Policy documents, especially in the Western Balkans countries, and to some extent in other strategic frameworks such as National Poverty Reduction Strategies."

Referring to an Asian country in which apparently no post-WSIS negotiations have happened, respondent (2e) stated, "I am sorry to say that, I don't think many governments ever read the WSIS document once they came back to their capitals. It has very low political profile. Can surely say [our national] government I don't think even takes anything in it seriously. They have their own ICTD and internet governance take, and they go by it." Similarly, respondent (2d) said, "I feel not much specific on gender has been conceptually elaborated at the institutional level until now" and specified that, "apart from better national and transnational connections, not much has changed as far as projects, policies, specific initiatives" are concerned. Finally, respondent (3c) remarked on the difficulty of attributing gender initiatives directly to WSIS. "In Rajasthan, for instance, there is a special focus on girls' school attendance, but I don't know if or how much this could be as a result of WSIS." This difficulty of tracing with certainty any kind of direct trajectory is an important point to acknowledge. In line with it, respondents (2c), (3b) and (3d) said that they did not know about evidence for implementation or had no data on it.

The same difficulty to point to any direct trajectory is also salient with respect to the question of an impact of WSIS gender networking and advocacy on (poor) women (in developing countries). Five respondents, (2b), (2c), (2d), (2f) and (3d), answered that they did not know of any such impact. Respondent (2c) remarked that, "Given the limited impact of the WSIS as a whole, and how abstracted it was from the reality of most people, it would be a tall order to expect any impact." Respondent (3e) provided a more nuanced view on potential impact, stating that, "I am sure that there was some impact which, though, would be very hard to distinguish anyway and which might have come within a larger WSIS emphasis highlighting the role of the Information Society and Digital Divide rather than due to the advocacy of specific ICT-for-Gender issues (there might be impact studies though). The overall encouragement was a factor which should not be excluded in impact assessment."

Respondent (3c) said that, “I cannot say that I can point at impact in this way. I think there is more awareness created but unfortunately I think this is work that needs to be continuing in order to provide impact.” The sentiment that it is too early to talk of impact in this way was reinforced by respondents (3a), (3b) and (2e). The latter shared, as already quoted in part, “First instinct after reading this question is to give an exclamation of complete negativity, and despair. But trying to be positive one must say that a couple of women’s groups have begun to see the seemingly tech area in a new socio-political and developmental light. And these groups are connecting with other groups and evangelising. And all this may develop into some momentum to engage with both the Information Society opportunities and challenges in a way to give women, and especially the poor women, some headway in the new social structures of the IS that are emerging. Properly done that can mean a lot for gender equality.”

It is crucial to note once again that the potential for impact expressed in opinions such as the one just quoted is seen to result from the networking and possibly the intellectual contributions achieved in the WSIS context, and not from the advocacy achievements. Impact is hence not really associated with any “implementation” of WSIS provisions that were gained through advocacy and that result in projects and policies that target (poor) women. This matches the finding that renegotiation rather than implementation is happening at the regional and national levels. Concurrently, those respondents who tried to describe what they saw as impact mentioned qualities such as good networking, contextual change and personal awareness or encouragement, which can be meaningfully related to the central “outcomes” that WSIS was credited with, i.e., networking, intellectual contributions, heightened legitimacy and improved skills. Again, these outcomes were not seen to result from the document “output”, but as independently and simultaneously achieved in the course of WSIS.

To sum up the responses from groups (2) and (3):

- It is still very early to speak of implementation and impact.
- So far, there is not much evidence for an implementation and impact trajectory from WSIS to the regional or national levels of politics and projects and ultimately to the individual level of a transformation of circumstances and outlook.
- Regions and nations follow their own political trajectories and do not simply adopt WSIS provisions. Consequently, WSIS gender provisions do not “trickle down” and get implemented in these contexts in a direct way. Instead, they require renewed advocacy efforts to get politically reaffirmed, which might then lead to implementation.
- Impact should not primarily be traced in relation to governmental policies, initiatives or projects potentially resulting from WSIS, but with respect to changes in networks, individual perspectives and contexts achieved or inspired by the WSIS “outcomes”, which were unrelated to the advocacy results.

These crucial points get reaffirmed through the responses obtained from group (1). The two respondents from the Latin American region, (1e) and (1c), referred to the eLAC 2010 plan and the creation of the Gender Working Group, as discussed earlier. Participant (1e) stressed that there was no clear trajectory from the global to the local and that it was impossible to establish a clear causality between WSIS and anything else. She also pointed out that it is difficult to evaluate an impact immediately. However, this respondent also mentioned an influence that registered at the academic level, stating that students in their research projects use “that famous paragraph that we did”, which refers to paragraph 12 of the Geneva Declaration of Principles. Respondent (1c) was also cautious in talking of an impact: “From the LAC perspective [...] excepting the measurement of information society work, it seems too early to observe any impact. Also because at the national machineries the policies regarding the information society are conducted by men and the women’s ministries/departments/offices are not involved in the development of those policies, except in Chile and the Dominican Republic.” Concurrently, respondent (1f) stressed the importance of “gender champions” within governments and of sustained gender advocacy at the national level.

Respondent (1d) answered the question about an impact of the WSIS process on (poor) women (in developing countries) in a similarly nuanced manner, but with more reference to personal transformation and norms: “I would argue that you cannot make such instrumentalist linkages. It is clear that the lives of poor women have been and are being affected by the massive penetration of ICTs, especially cell phones, into developing countries. However, changes are due to programmes and projects undertaken by national/regional governments, donors, NGOs, etc. and by the example provided by early adopters within the communities themselves. The impact of WSIS was to give a certain legitimacy to this process and to underscore the importance of ensuring that the benefits of ICTs are shared somewhat more equitably.” In addition, she stated, “At the government level there were also impacts in that some countries were probably encouraged to make changes in their regulatory processes as a result of the types of issues that were brought up at WSIS.” A similar view on the issue is expressed by respondent (1f), who explained, “I think it is difficult to attribute changes in the lives of women solely to the WSIS process. Development programmes and policies can make a difference in women’s lives directly and indirectly. I think what was important in the WSIS process is that it opened up a space for awareness-raising around the importance of including strong gender perspectives and commitments amongst participants of the process.”

Respondent (1a) replied to the question about impact by sketching a negative top-down trajectory and a positive bottom-up trajectory. On the one hand, she responded, “Nothing that I can imagine. In fact the WSIS process could not even exercise enough political clout to sustain aid in ICTs. APDIP shut down and funding for ICTs by some big donors like DFID dried up or were cut back soon after WSIS. UNDP had already closed down its ICTD thematic

area (not as a fallout but despite WSIS, and a misplaced assumption that mainstreaming ICTs was the next big agenda).” But on the other hand, she mentioned, “However, there is a non-linearity about impact, and the post-WSIS structures and civil society trajectory in relation to the Internet Governance Forum and GAID have helped break the consensus around the dominant market-led model. This has happened on account of some groups taking forward advocacy around notions like access, sustainability, public goods, etc., and also sharpening a gender and ICT theory around these.”

To sum up, given the numerous political and other processes at the global, regional and sub-regional levels which are somehow informed by a global political process like WSIS, it is as difficult to talk about clear cases of implementation as it is to point to clear cases of impact. But at the same time, most respondents attest to the fact that impact and implementation do exist, when they are understood in their multifaceted and diffuse nature, manifesting themselves at various levels, from other global contexts to local contexts, and encompassing many aspects, from individual to group to contextual features.

Conclusion

To recall, the aim of the overall BCO impact assessment is to test the hypothesis that “Policy advocacy and networks influence and reshape the agendas of ICT and ICD policy-makers and development practitioners.” As far as the gender networking and advocacy of the WSIS process is concerned, virtually all of the respondents in this assessment attested to its influence on the WSIS agenda. However, most respondents simultaneously pointed out that this influence, when judged in terms of the final documents negotiated in the WSIS process, was not very big. But what precisely does that suggest? The more detailed considerations of the advocacy results that were expressed presented contradictory takes on the scope, quality and usefulness of the changes effected in the official documents. A reason for these contradictions was found in the different implicit standards of evaluation, which appeared to encompass strategic as well as intellectual considerations. An important future task would hence be to think through these standards in order to arrive at more grounded assessments of the scope and significance of advocacy influence on political agendas.

When assessing advocacy in strategic terms, it is also crucial to keep in mind that the global political sphere is distinct from the regional and the national levels, which follow their own political processes. Hence what needs to be examined as well is how changes that were advocated for and achieved at the global level may be of varying use in regional and national political contexts. This latter task needs to be pursued with particular reference to the “advocacy chain” that has become visible through the responses, in which results of the global WSIS process have been renegotiated in other global contexts as well as regional and national contexts instead of just having been adopted and implemented. In terms of advocacy content, it appears that the

normative stance of gender equality, women’s human rights and empowerment, coupled with the promotion of the dual strategy of gender mainstreaming and special measures for women, were usefully promoted at the global level in this respect.

The identification of the “advocacy chain” furthermore raises the central question of who involves her- or himself in this kind of advocacy at different levels. Here, the answers initially pointed to the presumption prevailing among outsiders that the same gender advocates, or at least the same gender advocacy networks, would be active at different political levels. Evidence from the Latin American region bolstered this notion. Yet at the same time, it has become obvious that the core of gender advocates active in the field of global media and ICT policy is quite small and that this core is very interested in finding more allies. Most centrally, this is seen to require them to convince more traditional gender networks of the importance of ICT issues, to convince ICT networks of the importance of gender issues, and to convince gender and ICT networks of the importance of a global process like WSIS and its possibilities for impact.

The responses obtained for this assessment point to the success of WSIS gender networking and advocacy in all of these directions, however limited in the number of people and uneven at the level of the individual. It has become clear that initial outsiders to WSIS gender networking and advocacy did end up with the crucial feeling of ownership of the gender perspective and its results at WSIS. Here, it is vital to learn more about how this happened. It appears that the most important route to this ownership was positive personal interaction with the WSIS gender advocates and an incorporation of their networking and advocacy work into the outsiders’ own work. These forms of interaction and incorporation could happen irrespective of the precise nature of that work, be it largely political, academic, or implementation-oriented, and it took place at different levels, from the global to the regional and national.

Beyond this direct influence of WSIS gender networking and advocacy through active interaction with it, the assessment has found no evidence that indirect forms of involvement with WSIS gender networking and advocacy, such as for instance tracking of its achievements online, may lead to any kind of involvement with it or ownership of it among outsiders. This finding is particularly interesting with regard to gender and ICT groups, which might have been supposed to recognise a stake in following developments such as WSIS gender networking and advocacy even from a distance. At bottom, this finding suggests that merely making information available online is insufficient to influence new constituencies.

Given the finding that positive personal interaction with WSIS gender advocates seemed central to its influence on outsiders, it appears that an open organisational structure and sustained personal outreach would be important for maximising its influence. The achievements of WSIS gender networking and advocacy were not optimal in these respects. Mentioned as an asset were the skills of the gender advocates to use ICTs inclusively in

order to allow constituencies who were off-site of the WSIS preparatory process to influence the advocacy. Liabilities were seen in the sharp disagreements and undemocratic and untransparent decision-making processes that characterised the WSIS GC in particular. These liabilities could be offset to a large degree by the high visibility, integrity and commitment to outreach and collaboration of certain gender advocates in the WSIS process. But it became obvious that liabilities of this kind need to be avoided in the future in order to foster better participation in and ownership of gender networking and advocacy.

Ownership of WSIS gender networking and advocacy could develop in different stakeholder groups, exemplified in this assessment by representatives of civil society, UN agencies, and governments. What needs to be further investigated is how the private sector factors into these multi-stakeholder alliances for gender. This task seems even more pressing given that the debate within WSIS gender networking and advocacy about how the private sector should be dealt with was centrally responsible for the split of the gender advocacy constituency into two groups, one accommodating the private sector and other stakeholder groups and the other relying on the established practice of a civil-society-only working space.

In closing, the two guiding questions for the gender impact assessment will be considered. To repeat, the first question asks about the ways in which gender and ICT networks have influenced agendas of ICT and ICD policy-makers and practitioners. Since most of the answers obtained dealt with the “how” of gender networking and advocacy, this question is most fruitfully interpreted to be concerned with the techniques, strategies and assets employed by the gender and ICT networks and what kinds of influence can be attributed to them. The area of political gender advocacy proper was just discussed, but it is important to acknowledge that many respondents in this assessment suggested that the influence of WSIS gender networking and advocacy needs to be understood not only in the direct advocacy result on the global documents (the “output”). Also, and in fact much more important according to many respondents, it needs to be considered with respect to other dimensions, labelled “outcome” and achieved simultaneously and independently from the output of advocacy-influenced documents.

These outcome dimensions encompass:

- The creation and strengthening of networks and of the gender and media/ICT perspective within networks.
- Intellectual contributions to the field of gender and media/ICTs and a concurrently heightened legitimacy of this field.
- New or strengthened skills among the WSIS gender advocates and their networks, including precedents of what to avoid in the future.

Taken together, these dimensions suggest that gender networking and advocacy with respect to ICTs was deepened and broadened through the WSIS process, and that the process spurred new collaborations, deeper insights, better capacities and hence a more solid establishment of this field as a legitimate and productive undertaking in which outsiders can find and join competent insiders. This means that ICT and ICD policy-makers and practitioners have gained more visible opportunities, incentives and potential allies to incorporate gender considerations into their agendas, and that it has hence become harder for them to ignore gender issues and gender advocates.

The second guiding question asks about the extent to which the networking interventions have resulted in gender-responsive policy and process changes, implementation and delivery at the national level. Again, as far as policy processes are concerned, it needs to be pointed out that WSIS gender networking and advocacy is judged to have influenced the global documents, but that these appear to get renegotiated rather than just adopted and implemented at the national level. In any case, it was felt that any forms of WSIS implementation or impact at the national level would be at a very early stage and therefore could not be perceived in very concrete terms yet. In general, most respondents were very reluctant to construct a direct trajectory from a global process like WSIS to the regional or national levels. They stressed that many different influences are simultaneously at work in a whole range of political processes pertinent to ICTs, so that no clear causality or trickle-down effect can be established.

Also, the responses suggested that understanding impact as resulting from a top-down, implementation and delivery trajectory generated by policy documents would at best only represent part of the picture. The other, and for many respondents more important, part is the outcome trajectory that lies beyond advocacy and builds on the networking, intellectual contributions, legitimacy and skills mentioned above, whose impact will probably be even more contextual, dispersed, pervasive and at the same time autonomous and harder to pinpoint than that of the advocacy and policy chain. The first traces of this were seen in contextual changes and changes at the levels of networking and individual outlook. In this way, the kinds of impact generated by a world summit like WSIS can be seen as much more than the results triggered by governments, their documents and implementing agencies, and this perspective ties back into the elaboration on the previous question, that the influence of gender and ICT networks on ICT and ICD policy-makers and practitioners can most fruitfully be understood as presenting them with a newly consolidated field of expertise. This field of expertise might appear more vital and interesting to engage with and more difficult to ignore on account of its growth during WSIS and in the post-WSIS phase. ■

Questions used in the three questionnaires

(Numbers in parenthesis indicate which groups the questions were addressed to.)

Which aspects, if any, do you consider unique to the networking and advocacy efforts regarding media/ICT and gender issues in the WSIS context, as for instance compared to the media/ICT and gender networking and advocacy in other UN contexts such as the Beijing process? (1)

How visible was the gender networking and advocacy in the WSIS process, and how well did the gender activists express their main goals to the stakeholder group that you belonged to? (2/3)

What were the strengths of the gender networking and advocacy in the WSIS process? (1/2/3)

What weaknesses or failings did the gender networking and advocacy of the WSIS process have? (1/2/3)

How did the approach, scope and/or methods of gender networking and advocacy compare with other forms of thematic or regional networking and advocacy of the WSIS process? (1/2)

How did the gender networking and advocacy interact with other forms of networking and advocacy in the WSIS process? (1/2)

Are there any specific outcomes of the WSIS process that you would call an achievement of the networking and advocacy regarding media/ICT and gender issues? If so, which outcomes

are these, and could they possibly also have resulted without the gender networking and advocacy? (1/2/3)

How do the achievements of gender networking and advocacy compare with those of other thematic or regional networks of WSIS, for instance in terms of scope or degree of success? (1/2)

In which respects do you find the WSIS outcome with regard to gender to be different from or similar to the outcome of other global political venues that have addressed gender issues, such as the Beijing process? (1)

Which new kinds of participants, if any, did the WSIS process bring to the global media/ICT and gender network? (1)

If you identified new kinds of participants, how have they contributed to and possibly changed the networking and advocacy around media/ICT and gender issues? (1)

In what way, if any, may the WSIS process have set a precedent for future gender media/ICT networking and advocacy, for instance in terms of new alliances, methods or goals? (1)

In what way, if any, has the WSIS experience brought about a new relationship between other gender networks and networks focusing on gender and media/ICTs? (1/2/3)

In what ways, if any, have the relationships between the gender and media/ICT networks, the technologically focused networks and the development networks changed on account of the WSIS experience? (1/2/3)

Do you know of any examples where gender aspects of WSIS have been reflected in implementation at the country or regional level? (1/2/3)

What impact (i.e., lasting change in the lives, behaviour, potential, etc. of those beyond the WSIS process, in particular a) women in general and b) poor women in developing countries) can be attributed to the gender networking and advocacy of the WSIS process? (1/2/3)

Could you suggest any individuals who have directly or indirectly been involved in implementing WSIS provisions as further possible interviewees for this study? (1/2/3)

INVESTIGATION 4

Impact Assessment

Introduction

DAVID SOUTER

The nature of impact assessment has been discussed extensively within the development community as a whole, and a solid body of experience and methodology has been developed over many years. At the heart of this general understanding lies a crucial distinction between impact assessment and evaluation. Evaluation, to put it at its simplest, is primarily concerned with identifying the results of an intervention in terms of the objectives that were defined at its inception. Impact assessment is concerned with much wider results over a longer period of time, often summarised as “lasting and sustainable change in people’s lives.”

Both evaluation and impact assessment are crucial to understanding what happened as a result of any intervention and its implications for the design and implementation of future interventions. They are critical to the internal learning processes of implementing agencies such as BCO partners. They are also widely used by donors to validate past and inform future funding decisions. Not surprisingly, there can be considerable tension between these different uses of evaluation and impact assessment findings.

Impact assessment is more challenging than evaluation because it seeks to explore issues from a wider range of view-

points over a longer period of time. Effective impact assessment work depends on a substantive understanding of the context within which any intervention takes place, and of the wider social, economic and political changes which are taking place around it. It also, ideally, needs sufficient time to provide enough perspective and enable assessment of sustainability. It may be even more difficult in the case of ICD because of the very rapid pace of change in ICT technology and markets.

For the fourth investigation in Component 3 of the BCO Impact Assessment, BCO partners chose to look at impact assessment itself, at their own current experience of it, and at how impact assessment processes might be most effectively deployed in ICD. The investigation included two elements:

- An overview of current thinking and practice on impact assessment, written by David Souter.
- A workshop during which BCO partners explored their own experience and considered how they might build impact assessment more effectively into their own future work.

Both the overview and workshop reports are included in this section of the overall report. ■

ICD and Impact Assessment: Investigation Report

DAVID SOUTER

Introduction

This document is the final report of Investigation 4 of Component 3 of the Impact Assessment of the Building Communication Opportunities (BCO) programme, which was implemented by DFID, SDC and six international NGOs in the period 2004-2008. Background information about the BCO programme can be found in Annex 3.

The majority of work within the BCO Impact Assessment has reviewed particular experiences of BCO and other agency work concerned with information and communications in development (ICD). The purpose of this particular investigation was more general: "to contribute towards improved processes for monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment" in the ICD sector in general and in relation to BCO agencies' own work in particular.

BCO partners agreed that the scope of the investigation should be as follows:

- To review the approaches to evaluation and impact assessment which are used by BCO partners and other ICD agencies.
- To compare these with approaches to evaluation and impact assessment which are used in other development organisations, including both donor agencies and mainstream development NGOs.
- To assess whether, how and where the evaluation and impact assessment requirements of ICD activities differ from those of other development contexts.
- To identify measures which BCO partners and other ICD agencies can take to improve the quality and value of their monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment.

The investigation has been made up of two main parts:

- This report provides a general review of impact assessment literature and experience, and explores possible areas in which ICD impact assessment may have different requirements from those in other development sectors. It was prepared, on the basis of desk research and shared experience, both as a stand-alone document and as a background resource and framework for discussion by BCO partners in the workshop which formed the second part of the investigation.
- A workshop was held by BCO partners in London on 18-19 March 2008 to provide an opportunity for them to review their own approaches to evaluation and impact assessment and compare these with practice in other organisations and the requirements of other stakeholders.

The specified aims of this workshop were:

- To establish the relationship between implementation, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and impact assessment.
- To discuss objectives and best practice in impact assessment.
- To review BCO partner experience to date and compare with experience of selected NGOs with substantial impact assessment experience and established models of practice.
- To understand donor perspectives on impact assessment.
- To identify areas in which ICD impact assessment may differ from that in other sectors.
- To identify ways in which BCO partners – and other ICD agencies – can move forward in this area

A report of the workshop follows this report.

Report structure

This report is divided into two main parts.

- Part 1 summarises the issues and debates surrounding impact assessment in development, describes broad approaches to it which are widely advocated within the development community, and raises some of the challenges which it poses to development agencies, particularly NGOs. This part is not specifically concerned with ICTs or ICD.
- Part 2 considers how and where the evaluation and impact assessment requirements of ICD activities may differ from those in other development contexts. It makes some suggestions about ways in which BCO partners and other ICD agencies might improve the effectiveness of their impact assessment work, drawing on the experiences described earlier in the report. This part of the report also incorporates some input from discussions at the BCO impact assessment workshop held in March 2008.

Annex 1 draws attention, briefly, to some of the evaluation and impact assessment documentation which was provided by BCO partners as input to this investigation. A list of selected resources concerned with impact assessment is also attached in Annex 2. This is not intended as a comprehensive bibliography, but as a provisional list of material which readers of the report may find useful in exploring further some of the issues raised in the report. ■

Impact assessment practice and experience

Introduction

Part 1 of this report is concerned with the broad objectives of impact assessment, and with the approaches to it which have emerged from the experience of development agencies, including both donors and implementing agencies.

It seeks to provide a straightforward account of the issues and the challenges they pose, which can be used as a basis for discussion within BCO and other ICD agencies. This is not a comprehensive account of impact assessment, but a starting point for discussion of how it relates to ICD. It seeks to build on the broad consensus which has emerged from experience and review by development agencies, and which is reflected in the literature. A short list of relevant literature is attached to the end of the report, and readers should explore this for more comprehensive accounts, particularly of methodologies and implementation issues.¹

This part of the report looks in turn at the following issues:

- What is impact assessment?
- Why does impact assessment matter – and to whom?
- How does it relate to monitoring and evaluation?
- How are the different terms used in results assessment related to one another?
- What does impact assessment measure?
- What are the main challenges in measuring impact?
- What processes and methodologies do development agencies use in measuring impact?
- What special factors need to be taken into account when considering particular types of work?

What is impact assessment?

There is no standard definition of “impact assessment” in the development literature. However, there is a broad consensus about its meaning with which most of that literature concurs. Variations of wording in definitions result from different authors’ attempts to capture as much as possible of that consensus in a single phrase.

These are two examples of such definitions from texts which have been widely used:

Impact assessment refers to an evaluation of how, and to what extent, development interventions cause sustainable changes in living conditions and behaviour of beneficiaries and the differential effects of these on women and men (Oakley, Pratt & Clayton 1998).

Impact assessment is the systematic analysis of the lasting or significant changes – positive or negative, intended or not – in people’s lives brought about by a given action or series of actions (Roche 1999).

The latter wording, which was agreed following extensive interactions between experienced development managers, draws attention to three key points which are common to almost all definitions and which are central to the discussion of impact assessment within the literature. These are:

- Impact assessment is concerned with change in people’s lives, and specifically with lasting and sustainable change.
- These changes take place within complex contexts, of which individual development interventions form only part.
- Those which occur in practice may differ from those that were intended.

Why does impact assessment matter – and to whom?

The purpose of impact assessment is generally felt to be three-fold:

- To find out what changes have occurred in people’s lives following a development intervention.
- To understand how far those changes can be attributed to that intervention.
- To learn from that assessment in order to improve future practice – either within the existing intervention, or for the design and implementation of new activities.

Impact assessment therefore both looks back at what has happened and forward to what might happen in the future.

Most people agree that it is important in any field of endeavour to understand as well as possible the degree of success or failure one has had in achieving objectives and to know what

¹ Three works that may be particularly useful here are those by Oakley, Pratt and Clayton for INTRAC; by Roche for Oxfam and Novib; and by Gosling and Edwards for Save the Children.

happened as a result of one's actions. This is as true of development as any other field, and it is equally true for governments, international agencies and NGOs. Much development work builds on assumptions and theories of change. Impact assessment enables these assumptions to be tested, refined, revised and adapted in the light of real experience on the ground. It provides the evidence which is crucial for good decision-making.

In the past, evaluation and impact assessment have sometimes been seen primarily as tools for accountability, especially accountability to donors. Today, however, development agencies emphasise three main stakeholder or client groups: donors, implementing agencies, and those who are directly or indirectly affected by the interventions whose impact is assessed. The primary emphasis for these three groups might be summarised as follows:

Donors	Accountability
Implementing agencies	Learning
Project users	Improved performance

- Donors are concerned primarily to understand the results of their financial support. They want to know whether a particular intervention is achieving results which are consistent with their development objectives and with the particular objectives they are funding through a specific intervention. More generally, they want to know whether their overall activities within a sector or a country are contributing towards the development goals to which they are committed (such as the MDGs). This is partly a matter of the accountability of implementing agencies to donors, but also of the accountability of donors to taxpayers and their international peers.
- Implementing agencies are (or should be) concerned primarily to understand whether they are achieving their particular objectives for an intervention, but also to establish whether there are other results from their interventions which affect people's lives, and to learn lessons from experience which will help them to be more effective in the design and implementation of their work in future. For them, accountability to donors may well be an important part of evaluation (see below), but impact assessment should go beyond this, providing deeper and richer understanding of the results of interventions and their relationship with project users and the communities in which they live.
- The third – and ultimately most important – group of stakeholders consists of those who are affected by the intervention. These include both “target beneficiaries” – the communities or social groups for whose direct gain an intervention is taken by an implementing agency – and other communities and social groups whose lives are affected indirectly. Here, too, there is an important distinction between evaluation – which is primarily con-

cerned with what happens to “target beneficiaries” – and impact assessment – which should reach more deeply into changes that take place within wider society, and identify unexpected outcomes, whether these are positive or negative.

The requirements of these three stakeholder communities are not always consistent, and this can cause some difficulties for implementing agencies. Many NGOs recognise the competing pressures of accountability (demonstrating to donors that they have had value for their money, and should pay for more) and learning (exploring weaknesses and failures as well as strengths and achievements in order to ensure better practice in the future). One BCO partner has described this dilemma thus: “Becoming a learning organisation and promoting our good experiences doesn't mean we have to share everything with everyone.”

Finally, in this context, some have argued that impact assessment should be used as an advocacy tool within development debates, for example, that it should be used to demonstrate the perceived value of particular approaches in order to secure greater funding for them from donor agencies. This has sometimes led implementing agencies to seek out findings which will reinforce their assumptions and persuade donors of their value rather than taking a more open-minded approach to identifying impacts.

The consensus in the impact assessment literature here is clear. INTRAC summarises it like this:

Proof of effectiveness is not the main goal of impact assessment: it is concerned more with understanding, and learning from, the processes and approaches that have led to achieving a particular impact so that such knowledge and experience can be used in comparable situations.

The *findings* of impact assessments, in other words, may well have value in demonstrating the effectiveness of particular approaches to donors, but impact assessment itself should be an honest and open-minded undertaking aimed at finding out what changes happened, rather than seeking out good news.

“Proof” of effectiveness is, in any case, almost impossible to achieve. The complexities and uncertainties of impact assessment, discussed in section 6 below, are such that it is much more of an exercise in judgement than forensics. Impact assessment practice is primarily about the acquisition of evidence that is sufficient and sufficiently reliable to enable judgements to be made about impact with a fairly high degree of confidence. This requires discipline in data collection, rigour in data analysis and realism in interpretation, but even the best impact assessment will always leave room for doubt and debate about its findings. In practice, much can be learnt from that interpretive debate as well as from impact assessment results themselves.

How does impact assessment relate to monitoring and evaluation?

“Impact assessment” is usually discussed alongside “monitoring” and “evaluation”. A number of collective terms have been suggested to cover all three linked activities, and one of these – “result assessment” – will be used in this report. The word “results” will also be used as a collective term covering the different levels of finding (output, outcome/effect and impact; see below) which emerge from them.

As with “impact assessment”, there are many different definitions in the literature for “monitoring” and “evaluation”. However, as with “impact assessment” too, these definitions fall within a broad consensus about what is meant, and different wordings reflect attempts to capture as many as possible of the nuances which are contained in that consensus.

Here are two examples of definitions, taken from a recent IN-TRAC publication:

Monitoring is the systematic and continuous assessment of the progress of a piece of work over time, which checks that things are “going to plan” and enables adjustments to be made in a methodical way.

Evaluation is the periodic assessment of the relevance, performance, efficiency and impact of a piece of work with respect to its stated objectives (Bakewell 2004).

These can be set alongside the Oxfam/Novib definition of impact assessment, which was given earlier:

Impact assessment is the systematic analysis of the lasting or significant changes – positive or negative, intended or not – in people’s lives brought about by a given action or series of actions (Roche 1999).

What is being measured in each process might be summarised as follows:

Activity	Measuring	Primary timing (see note below)
Monitoring	Ongoing activities	During implementation
Evaluation	Performance against objectives	At end of implementation
Impact assessment	Lasting and sustainable change	After implementation

In practice, of course, these three processes are closely related to one another:

- The data required for measurement are closely related (though not necessarily identical) and need to be collected cohesively (not least in order to reduce the management burden on project personnel).
- Monitoring of project performance should lead to changes in implementation practice and so performance.
- The boundaries between evaluation against objectives and the measurement of change are sometimes blurred; the former often forms part of the latter.

It should be noted that the timing of these activities also overlaps. So, while evaluation and impact assessment are usually undertaken at the end of implementation (part-way evaluations also sometimes happen), they require data collection during implementation and must be established before then as an integral part of project or programme design. The need for integration of evaluation and impact assessment from the earliest stages of the project cycle is emphasised within evaluation and impact assessment literature.

How are the different terms used for result assessment related to one another?

A number of different terms are used for the different kinds of “results” which emerge from monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment. Once again, although the wording of definitions varies, there is a broad consensus on the meaning of these terms throughout the literature. The four key terms concerned are “inputs”, and three (or four) different terms for “results” themselves – “outputs”, “outcomes” or “effects” and “impact”.

Here are brief summaries of these terms as they are used in this report:

- *Input* refers to the financial, physical and human resources used within an activity.
- *Output* measures the extent to which an activity’s planned inputs have been made and planned services deployed.
- *Outcome* (or *effect* – the use of the two words is close to interchangeable) measures the use of inputs and outputs and the short-term results arising from these.
- *Impact* measures the long-term changes in people’s lives, social behaviour and economic and political structures that can be attributed – in whole or part – to the activity.

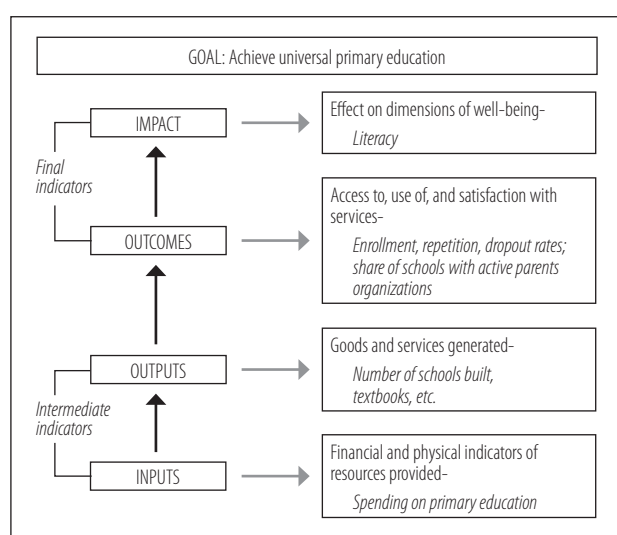
Hivos defines the three “result” terms similarly, for contractual purposes, as follows:

- *Outputs* = direct results (products, services) from activities related to short-term objectives

- *Outcomes or effects* = results in terms of the direct or indirect effects of the outputs, related to mid-term or intermediate objectives
- *Impact* = structural (lasting, significant) change, related to longer-term development objectives or goals.²

In practice, the evaluation of outputs and outcomes/effects is usually confined within the parameters defined by project terms of reference: they are the results of the project activities themselves. Impact assessment, however, reaches beyond this to ask whether the project results themselves made any difference. It is also much more concerned with placing the results of particular interventions in their wider context.

There are many illustrations of the relationship between these terms to be found in the literature. This diagram, which offers examples of the kind of result that might be measured by each term in the case of primary education, is taken from the World Bank's management literature on Poverty Reduction Strategies.³



An example more familiar to BCO partners might be a programme to establish telecentres in rural communities in a particular district, with the aim of extending access to information to local people, for example information about health and agriculture.

In the case of such a telecentre:

- The *inputs* concerned would be the financial resources required to pay for it and for the necessary equipment and connectivity, physical links to the telecommunications network, personnel to install and manage the telecentre, and whatever other resources might be required to put facilities in place.
- The *outputs* would be measured by the number of telecentres which were established, the amount of equipment made available, software installed, connectivity made available, and so forth: in other words, the facilities themselves. Putting these facilities in place would meet some of the criteria set out in project terms of reference, but the facilities alone would not have any impact on the behaviour or the lives of local citizens. Monitoring often focuses on output measurement, but should also address the measurement of outcomes.
- *Outcomes* would include the use that is made of the facilities by local citizens – who used them, and for what purposes? In particular, outcomes to be measured would include whether people used them to gain the information resources for which they were established (in this case, information about health and agriculture). Important issues would include the levels of use by different social groups (disaggregated data) and user views of services provided. This would be the most important level of measurement in an evaluation, but the use of facilities during the project cycle does not necessarily imply “lasting and sustainable change” in people’s lives.
- Measuring *impact*, therefore, would go beyond the relationship between users and facilities to look at how information gained was used – for example, whether it led (directly or indirectly) to changes in hygiene or farming practice – and, beyond that, whether it thereby led to changes in the quality of life, for example in general levels of health and rates of infectious disease, or in levels of agricultural productivity. Impact assessment should also look for more distant impacts related to the project purpose – for example, changes in school attendance resulting from better children’s health; or changes in land ownership resulting from better yields; or the impact of farm changes on people’s incomes and expenditure or on patterns of migration. Finally, it should also look for unexpected results that are unrelated to project purpose – for example, improved communications with family members living at a distance, or (less positively) problems associated with online gambling.

Outcomes, therefore, tend to be directly related to projects and to be measured in the shorter term. Impacts may be much less directly related to projects, and tend to be measured in the longer term. The further along the chain of measurement one moves, from outputs to outcomes to impact, the wider becomes the range of results which might be associated with an intervention – and the more difficult becomes the process of assessment.

² Definitions taken from Hivos (2004).

³ World Bank, PRSP Sourcebook, available at: web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY/EXTPRS/0,,contentMDK:20175742~pagePK:210058~piPK:210062~theSitePK:384201,00.html

What does impact assessment measure?

The meaning of change

Impact assessment is concerned, then, with change in people's lives rather than with change in the facilities or resources which are available to them. But what is "change"? And how can it be measured?

Most development interventions have some theory of change. Sometimes this is explicitly described as such: Panos London, for example, aims to use "theory of change" documents as part of its programme design process. More often, it is set out in a different management tool, such as a logical framework (logframe) of the kind that DFID asks its partners to prepare. Sometimes, it is not explicit but apparent in the assumptions underlying the decisions made about project design and implementation. However it is formulated, though, it should include a logical sequence through which it is hoped the intervention will bring about a desired change for or within its target community.

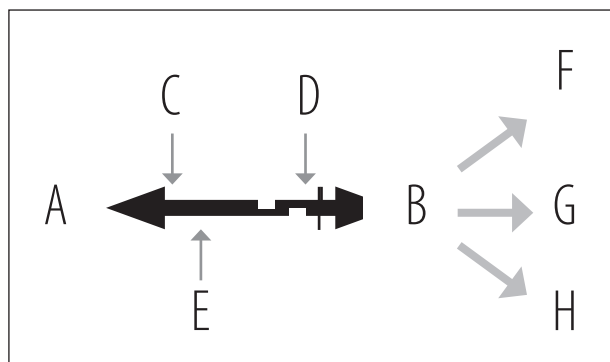
Change, of course, is happening all around us. Nothing in human society is static. Even the most stable and apparently "unchanging" communities experience changes in social and family relationships, in the yield and price of crops, in weather patterns and fish stocks, in their interaction with government, with outsiders, with their neighbours.

Change also takes place in many different ways. Some is highly visible – for example, the increasing use of mobile phones by people on city streets; some much less so – for example, change in relationships within the family. Some is very rapid – mobile phones again an obvious case; some gradual or almost imperceptible – the evolution of species the most obvious example. Some can be clearly linked to specific causes – like the change in mood of a football crowd when a goal is scored; much is a great deal more gradual and amorphous – for example, changing attitudes to the role of women in society. Change, in short, is as diverse as any other phenomenon, and different strategies are needed to capture different types of change.

What is more, change is not necessarily lasting or sustainable. New practices can be adopted because their novelty is attractive or because they offer short-term benefits at the expense of long-term viability. One change often leads to another, so that a behavioural change observed one year into implementation of a three-year programme might have been displaced by something else entirely by the time the programme ends. The pace at which people make use of new facilities or adopt new practices (which might be called "habituation") is both gradual and variable, often dependent on the numbers of adopters reaching a critical mass – which, again, makes it difficult to judge long-term results from short-term interventions. And, as development agencies know well, not all development interventions are sustainable once their initial funding period expires.

Measuring change is difficult for many reasons, some of which are discussed in the next section of this paper. In particular, in a development context, change rarely results from any single process or development intervention. On the contrary: development changes arise from a mixture of social, economic, political and environmental factors.

As a result, change is rarely linear in the way that "theories of change" sometimes imply. Most impact assessment literature now recognises that change in the real world is made up of much more than event (or intervention) A leading to consequence (or outcome) B. In real conditions, consequences are influenced not just by intervention A itself, but by the way in which it is implemented. Both intervention and outcome are influenced by a variety of other factors (C,D,E), which affect performance in achieving B, while they themselves in turn influence other dimensions of behaviour well beyond the terms of reference of the intervention itself (F, G, H). These relationships are illustrated in the diagram below.



The context in which development interventions take place is also changing all the time: always changing gradually, as the result of long-term economic and environmental trends; sometimes changing dramatically, as the result of natural disaster or civil conflict. Measuring change is necessarily difficult when the baseline context moves, and particularly when it moves rapidly or drastically.

Often, one of the most useful ways of looking at change is, therefore, to ask what is known as the counterfactual question: what would have happened if the project had never taken place? This question is particularly important if a number of different factors could have led to project objectives actually being achieved. (For example, a reduction in the incidence of malaria may be observed following a programme to distribute bed nets, but might actually result primarily from changes in weather patterns that have reduced the numbers of mosquitoes.) In such cases, the counterfactual question might be rephrased as: would the observed result have occurred whether or not the project had been implemented?

There is more discussion of these problems of causality in the next section of this report. They are particularly important in the assessment of pilot projects, whose purpose is not just to pro-

vide evidence about whether a particular intervention is viable in itself, but of whether it can be replicated in other locations or scaled up from community to district or national implementation. A high proportion of ICD projects have been pilot projects of this kind.

What are the main challenges in measuring impact?

All impact assessment experts agree that it is difficult to measure impact. In the past, some implementing agencies have argued that the difficulty of measuring impact is so great that it is not really worth the effort. Few would take that view now: too many past development assumptions have been proved fallible and too much past development expenditure has proved wasteful. The need for evidence-based decision-making permeates the development community today.

However, the challenges remain considerable, and this section of the report draws attention to some of the most important of those which are discussed within the literature.

There are, it should be noted first of all, usually two tiers of analysis involved in establishing impact. To establish that an intervention has had (a particular) impact on project participants, it is necessary to establish two things:

- Firstly, that it has had an effect on the behaviour of participants which is related directly to the intervention itself.
- Secondly, that this effect has led to changes in the material circumstances, attitudes or behaviour of those participants.

Only the former of these assessments normally forms part of an evaluation, but both are required for impact assessment. Impact assessment should also go further by assessing the unexpected as well as the desired results of an intervention on participants, and by considering impacts on non-participants.

Many of the difficulties involved in impact assessment stem from the complexities of causality. Historians and economists are particularly familiar with these. Many – one should probably say, all – social change results not from single linear processes of change but from the cumulative effects of many different trends within society and the interactions between them. Obvious examples of this for historians are the origins of the First and Second World Wars. These were triggered, respectively, by the assassination of an Austrian archduke in 1914 and by Hitler's invasion of Poland in 1939, but few would argue that they were caused by these. Their causes were far more complex, with roots in many different social, economic, political, military and diplomatic issues of the preceding generation and before. The actions and inactions of many people at many times contributed to the outbreak of war, as did economic and social transformations outside the control of individuals or nation-states. Very

few of these actions or inactions were ever taken with the object of achieving war, nor is any one of them likely to have brought war about alone.

The following paragraphs raise and comment briefly on the most important of the challenges which have affected impact assessment in development. There is insufficient space to explore these fully in this report, but more detailed consideration can be found in sources listed at the end of the report. The challenges discussed here are in turn:

Challenge 1: The complexity of change

Challenge 2: The challenge of context

Challenge 3: The challenge of the baseline

Challenge 4: The challenge of attribution

Challenge 5: The challenge of aggregation

Challenge 6: The challenge of disaggregation

Challenge 7: The challenge of the non-participant

Challenge 8: The challenge of the unexpected

Challenge 9: The challenge of perception; and

Challenge 10: The "longitudinal" problem

Challenges, of course, should be seen as what they are: as challenges, not as insuperable obstacles. They may be difficult to overcome, but there are ways of doing so, at least partially, sometimes comprehensively. The overall challenge of impact assessment might be summarised as the challenge of turning analytical problems into useful knowledge.

CHALLENGE 1: The complexity of change

As mentioned earlier, change is complex and messy, not linear and straightforward. Change takes place in almost everything almost all the time – sometimes rapid, sometimes so slow as to be almost imperceptible. Many different processes of change, occurring simultaneously, interact with one another. Change in particular areas of life – particularly social change – results from a large number of diverse and differently interrelated factors. Identifying all of these, and establishing the relationships between them, is often inexact: an art rather than a science, some would say. Placing the outcomes of particular development interventions in what might be called the "background noise" or "chaos" of "ambient change" is very difficult.

Three specific points about this are especially worth noting here, out of the many made within the literature:

- Change of the kind sought by development interventions is susceptible to unexpected externalities – to events like civil conflict, natural disaster, or changes in the terms of

trade which affect the lives of project participants. Chance is also often a significant factor in change processes.

- As a result, change often needs to be measured against a moving baseline. Suppose, for example, that the objective of a particular intervention is to raise the average income of a group of primary producers over a three-year period. By the end of that period, it may be that the average income of the target group is just the same as it was at the beginning of the period. In one sense, this might suggest that there has been no change (and that the project has therefore been “unsuccessful”). However, if the average income of primary producers in other communities with similar circumstances has fallen, then what has been observed is a change in the relative position of the target group and in its members’ ability to maintain incomes in the face of adverse trading conditions (implying that the project might have been “successful” after all).
- Thirdly, change is rarely continuous; it usually fluctuates, accelerating or decelerating in accordance with various factors – some unpredictable, some in line with the seasons of the year. It is not, therefore, sufficient to measure the level of a particular indicator at the start and end of the project period in order to measure change during that period. Either of those points might be exceptional, and/or there may be strong variations in indicator levels during the period of a project which will not be identified if only start and end point data are considered. Continuous monitoring of data indicators is necessary to achieve genuine understanding of what is going on.

Understanding change, therefore, requires an in-depth understanding of both context and the baseline against which change is being measured.

CHALLENGE 2: **The challenge of context**

Every development context is different. It involves different stakeholders, different target beneficiaries, different economic and social circumstances and relationships, different power structures, different communications environments. The aims of every development intervention are also different, and depend (or should depend) substantially on context. As everyone in development knows, the extent to which interventions correspond to the context in which they are implemented is critically important to the level of engagement they will secure and to the likelihood that they will achieve what they set out to do.

Context, like change, is complex and multifarious. Understanding context requires understanding of social, gender, cultural, political, economic, topographical and environmental factors, and of the changes and trends which are underway in these – as well as sector-specific factors related to the project itself (HIV/AIDS rates, radio ownership levels, literacy, etc.). Contextual factors also intersect with one another just as changes do.

The need to understand context is clear in development work, but so is the challenge of understanding context. Three issues which are often raised in the literature where this is concerned are the following:

- The complexity and influence of context increase as one moves along the result assessment chain, from outputs to outcomes to impact. This means, firstly, that greater depth of understanding of context is required for impact assessment than at other levels (e.g., evaluation); and, secondly, that assessment of impact can never reach the degree of precision that can be reached at other levels, particularly outputs.
- The findings from impact assessment of development interventions cannot be transferred automatically from one context to another. Contextual factors are often highly important in determining whether particular results arise. Identifying contextual factors and relating these to impact findings is therefore a most important part of impact assessment. A good illustration of this from the ICT sector might be the Grameen Phone programme, which is generally agreed to have been highly successful in rolling out mobile phone access into rural areas in Bangladesh. Contextual factors of importance in this experience include the long-established microcredit facilities of Grameen Bank (and its customer base), Bangladesh’s particular demography and topography, and the weakness of the national fixed phone network. Understanding these contextual factors is crucial to assessing the replicability of the Grameen model in other countries.
- Those who understand context best are those living within the communities concerned. The participation of project users is increasingly considered crucial to the design and implementation, monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment of development interventions. Models of participatory design such as ActionAid’s Reflect methodology and Plan International’s Child-Centred Community Development approach have been widely discussed. Today, it is increasingly argued, only fools rush in to designing and implementing interventions without community involvement (though that does not prevent it happening in practice).

CHALLENGE 3: **The challenge of the baseline**

Monitoring is the fundamental tool for all result assessment. Without reliable data of some kind, no serious evaluation or impact assessment can take place.

Impact assessment is concerned with the measurement of change; and measuring change has to begin with a clear understanding of the starting point from which change is to be measured. It is, obviously, impossible to say whether a particular outcome – say, the proportion of children enrolling in primary school – has changed over a period of time if one has no starting point with which later measurements can be compared. The starting

point that is required is known as the baseline. Without some sort of baseline, it is not really possible to assess impact at all.

Baseline data can be drawn from many different sources, including published data, but in most cases specific data need to be collected before project initiation. Ideally, these data can/should cover:

- The broad context in which an intervention takes place.
- Current data (and understanding of their representativeness) for the quantitative indicators which are to be used for monitoring purposes.
- Initial data derived from qualitative sources (focus groups, interviews, etc.) for the qualitative indicators which are to be used.

In many cases, a static baseline is not sufficient. Where circumstances are changing – for example, where the incidence of endemic disease is rising, or where more and more people are joining a particular group (such as mobile phone owners), then it is also important to know the trend observable for an indicator and to treat trend (e.g., a moving twelve-month average) as the baseline for comparison with future trend measurements. More points concerning baselines and indicators are made later in this report.

In practice, the quality of baseline data collected for development interventions is highly variable. Measures can be taken to recover baseline data retrospectively – for example, from official statistics and from “hindsight” interviews – but these are poor substitutes for genuine baseline data acquired at the proper time. This is one of the key reasons why impact assessment experts agree on the importance of integrating impact assessment into project design, so that the indicators needed for impact assessment are established with baseline data from the start.

CHALLENGE 4: **The challenge of attribution**

Attribution means the allocation of responsibility for a particular result (outcome, impact) to a particular cause or causes (development intervention and/or other factors). It is a key part of impact assessment. If one could not at least make some judgement about whether an intervention has contributed to an outcome or impact finding, and to what extent, then it would be hard to justify undertaking impact assessment in the first place. The structure of monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment for any intervention therefore needs to be designed with this in mind.

The challenge of attribution stems from the complexity of causality. The fact that change has occurred does not mean that it has been brought about by any single cause. If many different factors contribute to change, then it is very difficult to attribute change to any one (or any group) of them. In practice, change may well result from a number of factors, either contributing independently or acting upon one another. Different factors in

causality may be more or less important at different times during the project cycle.

Attribution is particularly difficult where small-scale interventions are involved, as is often the case with NGOs (including BCO partners and other ICD agencies). In most cases, NGO interventions are unlikely to be the most substantial changes taking place in the contexts of people’s lives. What is more, they are very often not the most substantial development interventions taking place, the most important changes taking place in the information and communications environment, or even the most important interventions concerned with information and communications. Other development actors – international donors, governments, other NGOs – are likely to be intervening, and it will be difficult to distinguish “the results” of any one intervention from those of others.

The problem of attribution is made particularly difficult because of how it relates to the politics of aid. Many organisations want to claim credit for what are seen as positive outcomes; few want to admit liability for negative results. There is a strong temptation for development actors (implementing agencies, donors) to claim credit for achieving impact because this is what those to whom they are accountable (donors, taxpayers) want to hear. From the point of view of project participants (or “target beneficiaries”), however, it is more important to understand what has or has not been achieved, and it is this understanding that will contribute to the learning of implementing agencies and donors for the future.

CHALLENGE 5: **The challenge of aggregation**

The challenge of aggregation is in some ways the corollary of the challenge of attribution (although the term “aggregation” is sometimes used in this context with different meanings).

Individual development interventions usually target specific aspects of change in people’s lives – improving water cleanliness, protecting against disease, providing employment opportunities, etc. They often, as noted above, coincide with other activities by other implementing agencies within the same areas of work. They often coincide, too, with other activities by the same implementing agency and by other agencies within related fields of work. These different activities often have an influence on one another, which affects the ways in which they work and the changes that may be attributed to them.

In practice, therefore, it may not be individual interventions at all to which change should be attributed, but the cumulation of a group of interventions which interact with one another, so that their collective impact is more substantial than the sum of their impact as individual interventions. Result X, for example, may not have happened if only A or only B had taken place, nor may it have happened as a result of A and B taking place simultaneously; it may instead have happened because A and B interacted with one another, reinforcing each others’ effectiveness

and enabling more things (C and D) to be done by project users than were envisaged in the terms of reference for either A or B.

Individual development actors (donors, implementing agencies) are also concerned with the impact they are having on community development as a whole, and so are often particularly keen to aggregate the impact of the various interventions that they themselves make within individual communities or countries.

CHALLENGE 6: **The challenge of disaggregation**

The challenge of disaggregation is concerned not with projects and programmes, but with individual participants/beneficiaries.

The need to disaggregate data for monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment purposes is widely understood. Development interventions usually target identified social groups, but those groups themselves can be further subdivided. Disaggregation of data by gender, and separate analysis of the impact on women, are so accepted now that it would be surprising to find them missing. However, there are many other social categories which may be differentially affected by an intervention. Such groups might include those with different levels of income, types of primary economic activity, levels of education and literacy, age, employment status, land ownership, ethnicity or caste, etc. Data and subsequent assessment need to be disaggregated into these categories if what might be called the texture of impact is to be properly understood.

The distribution of power and resources is a particularly important issue here. Some development interventions aim to change the balance of power, income or resources within communities. In other cases, this is an unintended outcome. The following example – of an information project which aims to increase farmers' knowledge of market prices in order to enhance their bargaining power vis-à-vis market intermediaries ("middlemen") – may serve to illustrate both possibilities. This example has an explicit aim of redistributing incomes and power relationships (towards producers and away from intermediaries). However, the information resource provided may be more accessible to, or better used by, more prosperous farmers or those with higher standards of education; they may also be able to negotiate more effectively (because of their higher education levels or because they are not indebted to their intermediaries). As well as redistributing income and power between intermediaries and farmers, this project may also therefore be of more benefit to more prosperous farmers and so redistribute the gains of production between richer and poorer farmers. An implementing agency needs to understand outcomes with this degree of disaggregation in order to see how it might adjust implementation in order to meet the needs of poorer farmers more effectively.

It is often particularly difficult for development interventions to reach the most marginalised groups within communities – for example, the very poor and those who experience multiple deprivation (low income plus illiteracy plus landlessness, for

example). These highly marginalised (or "socially excluded") groups may be regarded as special priorities. However, it is quite possible for interventions to achieve gains for the majority of the poor (say, the lowest 25% of income-earning households) without achieving gains for the poorest and most marginalised. Particular attention therefore also needs to be given to identifying the experiences of the most marginalised.

The capacity to monitor, evaluate and assess impact with this level of disaggregation needs to be built into project design from the start, including baseline data.

CHALLENGE 7: **The challenge of the non-participant**

Similar questions about the distribution of outcomes arise concerning non-participants.

Development interventions usually aim to change the circumstances or the lives of particular communities, social groups or combinations of these – the poor, women, children, the illiterate, this village, that district. Monitoring and evaluation focus primarily on these target beneficiaries because they are concerned with assessing the intervention itself. However, development interventions do not only impact on the lives which they are intended to affect; their impact reaches much more widely, affecting those in other communities and social groups. Impact assessment needs to be concerned not just with whether an intervention affects the lives of target beneficiaries, but also with whether (and how) it affects the lives of wider communities (and the relationships between these and the target beneficiaries).

Another example may help to illustrate this point. Suppose this time that an information project has been implemented in order to provide those on fishing vessels from a particular community (X) with GPS (satellite) information about the whereabouts of fish shoals, with the aim of increasing fishing incomes. This information should enable fishing vessels from that community to make more effective use of time at sea, increasing catches and so being able to sell more fish in local markets. Unless these markets are very inelastic (in which case prices will fall instead), this should increase the incomes earned. However, fishing vessels from other communities (Y and Z), which do not have access to GPS information, may also sell fish into the same markets. The project may therefore increase fishing incomes in community X by redistributing market share to it from communities Y and Z (which will also have higher overheads per fish sold because they spend more time at sea looking for fish rather than actively fishing). The overall impact of the project on average fishing incomes in the district (communities X, Y and Z) as opposed to the target community (X) may therefore be positive, neutral or even negative; and it will not be possible to judge this by looking at community X alone. (Other impacts may be worth considering in this kind of case – for example, impact on the sustainability of local fish stocks. This would be particularly relevant if impact assessment were to be used to consider whether the project should be scaled up district-wide.)

Evaluation, in short, focuses on target beneficiaries (in this example, community X), while impact assessment needs to reach more widely (to communities Y and Z) in order to gain an holistic picture of what is happening as a result of project implementation. For this reason, impact assessment needs to include a wider range of stakeholders in its data gathering – an issue which is discussed further later in this report.

CHALLENGE 8: **The challenge of the unexpected**

All development interventions have unexpected outcomes – because it is never possible to predict everything that is likely to happen in the future. These unexpected outcomes may be of the kind illustrated by the examples in Challenges 6 and 7 above, i.e., concerned with the redistribution of assets and power within or between communities. They may be positive or negative, in terms of project objectives or of the overall development needs of target communities.

Chris Roche, in his Oxfam/Novib study, offers a couple of different illustrations of unexpected impacts from Oxfam work in rural communities:

... a review of a goat-rearing project [in Pakistan] revealed that the project had an important impact on women's religious life because it enabled them to sacrifice animals for the Muslim festival of Eid. This had not been made an explicit area of change at the beginning of the project, and although the women may always have viewed it as an indicator of success, it was not seen as such by Oxfam.

An evaluation of an Oxfam-supported credit and income-generation programme in Chad ... revealed that one of the women's own success criteria was that as a result of the project, they were now able to purchase bigger cooking pots. This in turn had allowed them to participate more fully in community celebrations, a critical element in feeling part of a social network (Roche 1999).

Neither of these unexpected outcomes is likely to have been anticipated in project design. Another example may serve to illustrate how unexpected outcomes may also be hard to pick up through the indicators which are established for impact assessment. A de-worming programme may have been introduced primarily to improve children's health. One of its impacts, however, may well be to increase school attendance, which is in turn a significant factor in determining qualification outcomes and learning gains. As well as impacting on health, therefore, the intervention may have significant impact on education – but this is unlikely to be picked up unless indicators for education outcomes were included at project design stage.

As is often said, we should always “expect the unexpected”. Unexpected outcomes may turn out to be more significant than

anticipated outcomes. They may, as noted above, be positive or negative. Impact assessment needs to pick them up, to be honest about them, and to learn from the experience how to capitalise on the opportunities of the positive and avoid the problems of the negative.

CHALLENGE 9: **The challenge of perception**

Many different people are affected by development interventions: project managers and staff, target beneficiaries, non-beneficiaries, and wider groups of actors such as local officials, managers and staff of adjacent projects, etc.

Different stakeholders are likely to have different perceptions of impact. In particular:

- Target beneficiaries may perceive impact differently from project managers (see the Oxfam examples in Challenge 8 above).
- Target beneficiaries may emphasise individual and family benefits rather than impacts at the level of the social group or community.
- Different groups of target beneficiaries may have different perceptions of impact, depending on the extent to which they have gained or lost (either absolutely or relative to their peers).
- Non-beneficiaries and non-participants are likely to perceive change differently from beneficiaries and participants.

Experience suggests that it is important for impact assessment to capture the diversity of experience and perceptions around an intervention. The participation of diverse stakeholders in impact assessment is considered further in a later section of this report.

CHALLENGE 10: **The “longitudinal” problem**

Impact is long-term, and does not stop when a project's implementation phase comes to an end. In fact, if an intervention leads to “lasting and sustainable change”, the majority of that change must still lie in the future when project managers are closing the accounts and writing up their notes.

Impact assessment is usually undertaken immediately after the end of project implementation. This is necessary if donors and implementing agents are going to be able to learn lessons quickly enough to apply them in project design and implementation elsewhere. But how can impact assessment offer insights into “lasting and sustainable change” if it is undertaken before that lasting and sustainable change has actually occurred?

In many ways, this is the most difficult of all challenges for impact assessment. Two points are often made within the literature.

- It is sometimes possible to identify proxy indicators which give an indication of how future impact might evolve. For example, data about people's *attitudes* towards a particular issue are often (but not always) a good indicator of their likely future *behaviour*. Similarly, monitoring data which establishes trends over a period of time can be used to predict likely future (continuation of those) trends. However, this does not allow for the discontinuities that often occur within trend data, nor does it anticipate the sustainability of change after the end of project funds and management (where the end of the project itself – and project funding or management involvement – may well affect the continuity of trend). These approaches are useful, therefore, but still far from ideal.
- The best way of assessing “lasting and sustainable change” is to use longitudinal studies – in this context sometimes called recall or tracker studies – undertaken some time (six months, two years, five years) after project closure, in order to establish what change occurred in people's lives afterwards and/or whether existing change trends continued beyond the project closure date. However, implementing agencies are usually reluctant to use resources to undertake studies of past activities, which are no longer being funded, while donors have also proved reluctant to finance them. This is a particular problem in areas like ICD where there is no strongly established evidence base of past experience on which to build.

What processes and methodologies do development agencies use in measuring impact?

There is a good deal of literature about the processes and methodologies which are used to measure impact. Some of the key sources on this are listed at the end of this report.

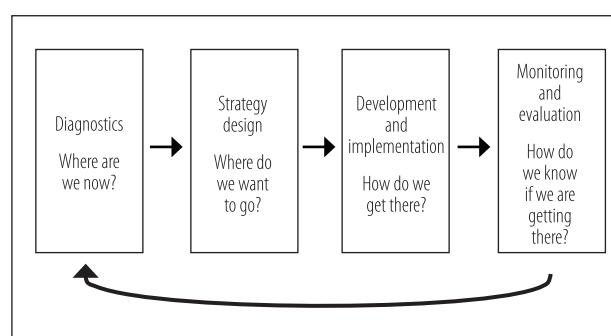
There is not space here to discuss processes and methodologies in detail. However, a summary of points which may be particularly useful for BCO partners and ICD agencies is included in this section, which also comments on overall experience of impact assessment amongst NGOs, including BCO partners. These comments fall into the following areas:

- Impact assessment and the project/programme cycle
- Participation
- Diagnostics and design issues – modalities and methodologies; indicators and baselines
- Implementation issues
- Analysis and interpretation
- The use of impact assessment findings

Impact assessment and the project/programme cycle

It is emphasised throughout the literature that impact assessment is not a one-off exercise to be undertaken at the end of a project or programme, but an integral part of project/programme management which needs to take place throughout the project/programme cycle.

The project cycle will be familiar to readers of this report. The following diagram provides a basic summary of the main stages which are generally included. Monitoring and evaluation, plus impact assessment, should, as this indicates, feed back into the next cycle of diagnostics and design.



Each stage of this cycle, for an implementing agency, requires active engagement with impact assessment:

- Impact assessment requirements need to be integrated into intervention diagnostics and design in order to ensure that relevant indicators and methodologies are set up for monitoring and evaluation, and that relevant data can be collected.
- Data collection and monitoring processes need to be undertaken systematically throughout implementation.
- Analysis and interpretation need to draw on a variety of sources, including inputs from *outside* the intervention itself as well as data that it generates internally.
- Findings of impact assessment should be fed back to stakeholders, including programme managers but also project users, donors and other NGOs working in related fields.

Many NGOs acknowledge that they experience real difficulties in implementing monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment. The evaluation specialist Rick Davies (cited in Oakley et al. 1998) summarised the degree of attention which he saw being paid to different stages of managing monitoring and evaluation (M&E) as follows when assessing projects in Bangladesh in the mid-1990s:

Stages of M&E development	Degree of attention paid
Design	Extensive
Implementation	Substantial
Data generation	More
Data interpretation	Less
Use	Some
Evaluation	Minimal

Many NGOs acknowledge, in particular, that they sometimes find it difficult to find staff time for evaluation and impact assessment, and that it feels hard to justify spending resources on this rather than on meeting other project needs.

DFID has suggested that monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment costs might make up around 10% of project expenditure for relatively small projects, increasing to as much as 30% in the case of pilot projects where evaluation and impact assessment are a crucial part of project purpose.⁴ To many NGOs, this represents significant funding which could be used to serve their target communities better or to increase the number of target communities served by an intervention. Indeed, NGOs also feel under pressure from donors to maximise the number of target communities and activities. Some suggest that this encourages them to overcommit resources in project proposals, and subsequently to pay less attention to “non-core” aspects of interventions like monitoring and evaluation.

A balance of judgement is involved here. Interventions are more likely to meet their objectives (or likely to meet more of their objectives) if effective monitoring and evaluation are used to improve current implementation and future design. At the same time, the costs (both financial costs and the opportunity costs in staff time) need to be kept to a level which is not overly burdensome. Impact assessment specialists argue that this balanced judgement should be made within the design process for impact assessment – for example, by choosing indicators and methodologies that offer relatively high returns from relatively low financial and human inputs – rather than through a choice being made *between* impact assessment and implementation funding.

Participation

There was a time when evaluation and impact assessment were thought of as processes that were *done to* interventions, rather than *part of* them. Thinking about evaluation and impact assessment moved on from this top-down approach many years ago, and more inclusive and participatory processes are now advocated throughout the impact assessment literature. How-

ever, most people involved in this area would recognise that old practices die hard; that much of the evaluation and impact assessment work which is done today is insufficiently participative; and that it is therefore likely to miss much of the impact that could and should be observed.

The case for participation is straightforward enough: those who are best able to identify changes in their lives are those who experience them. As Oliver Bakewell puts it:

Understanding sustainable changes in people's lives must take account of their values and priorities; projects cannot be deemed to have positively affected the lives of local people if the perceptions of the local people diverge seriously from those of external observers (Bakewell 2003).

In addition, most NGOs, including BCO partners and other ICD agencies, are committed to empowerment and the involvement of the poor in decision-making that affects them. It would be odd, indeed, not to include them fully in the design, implementation and evaluation of initiatives that sought to increase their empowerment and involvement in other decisions that affect their lives.

There is much commentary on participation in the literature cited at the end of this report. For present purposes, it is worth drawing attention to three main points, concerning respectively:

- Project participants
- The wider stakeholder community
- The relationship between project input from participants and external experts.

Project participants

The consensus among evaluation and impact assessment experts is that these processes will be much more effective in understanding the whole range of intervention results if participants are fully involved at all stages. This includes the identification of indicators (selecting those which are meaningful to participants, best reflect actual behaviour, and are most likely – in the case of questionnaire research – to be answered honestly); the implementation of data collection; the monitoring and interim assessment of findings; and the analysis and interpretation of data during the final stages of evaluation and impact assessment.

This is not to say that participation is easy to secure. It is time-consuming and adds costs which need to be recognised (not least by donors) as well as adding value. Nor is the involvement of project participants necessarily inclusive. Care needs to be taken to ensure that the views of *all* groups of project participants are included, not just the most vocal or powerful within local communities. The inclusion of women and of children, of the very poor and the socially marginalised, can be particularly challenging.

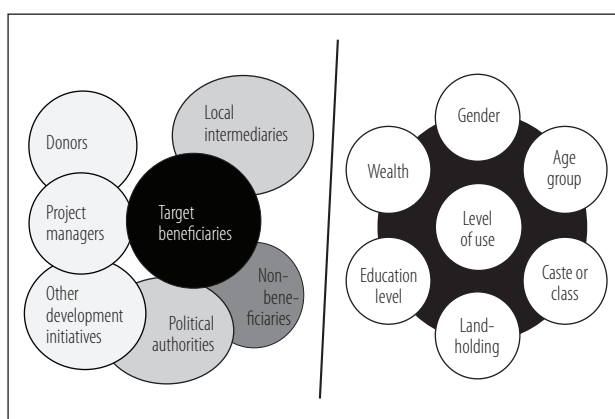
⁴ Cited in Panos London (2004).

The views of project participants are often, also, unlikely to be uniform. Different project participants will have different views – about indicators, about what has happened to them and their communities, about the interpretation of findings. There is sometimes a temptation to take majority views (or those of the most engaged) as being representative when this may not actually be so. Part of the point of including project participants should be to value and incorporate the diversity of perceptions within user groups, and seek to understand why different participants experience the results of interventions in different ways. “Intersubjectivity” – the extent to which people agree or disagree – is, in other words, of positive value rather than a nuisance.

Wider stakeholder groups

However, project participants are not the only people affected by interventions. As discussed above, impacts are felt not just by participants but by others – for example, those who are not target beneficiaries within target communities; those who live in neighbouring communities; those who interact (socially, economically, politically) with project users; local officials; managers and users of other local development interventions; etc. Project managers and donors are also important stakeholders who have different objectives and perspectives from project users. The diagram on the following page seeks to illustrate both the diversity of project participants and this wider constellation of interested stakeholders.

As Save the Children puts it, “different stakeholders will have different views on what success is, depending on where they are within the impact chain” (Gosling & Edwards 2003) – and they will also have different views about what impacts are actually experienced and by whom. Project participants will naturally pay more attention to their individual and family circumstances than to changes in the wider community, and much less attention to those in other communities with which they are not personally involved. Their participation alone in impact assessment is therefore insufficient to gain an holistic picture of what is happening. Wider stakeholder participation is needed for this – and, again, intersubjectivity adds to rather than detracts from understanding.



The role of experts

The third issue here concerns the role of experts, which has often been controversial and sometimes seen as antithetical to a participatory approach, as if the perspectives of participants and professional impact analysts were necessarily alternatives rather than complementary to one another. In practice:

- Participants and other project stakeholders draw on direct and personal experience of a particular intervention.
- External experts draw on experience of comparable situations elsewhere and offer expertise in the design, implementation and analytical processes needed to organise, illuminate and interpret project data and direct experience.

The question for implementing agencies is one of identifying the best ways of bringing together participation and outside expertise, rather than seeing them as alternatives. Impact assessment is unlikely to be most effective if it relies exclusively on either.

Diagnostics and design issues

There is not sufficient space in this report to explore evaluation and impact assessment process issues in any depth. This can be better done through the literature cited at the end of the report. It is, however, worth drawing attention to some specific points in the design process whose importance is emphasised in the impact assessment literature as a whole.

The first of these is to reiterate the importance of incorporating impact assessment at the very start of the project cycle, in diagnostics and design.

The design phase of the project cycle is principally concerned with the identification and clarification of objectives, and then with agreeing implementation methodologies and mechanisms which, it is believed, will lead to these objectives being achieved. A chain of thinking (explicit or implicit) usually links the activities, purposes/objectives and ultimate goals of an intervention along the lines of the following example:

- Goals: increased productivity and reduced poverty levels
- Purpose: better-informed farmers in target communities
- Activity: introduction of telecentres including internet access

The links in this “impact chain”, which can be read from top or bottom or from bottom to top, incorporate assumptions (or aspirations) that the activity will lead (or contribute to) the purpose which in turn will contribute to achievement of the goal. This chain of thinking is often set down in a management tool such as a “theory of change” or “logical framework” (“logframe”). Whether it works is, of course, dependent not just on whether the chain of thinking is itself viable but also on the modalities of implementation, on changes in the external context, etc.

It is this chain of thinking that identifies the expected (or hoped-for) impact of an intervention which needs to be assessed (along with unexpected impact) in any impact assessment process. It therefore provides the obvious starting point for incorporating impact assessment in project design. If monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment are to be undertaken seriously, then it follows that the indicators and methodologies to be used need to be incorporated from the start. Otherwise, critical information will be missing.

Indicators are crucial to impact assessment. They may be quantitative or qualitative (see below), but they must be there. As impact assessment is about measuring change, they must be capable of doing so – not just in terms of physical or visible outcomes but also (usually) in terms of attitudes and behaviour. To a large extent, the same indicators may be used to measure outputs, outcomes and impact, and for evaluation and impact assessment, but additional indicators are likely to be needed for the latter because of its longer term, its greater depth (“changes in people’s lives” rather than outcomes of a specific intervention) and its wider reach (non-target as well as target groups; unexpected as well as anticipated results).

There is a lot of material about indicators in the literature cited at the end of this report. A good many of these sources cite two mnemonics that aim to summarise the qualities required of indicators, and these are set out in the following table. The “SMART” list might be considered applicable to indicators themselves, while the “SPICED” list is more relevant to how to use them.

SMART indicators	SPICED indicators
Specific (to the change being measured)	Subjective
Measurable (and unambiguous)	Participatory
Attainable (and sensitive)	Interpreted (and communicable)
Relevant (and easy to collect)	Cross-checked
Timebound (with term dates for measurement)	Empowering
	Diverse and disaggregated

Many of the terms in this table are quite ambiguous, and, if they are to use them, agencies need to explore their meaning within their own organisational and intervention contexts.

One other point worth emphasis is that indicators must be measurable and attainable. Useful indicators have to be clearly relevant to the changes which are being measured. They have to be easy to collect and understand. If they are not, they will not be collected reliably and they will not be analysed and used. They should, in other words, be sufficient for the purpose of assessing impact, but not so numerous or so complex as to be unduly burdensome. Experience suggests that many evaluation processes seek to measure too many indicators, and that this leads to less measurement in practice than might otherwise

take place. Selection, here, is crucial. As Save the Children summarises the point, “a small number of meaningful indicators which can be looked at regularly and carefully is more useful than a long list which is too time-consuming to use.”

Lastly, it should be remembered that not all results can easily be measured by direct indicators. Often it is necessary to use proxy indicators, i.e., indicators which are easier to collect and which suggest what a more challenging indicator might establish if it were possible to use. An example might be the use of condom purchase data as a proxy for the measurement of condom use (about which interviewees might be reticent). Indicators identifying interviewees’ attitudes can also sometimes be used as proxies for change in longer-term behaviour – which may be helpful when impact assessments are undertaken at the end of projects rather than at a later date. However, proxy indicators must be used with care: condom purchase does not necessarily imply condom use, and attitudinal change is not necessarily translated into changes in behaviour.

Baselines are crucial to validating later data measurements. The aim of impact assessment is to measure change, and to measure change it is essential to know the starting point. (It is also, as noted earlier, essential to know whether this starting point is static, and to take measurements at different points in time in order to establish trend. In some cases, as indicated earlier, trend data may provide a better baseline than static data.)

When indicators are identified for anticipated outcomes, the first task should be to establish baseline data for them. However, this is not in itself sufficient. Many of the changes that are observed in impact assessment are unexpected, and these also need to be compared with the *status quo ante* – the situation before project implementation began. Specific indicators will not have been established at project outset for many unexpected outcomes. To assess their impact, it is important to have a much broader understanding of the overall social and economic context of an intervention, including wide-ranging data about target beneficiaries and the communities in which they live. Of course, this should form part of the initial diagnostics that precede design. Much of it should be derived from non-project statistical sources and from design phase interviews and discussions with project participants and other stakeholders. It does, however, require capture.

Interventions themselves also change the contexts in which they are implemented, and monitoring needs to be sensitive to this. The relevance of baselines can also be affected by external factors, such as changes in the law, civil conflict or the adoption of new resources (such as mobile phones). Where either of these types of change is rapid, it may be necessary to use “rolling baselines”, i.e., to adjust the baseline used for monitoring from time to time.

Where baselines are absent – for example, when it is decided to introduce impact assessment during rather than before project implementation – it may be possible to reconstruct them to

some extent with hindsight (using past official data or retrospective interviews with project participants), but this is always less reliable than using baselines which have been established as part of intervention design and implementation.

Assessment methodologies

As with indicators, there is a wide-ranging literature about the methodologies that can be used for impact assessment. It is not a purpose of this report to offer a guide to these, and readers are referred for this to the established literature cited at the end of the report. The methodologies explored in this literature include, among many others:

- The collection of statistical data on the use of facilities (which can be automated) and the ways in which facilities are used (such as “exit polls”).
- Household and other surveys of project users and non-users.
- Interviews with randomly selected project users and non-users, or with key informants (such as information intermediaries).
- Focus groups.
- “Delphic surveys” which exploit expert perceptions of likely impacts.
- “Tracker studies” which follow outcomes over an extended period of time.

Some of these methodologies are quantitative (based on counting numbers) while others are qualitative (based on gathering views). The distinction between quantitative and qualitative approaches is sometimes seen as a difference in style as well as substance, with quantitative measurement being associated with a technocratic approach to development, and qualitative approaches with social development objectives. This distinction is sometimes exaggerated. Quantitative measurements may be said to be more precise, qualitative measures more capable of capturing nuance. But social science research often uses both in combination, and much qualitative research is translated into numbers for analysis. Development projects, similarly, are likely to find that a combination helps them to achieve most insight. Indeed, comparing outcomes from more than one methodology (“triangulation”) is an important way in which to verify results.

Some donors and implementing agencies have developed their own methodologies for impact assessment which they seek to apply systematically to all their work, recommend to their partners or require of their grantees. These are sometimes linked to particular aspects of development or social science theory. IDRC’s “outcome mapping” approach might fall into this category (though it might equally be regarded as one methodology among others in the list above). Other agencies, such as Hivos,

emphasise flexibility and diversity of methodology, enabling project partners and participants to select approaches which most suit their own specific needs. Hivos (2004) describes its flexible approach as one that “allows for diversity and flexibility, ... is based on methods and indicators proposed by partners themselves, and which are meaningful and relevant to them,” and thereby “contributes to learning processes of both partner organisations and Hivos” itself.

Finally, some impact assessment experts have sought to identify simpler ways of addressing the complexities of assessing impact. One example here, pioneered by Rick Davies, is the “most significant change” approach, which asks participants/stakeholders to identify the most significant change which they have experienced in their lives during a project lifetime. Such approaches are often most useful in conjunction with other methodologies.

What matters most about the choice of methodologies is that they should be appropriate to the context, the type of intervention and the indicators which can be used. Methodologies which are well-suited to certain interventions will be poorly suited to others. In particular, different methodologies are likely to be required for large-scale projects with many stakeholders (such as AMARC’s 2006 study of experience with community radio) and for small-scale projects with relatively few participants. Project managers and participants also need to be comfortable with methodologies used (and so involved in their selection), which may add dimensions of development ethos (different agencies have different development approaches) and cultural norms (what will participants be prepared to do) to the selection process. One size, in short, does not fit all.

There is, however, also a countervailing case for standardisation. Too much diversity of methodology can make it difficult to compare different experiences and thereby build a substantial evidence base. Where outputs are relatively common, it may be particularly valuable to standardise evaluation procedures – as IICD has done through its online response process for activity participants. Impact assessment can build on standardised evaluation data of this kind, though it will also need to go beyond them in order to capture consequential changes in behaviour and other results which evaluation does not reach.

One point which is emphasised in the literature is the value, already mentioned, of using a number of different methodologies to approach the same impact questions. This allows for cross-checking of findings, and also greater depth of understanding of what is going on. The telecentre example given earlier may help to illustrate this.

In this example, a number of telecentres were set up in an area in order to increase access to information in local communities, particularly concerning health and agricultural productivity. A number of complementary methodologies might be used to assess usage and impact of these telecentres; for example:

- Automated statistical data on telecentre use.
- Exit polls of telecentre users, to identify what use they made of the facilities.
- Household surveys at varying distances from telecentres, to identify the extent to which the local community is making use of the facilities.
- Interviews with information intermediaries and other key informants about their perceptions of the results of telecentre deployment (and their own use of facilities).
- Statistical data on (e.g.) actual use of vaccination clinics or changes in farm practice.

These methodologies together would give a much richer picture of the results of the initiative than could be achieved through one alone. In particular, in this example, household surveys will identify the reach of the initiative within its target population, something that cannot be picked up by the (more usual and much cheaper) exit polls of users.

Implementation

Much less needs to be said here about implementation, which is again covered in depth in the literature referenced at the end of this report.

The quality of impact assessment which can be undertaken is highly dependent on the quality of monitoring practice and data/knowledge management. Important issues for results assessment during the implementation phase of interventions are:

- Monitoring should be undertaken systematically and professionally.
- The results of monitoring should be assessed and used to adapt implementation as required.
- Monitoring data should be stored in such a way that it can be readily accessed, both during implementation and for subsequent evaluation and impact assessment.

Commentators on monitoring and evaluation processes often observe that less attention is paid to these implementation requirements than to design, particularly if there is a high degree of staff turnover.

Analysis and interpretation

Rick Davies' assessment of evaluations in Bangladesh in the mid-1990s (illustrated above) suggests that NGO attention to monitoring and evaluation often dissipated as it moved from project design to project completion. Analysis and interpretation work was therefore, in those cases, relatively weak.

Analysis and interpretation are distinct but linked processes: analysis being concerned with identifying what can be said from

the quantitative and qualitative evidence available, including statistical analysis of qualitative findings; interpretation being concerned with placing that analysis in an explanatory context which is useful to project participants, managers and donors.

There are often conflicting pressures on project managers where analysis and interpretation are concerned.

On the one hand, there is pressure to demonstrate success: partly for reasons of personal/project prestige; partly to reinforce morale and commitment within the organisation; partly to convince donors that their money has been well spent and should be followed up with more. This can bring about a culture which is high on aspiration but low on evidence. One BCO partner described the result of this as follows: "A weakness of some [of our] project proposals in the past has been that they have made sweeping claims about what they would achieve, beyond what was really likely."

On the other hand, implementing agencies have a responsibility and a commitment to improve the quality of what they do and ensure that it contributes to achieving their development objectives. This requires them to acknowledge and learn from what did not work as well as expected, as well as what did. As IN-TRAC has put it: "The challenge for development agencies is not only to develop adequate methods of assessing the difference they make, but also to develop the courage to be honest about the results of those assessments and the necessary humility about their role as individual actors in the process of change."

It is worth thinking, in this context, of the needs of the different "client groups" for impact assessment identified near the beginning of this report. Of these, it might be said as follows:

- Donors need to understand the impact of any intervention in order to help them maximise the value of available development funds.
- Implementing agencies need to understand what has happened in order to help them improve the quality of their work for the future.
- Project participants have a *right* to understand what has happened as a result of initiatives undertaken in their name and a *need* to understand if they are to contribute most effectively to future programme design, management and evaluation.

Just as it is important in project design and implementation, stakeholder engagement is crucial in analysis and interpretation. For reasons already discussed, it is important to engage project participants in the analysis and interpretation process. They are, after all, best placed to recognise results which directly affect them. However, relying wholly on participant observation is as unreliable as relying wholly on expert analysis, because it is unlikely to pick up unexpected results, results which primarily affect others outside participant groups, or results which are less immediately apparent but which are likely to be perceived by experts with significant

wider experience. (An analogy – though not an exact one – might be the partnership between patient, general practitioner and specialist consultant in diagnosing medical conditions.)

The use of findings

It should go without saying that there is little point in undertaking impact assessment if it is not then used, just as there is little point in collecting data which are not then analysed.

As indicated in the previous section, findings need to be disseminated within the three main “client groups”. Project participants have a right to information about activities which are done in their name. Donors have a right to know and need to account for the impact achieved through their resources. Implementation agents need to share findings amongst their personnel, and in discussion with their development partners (donors and project participants) in order to improve their practice. Implementing agencies will also often benefit from sharing one another’s findings.

Dissemination strategies are often considered in terms of what is best for the agency which has undertaken the impact assessment process. It is more helpful in development terms if findings are disseminated according to their value in helping others make more effective development decisions in the future. Lessons shared are better learned.

What special factors need to be taken into account in particular types of work?

Each area of development work, of course, has its own special requirements where impact assessment is concerned. Part 2 of this report will raise some of the issues that may distinguish ICD work from other development sectors in this respect. This final section of Part 1 of the report looks at three other areas with special requirements which are of interest to BCO partners. These are:

- Advocacy activities
- Network activities
- Organisational impact assessment

Advocacy activities

Most BCO partner agencies focus a good deal of their work on advocacy, i.e., on seeking to achieve changes in policy and practice that will empower particular social groups (the poor, women, journalists) and secure other (“lasting and sustainable”) improvements in their lives.

The evaluation and impact assessment literature identifies a number of particular challenges in assessing the impact of advocacy work. These result from the fact that advocacy work usu-

ally (but not always) focuses on changing the attitudes and behaviour of decision-makers who are at a considerable distance (in both relationships and time) from those whose lives and opportunities the intervention aims to change. Panos recognises the problems that arise here in its *Monitoring and Evaluation Manual* when it says: “What we are trying to do is make a useful contribution to achieving the goal, not to achieve it ourselves, and we should bear this in mind when describing the project.”

To establish the impact of advocacy work on people’s lives, it is necessary to establish both a) that it has had an impact on policy and b) that the policy concerned has resulted in a change in people’s lives.

It is, of course, entirely possible that a) can be achieved without b) subsequently resulting from it. In such cases, evaluation may identify success where a) is concerned but only impact assessment will pick up failure in respect of b).

In practice, advocacy projects usually seek to achieve a number of steps in a linear chain of anticipated outcomes. An example might be taken from the DFID-funded CATIA programme’s intervention on the regulation of VSATs (very small aperture terminals). The ultimate goal of this intervention was to increase access to communications, and particularly the internet, for people living in rural areas which were unserved by fixed telecommunications networks. Such access could be provided by VSAT operators, but these were often constrained by regulations (for example, monopoly control of international communications gateways). CATIA’s intervention sought to change the policies of governments and regulators so that VSAT operators could bypass existing international gateways and so provide a commercially viable service in rural areas.

The steps in the chain of reasoning here (or the assumptions in the theory of change, if one prefers) are essentially as follows:

- Advocacy will lead governments and regulators to change their view of how to regulate the VSAT market.
- This will lead to changes in relevant laws and regulations.
- VSAT operators will take advantage of these changes to provide services in hitherto unserved areas.
- These services will be used by local people.
- Use of these services will lead to improvements in the lives and livelihoods of users and their communities.

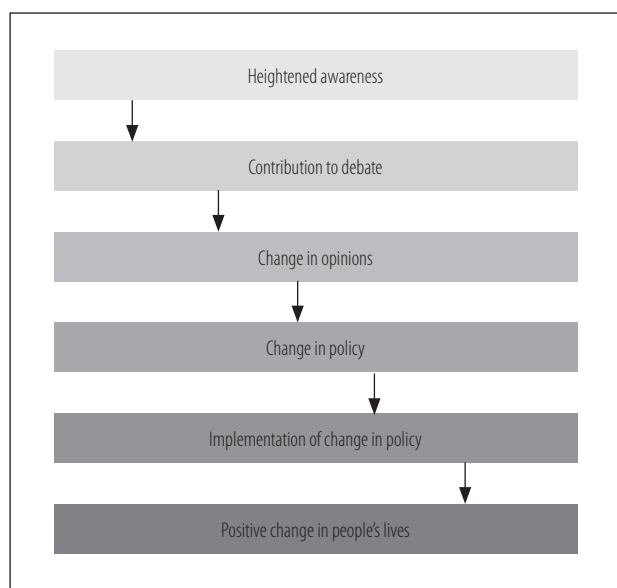
This is a lengthy and rather incremental chain of reasoning, and poses obvious difficulties for impact assessment. As with ICD applications, it is easiest to measure results close to the actual intervention itself – i.e., whether there are changes in government attitudes, legislation and regulation. Even these, however, are likely to be influenced by other factors, including advocacy by other interest groups. It is much more difficult to attribute impact to an advocacy campaign further down the chain, and particularly difficult to attribute lasting and sustainable change in peo-

ple's lives and livelihoods to the lobbying of parliamentarians and policy-makers which the intervention actually involves.

A similar set of issues arises with assessing the impact of media activities, such as the improvement of journalistic standards or the training of journalists to understand more fully issues such as climate change or children's rights. Journalists themselves do not change people's lives directly, but they may help to move the intellectual climate towards one in which opinions, behaviour and attitudes change (for example, towards discouraging wasteful use of scarce resources or allowing children more freedom to manage their relationships). The impact of any changes in journalistic practice on people's lives is likely to be both nebulous and long-term, which makes it more difficult (and more subjective) to discern, but not necessarily less significant.

One way of dealing with these problems would be to set close limits to what are regarded as the objectives of an advocacy or media campaign – e.g., to see it as exclusively concerned with achieving policy change itself rather than with any desired consequential change in people's lives. Essentially, this would mean defining the objective as being the facilitation of an enabling environment (which others could then take advantage of in ways that would be likely to have positive effects on lives and livelihoods) but not reaching beyond these onto subsequent steps in the causal chain.

However, agencies whose theory of change for an intervention is based on achieving impact on the lives of the poor will wish to go beyond this and try to understand whether the policy change they advocate actually brings about change in people's lives. Oxfam has developed a useful hierarchy of advocacy outcomes that can be used to assess the depth of impact that has been achieved by any advocacy intervention, which is illustrated in the following diagram:⁵



⁵ Cited in Bakewell (2003).

Only the last stage in this hierarchy would normally be considered impact in the sense of "lasting and sustainable change" in people's lives. Assessing the impact of advocacy work, however, requires assessment of all stages in the chain.

Network activities

Most BCO partners are involved in a range of networking activities. Some are themselves network organisations. Others work closely with other agencies in a variety of different partnerships – of which BCO itself is one.

Networks take a variety of forms and have a variety of purposes. They interact with other relationships between organisations – multi-stakeholder partnerships, donor/agency relations, public/private initiatives, etc. – with which they share some or more characteristics. The experience of development networks in general and their relationship with other types of partnership is explored in Investigation 3 of the BCO Impact Assessment, and this is not the place to consider it in depth. However, it is worth raising a couple of points about networks here, which arise from the impact assessment literature and which affect the way in which BCO partners and other ICD agencies may wish to assess the impact of their work. These are in many ways similar to the points which are made above about the challenge of aggregation.

The crucial question concerning networks and impact is about whether the impact achieved by a network, in any particular context, is more or less than the impact which could be achieved by its member organisations acting alone. This can be phrased as a counterfactual question: what would have happened if we had not networked together for this purpose? To assess this, it is not just necessary to have a baseline which is concerned with the circumstances that an initiative seeks to address, but also to understand the ways in which networking itself has affected the work which is undertaken by network members.

Two examples may serve to illustrate the differences which may arise within this context.

- On the one hand, a network may be built around the different strengths of member organisations with divergent expertise. An example of this would be a network which brings together the expertise and acknowledged authority of different organisations in a) child protection and b) the internet, in order to create a single strong voice advocating a particular shared approach to child protection on the internet.
- On the other hand, a network may be built around a limited range of common objectives which are shared by organisations which otherwise have divergent views. An example would be the coalition that might be created by environmental activists, local residents' groups and business interests to oppose (or support) a road or airport development.

In either of these cases, different network members will use different methods to influence different constituencies which are more likely to listen to them than to some of their network partners.

It is necessary here to separate the impact of the *process of networking* from the impact of the intervention itself (which happened to be managed in a networked way). The impact of the process of networking will be the difference between the results of advocacy undertaken through a network partnership – “the whole” – and the results which would have been achieved by the network’s members working alone and independently of one another – “the (sum of the) parts”. This difference in impact can, of course, be either positive or negative: networks which are poorly coordinated, which fail to overcome ideological or strategic differences, or which concentrate on networking dynamics rather than outreach can have less influence and impact than their individual members might otherwise have had alone.

This leads to one further general set of observations from the impact assessment literature, which concerns the impact of and on organisations themselves.

Organisational issues

At one level, organisational impact assessment is concerned with managerial functionality:

- How **effective** is the organisation (or project management) in turning aspirations into achieved objectives? In engaging stakeholders and participants? Or in the process of monitoring, evaluating and assessing its own work?
- How **efficient** is it? How much time, how many funds, how many resources does it need to undertake particular activities or to achieve its outputs? Could the same results have been achieved more cost-effectively, releasing funds and personnel for other work?

These managerial issues are important. Inefficiency and ineffectiveness waste resources and development agencies should be concerned about them. But development agencies are also concerned with other dimensions of their work which are not so susceptible to conventional management techniques – with participation, for example; with gender and social equity; with particular development philosophies; with innovation, perhaps; with a different balance between risk and caution in undertaking work.

Impact assessment also provides an opportunity for institutional reflection along these lines, and here too some of the lessons which have been learnt from project and programme evaluation are generally thought relevant. ■

ICD, media and impact assessment

Introduction

Part 1 of this report has been concerned with impact assessment in general – with its overall purpose, some of the challenges that arise in undertaking it, and the processes which it requires. The aim of Part 1 has been to raise issues that need to be considered by all development agencies undertaking impact assessment, including BCO partners and other agencies concerned with ICD.

Part 2 of the report is concerned more explicitly with ICD and impact assessment. In particular, it considers whether and where impact assessment for ICT/ICD interventions may have different requirements or pose additional challenges to those in other development sectors such as health, education or rural development. Its final section raises a number of possible approaches to impact assessment for ICD that may help BCO and other agencies to undertake more impact assessment work and to build a stronger evidence base from their own experience.

Disaggregating “ICD”

Much, perhaps most, of the discussion about ICTs in development today is concerned with the implementation of development programmes and projects (or ICD). That is, it is concerned with interventions that are made – by governments, international agencies and NGOs – with the aim of doing things with ICTs that would not otherwise take place (or would not take place for some time).

In addition, much of the literature reviewing the potential for ICD discusses it more as a single phenomenon than as the outcome of diverse types of technology with different purposes and usage patterns. While this is reasonable when considering *overall* potential, it is much less helpful at the level of individual programmes, projects or organisations. The first question to consider in this part of the report is, therefore, how far we should consider “ICD” as a single sector, and how far we should disaggregate it in our thinking.

In practice, different agencies concerned with ICD have distinct objectives, programmes and relationships with the ICTs they use. This reflects the fact that people use different ICTs in different ways. Within agencies, different activities respond to different aspects of the potential which ICTs enable and the uses to which ICTs are put. This is true within BCO as well as in the wider ICD community, and BCO partner activities can serve to illustrate the diversity of ICD activities:

- Some activities fall mostly within the traditional “communications for development” sphere – for example, Panos’ work to improve the quality of journalism or to capture the experiences of mountain peoples.
- Some are highly focused on advocacy – such as much of the work of APC and AMARC.
- Some are concerned with the application of ICTs to enhance service delivery and empower communities – for example, projects resulting from IICD roundtables.
- Some are concerned to promote or provide access to ICTs – such as through the deployment of telecentres or the promotion of alternative software.
- Some are concerned to use ICTs as delivery mechanisms for information – such as the websites of OneWorld and the broadcast content produced and distributed by Panos Institutes.

Although many organisations (within BCO and beyond) undertake ICD activities in more than one of these areas, these types of initiative have different characteristics: they make different uses of different technologies; address different development challenges in different communities; have different relationships between implementing agencies, project participants and other stakeholders.

Impact assessment of these different types of work is therefore going to vary substantially (just as it does in other development fields). It is not possible to construct a single impact assessment model or framework for ICD projects (defined as broadly as they often are) because different methodologies are required for the very different contexts and types of objective involved. There are many variations involved here, but two seem to be particularly important.

- One is the difference between technologies. Broadcast radio, mobile telephony and the internet are very different technologies with different characteristics and user interfaces; and they are used by people for different purposes – broadcasting, for example, to access news, general information and entertainment; telephony for maintaining social contact; the internet, where it is meaningfully available, for email, more personal information requirements and entertainment once again. Different approaches to impact assessment are likely to be required depending on which technologies are involved. This suggests that more attention should be paid to the distinctiveness of different

technologies than is sometimes currently the case. (This does not, of course, mean that there is not scope for synergies between technologies, such as the use of the internet as a distribution mechanism for radio content. Clearly there is, but the synergies involved are usually secondary to the main purposes for which technologies are used.)

- The second important distinction is between interventions that are concerned with media or with traditional “communications for development” objectives, on the one hand, and those which are concerned with the use of ICTs to deliver services to project users, on the other. Many of the implications of this distinction are evident from the earlier discussion in Part 1. “Traditional” media and C4D initiatives can be more distant from the ultimate target beneficiaries than those concerned with service delivery, with less direct or certain links within their theories of change. Improving the quality of development journalism, for example, is aimed more at improving the enabling environment for development activity than at achieving direct improvements in people’s lives: if it does the latter, it will do so in conjunction with other environmental factors and its direct impact will be difficult to discern. Service delivery initiatives are more directly concerned with enabling changes in people’s lives, often in “mainstream” development areas and in contexts where the relative effectiveness of ICTs in comparison with other delivery mechanisms is an important issue for impact assessment. Two aspects of change that are often significant here, and often overlooked, are a) the process by which people adopt new mechanisms for information acquisition and service delivery (habituation, continuity and discontinuity between old and new technologies); and b) the changing role of information intermediaries (the trusted sources of information and guidance for individuals and communities).

This second distinction, between environmental/cross-cutting/empowerment aspects of ICD on the one hand and instrumental aspects on the other, was discussed at length during the BCO impact assessment workshop held as part of this investigation. Most participants in the workshop felt that ICD has something of a dual character here – significant both for its capacity to change the environment for information and communications (and so for people’s lives) and in its capacity to achieve improvements in service delivery. Both of these dimensions of ICD work are important, and this duality itself may affect the ways in which impact assessment can most effectively be undertaken.

Impact assessment of ICD initiatives

The main question for this part of the report is whether ICD initiatives require different impact assessment frameworks from those in other development sectors. This question might be divided in two, as follows:

- Are ICD initiatives so different from other development interventions that the broad consensus about impact assessment described in Part 1 above does not hold where they are concerned?
- Even if it does hold, are there characteristics of ICD activities, or the environment in which they are deployed, that impose different or additional challenges or that require different approaches from impact assessment in other development sectors?

There is little in the ICD or impact assessment literature that would suggest that there are sufficient differences between ICD and other sectors to invalidate the broad consensus described in Part 1 of this report. All development sectors have particular challenges, and while those of the ICD sector differ from those in other sectors, hardly anyone has argued that that puts them outside the norms that apply generally to development activity. In any case, much of what concerns donors and implementing agencies about ICD is whether (or the extent to which) it improves on traditional/alternative means of seeking to achieve the same kinds of outcome – especially where it involves mainstreaming ICTs in other development sectors. It would be perverse in such cases to deviate from the norms of impact assessment which are used in those other sectors.

This suggests that there is no reason to construct impact assessment of ICD initiatives around principles other than those discussed in Part 1. However, BCO partners and other ICD agencies could usefully consider how they might strengthen their capacity in relation to these principles, in particular regarding:

- The integration of monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment into the overall project cycle, including programme and project design.
- The understanding of context, including the relationship between the intervention under consideration and other interventions undertaken by themselves or other development actors.
- The participation of project participants and other stakeholders at all stages of the cycle, including monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment.
- The selection of appropriate indicators and the establishment of benchmarks.
- Systematic monitoring and use of monitoring data.
- An open-minded approach to analysis and interpretation of findings, particularly to issues of attribution, aimed at learning from experience.
- The effective dissemination of assessment findings.

The second question above, however, about additional challenges faced by those undertaking impact assessment of ICD initiatives, has more substance. The most obvious way to

approach it is to ask what differences there are between the ICD sector and other development sectors that might affect how impact assessment can be undertaken.

Five possible areas of difference might be identified in this context, which can be summarised as follows:

- a. Organisational issues, including:
 - the difference between media and advocacy ICD interventions (which are concerned principally with change in the social or political environment) and service delivery ICD interventions (which are instrumental in character);
 - the small scale of most ICD agencies compared with mainstream agencies like Save the Children; and
 - donor uncertainty about the risks and potentialities of ICD activities.
- b. Issues to do with the nature of ICTs, including:
 - their cross-cutting character (and the difficulty of segregating the specific contribution of ICTs);
 - the importance of habituation (changes in behaviour as people become accustomed to the availability of goods and services); and
 - the difficulty of disentangling the impact of interventions from changes in the environment around them.
- c. The weakness of the established evidence base for ICD, which makes it more difficult to identify research questions and to establish appropriate indicators and base-lines.
- d. The rapid pace of change in information and communications technology and markets, resulting in:
 - rapid and unpredictable changes in the context for interventions;
 - difficulty in establishing baselines (even as trends); and
 - frequent changes in implementation strategies during the intervention cycle.
- e. Difficulties in assessing replicability and scalability, as technological change is likely to have made some aspects of interventions obsolete by the time impact assessment takes place.

The following paragraphs explore two of these issues in more detail: the quality of the evidence base for ICD, and the pace of change in communications technology and markets.

The evidence base

It is generally felt within the development community that the evidence base for ICD is weaker than it is in most development sectors.

Although there is now a good deal of written (academic and institutional) literature about ICD, a high proportion of this is concerned with the potential which its authors (and ICD agencies) feel can be derived from ICTs rather than with the assessment of experience to date. The ICD specialist international agency *infoDev* (2005) describes the problem thus:

There is still little rigorous understanding of the conditions for success of [ICD] innovations. There is an urgent need for more rigorous evaluation and impact assessment models and tools, and better analytical frameworks for understanding the role of ICTs as change agents in all sectors of economic and social development.

Some underlying reasons for the weakness in the ICD evidence base were described in the report of Component 1 of the BCO Impact Assessment, as follows:

- The experience of deploying ICTs in development is relatively new. Insufficient time has elapsed to allow for reliable judgements to be made of the impact of new technologies and the opportunities they offer.
- Much of the assessment which has been undertaken is based on short-term evaluation of pilot projects, and is focused narrowly on these particular experiences and on target beneficiaries. There has been little assessment of the holistic experience of ICT deployment or of outcomes/impact at a national level.
- The starting point for most ICD evaluation has been technological “solutions” rather than the development problems against which they might be deployed. This has led to a concentration within the evidence on technology rather than development, and on inputs rather than outcomes.
- Little has been done to relate evidence to the mainstream development sectors which are the main concern of development policy-makers. ICD experience has largely been assessed from the viewpoint of the potential of ICD rather than the challenges of health, education, poverty, rural development, etc. This has made it appear less relevant to mainstream development managers.
- Integration between ICD strategies and national development strategies, including Poverty Reduction Strategies, has been poor.
- Little has been done to date to gather together the broad range of evidence available from different countries and sectors and to make a cohesive assessment of this. (However, the Communication Initiative does provide a significant amount of raw material; and a number of attempts at cohesive assessment are now underway, including initiatives sponsored by DFID and by *infoDev*).
- Much ICD advocacy has been overenthusiastic, unresponsive to the concerns of mainstream development managers, naïve about the challenges posed in deploy-

ing new technologies in poor communities, and insufficiently concerned by the limitations of the evidence base available.

Without a strong established evidence base, donor agencies find it difficult to allocate large resources to ICD initiatives. This is a problem with which BCO partners are familiar. One of BCO's objectives from the outset, therefore, has been to contribute towards a more substantive and reliable evidence base for ICD and particularly the impact of ICD initiatives. The partnership expressed this in the following core question:

How do communications for development contribute to poverty reduction through strengthening the voices, communications and networking of the poor and the marginalised, and enable them to influence decisions that affect their lives?

Although this report and those of the other BCO Impact Assessment investigations cannot *answer* this question, it is hoped that they can contribute towards better understanding of the issues that it raises, and help BCO partners and other ICD agencies to contribute further to the evidence base, though stronger impact assessment work than is currently available.

The pace of change in communications technology and markets

Impact is about change in people's lives, especially lasting and sustainable change.

The most important and widespread changes in people's lives that have resulted from ICTs in the past decade have come about not because of development interventions but because of the increased pervasiveness of access to and use of ICTs within society. The rate of change in access to and use of ICTs has been exceptionally rapid in almost all countries. In particular, in the last ten years:

- Ownership of radio and television has become increasingly widespread, with radio use now generally pervasive, while broadcast content has become more diverse as a result of deregulation of ownership and transmission.
- Access to telephone networks has reached the large majority of rural areas in all countries (including many remote areas), with high rates of growth of mobile phone ownership and high rates of telephone use among non-subscribers as well as handset owners. The rate of growth of mobile telephony in developing countries is probably faster than that of any technology previously experienced at any time in any society.
- The internet has become pervasive in industrial countries, widespread in middle-income countries, but not yet widely used outside cities and elite communities in most low-income countries.

The impact of these changes is generally believed to be profound. Three points about this context should be borne in mind when thinking about the impact assessment of ICD initiatives.

- The first is that the impact of these changes in the information and communications environment of developing countries has not yet been properly assessed. Too little research has yet been done on the ways in which new forms of broadcasting, the sudden pervasiveness of telephony and the advent of the internet have influenced information and communications behaviour and/or facilitated change in people's lives, livelihoods and opportunities. There has, for example, been very little comprehensive assessment of the impact of these changes (seen either holistically as ICTs, or individually as different technologies) on national economies, on social behaviour or on particular social groups (such as children). This makes it more difficult to separate out the impact of ICTs in general from that of individual ICD interventions. (This might be described as the "own agency vs. development agency" question.)
- The second point is that these rapid changes in what might be called the "ambient environment" of information and communications show no sign of slowing down. Continual rapid change adds considerably to the difficulty of project design for interventions that make use of ICTs because it makes many of the assumptions involved unstable. To illustrate: it took around five years for mobile telephony in Uganda to transform national telecommunications from a situation in which there were just over 50,000 telephones located almost entirely in two urban centres, to one in which mobile phone networks reached more than 75% of the population and over a million people owned their own telephone handsets. The project cycle for many development interventions is three to five years. In these circumstances, it is clear that many of the assumptions which are made at the start of project cycles or in project design will cease to hold good by the midpoint of project implementation, and ICD interventions are therefore likely to need greater flexibility than is often found in other development initiatives.
- Interventions which make use of ICTs might therefore be divided into two main groups: those that seek to capitalise on the new availability of ICTs within target communities; and those which seek to compensate for their absence. The former can, obviously, make use of new networks to roll out services and need to provide relatively little new equipment which is not already being deployed. The latter, however, will seek to provide services and equipment where these would not otherwise be available, and so have much higher costs. The advent of mobile banking provides a good illustration (albeit one that is being deployed commercially rather than through development initiatives). The high costs of providing banking infrastructure means that financial services are generally not

available in rural areas of developing countries. However, financial services can “piggyback” the networks of mobile phone companies (both physical networks and networks of human agents such as airtime sellers) to offer banking services in rural contexts. It would not, however, be viable to build a mobile phone network for the sole purpose of delivering banking services.

The ICD sector and the challenges of impact assessment

Two ways of reviewing the implications of these additional difficulties for assessing ICD initiatives follow from the analysis in Part 1 of this report. These are to look at either a) the challenges of impact assessment which were discussed in Part 1 above, or b) the different stages of the project or impact assessment cycle.

The challenges of impact assessment

Part 1 of this report considered ten challenges of impact assessment – issues which make it difficult to undertake effectively and which need to be considered in its design, implementation and analysis. These were:

- Challenge 1: The complexity of change
- Challenge 2: The challenge of context
- Challenge 3: The challenge of the baseline
- Challenge 4: The challenge of attribution
- Challenge 5: The challenge of aggregation
- Challenge 6: The challenge of disaggregation
- Challenge 7: The challenge of the non-participant
- Challenge 8: The challenge of the unexpected
- Challenge 9: The challenge of perception
- Challenge 10: The “longitudinal” problem

The following paragraphs briefly consider these in the light of the additional challenges concerning the evidence base and the pace of change, which are described above.

The weakness of the established evidence base for ICD most obviously has implications for the understanding of context and the ease with which implementing agencies can identify the research questions that need to be asked in any particular piece of impact assessment work.

A good deal of the literature about ICD focuses, as noted earlier, on the potential of ICTs rather than on the interface between technology and human behaviour. Because the evidence base concerning this interface has not yet been well developed, the design of ICD initiatives often relies more on assumptions about possible outcomes than does design in other development sec-

tors. Indeed, over-reliance on assumptions (and consequent scepticism by donors) is one of the principal reasons why more impact assessment is required. The lack of substantial comparable research experience with ICD also makes it more difficult to decide what outcomes might be expected, and what indicators are needed to enable assessment of the unexpected.

More substantial additional challenges seem to arise, however, from the pace of change, which is much greater than in almost every other development sector. The following paragraphs suggest some of the most significant ways in which this is likely to affect the design, implementation and analysis of impact:

- ICD initiatives are likely to occur in an information and communications context which is changing very rapidly or (in some cases, even) experiencing transformation. The impact of ICTs in society as a whole is changing the ways in which people gain information and interact with one another. The behavioural change associated with this is likely to change the way in which people interact with an intervention itself during the course of implementation, in a way that does not usually happen with (for example) health or education projects.
- This makes it much more difficult, and sometimes perhaps impossible, to establish indicators which reveal findings that offer evidence primarily about the intervention itself rather than seeing that evidence lost in the “background noise” of external changes in the information and communications environment. One of the particular challenges here may be to distinguish between indicators which are primarily technological and those which are primarily concerned with attitudes and behaviour.
- The pace of change also makes it much more difficult, and sometimes probably impossible, to establish baseline data which will have consistent value throughout the implementation period. In many cases, the more important baseline may not be the static value of an indicator at a project’s starting point but the trend occurring in that indicator at that point in time; with the more important measurement of impact arising from it being not the rates at which static values change but the rate at which such trends accelerate or decelerate.
- It is clear from the above that it will often be more difficult to deal with matters of attribution in ICD initiatives than with other development sectors where it is easier to isolate individual changes in the environment (the introduction of a road, the digging of a borehole, the establishment of a clinic) within the relevant (transport, water supply or health service) context. In practice, it may sometimes be easier to establish the aggregate impact of changes in the ICT environment than the impact of specific components in that aggregate change.
- A weak background evidence base and rapid change make it likely that there will be many more unexpected or

unanticipated outcomes, and that these may be harder to identify. It is worth noting that communications business professionals have found it very hard to predict the outcomes of the technological changes they have introduced. The exceptional growth of mobile phones, SMS and the internet, for example, all surprised telecommunications business planners. Many of the outcomes of new technological deployments result from experimental behaviour by users, and this is as true of ICD interventions as it is of commercial ICT deployment.

- Finally, changes in this sector are so rapid that, by the time a (say) three-year initiative has been completed, the technology originally used has become obsolete, or at least would no longer be the most appropriate for deployment. At the same time, changes in the availability and use of ICTs within target communities are most likely to suggest a very different approach to facilitating access and use than occurred at project initiation. This poses particular difficulties for the use of findings of pilot projects which have been intended to provide evidence for scalability and replicability.

Stages in the impact assessment cycle

What are the implications of these issues for different stages in the project or impact assessment cycle? The following paragraphs suggest a number of issues that arise which might be included in future discussions.

Design stage

The main additional challenges of ICD impact assessment at the design stage of the project cycle include:

- The lack of a strong prior evidence base which informs understanding of context and of likelihood of impact.
- The lack of information about the overall communications environment.
- The lack of baseline data and instability of the baseline.

Some approaches which may help to address these additional challenges might include the following:

- Understanding of the *status quo ante* would be significantly improved if project design included an information and communications audit, i.e., a systematic, evidence-based assessment of the communications environment, including patterns of information and communications behaviour, the availability and use of ICT devices, and the role of information intermediaries in the locality concerned. Although this does take time and money, resources spent on this kind of preparation are likely to lead to better targeted implementation as well as better informed evaluation and impact assessment.

- Particular care should be taken over the establishment of indicators and baselines, including awareness of the rates of change which are occurring in indicators at project start. This should extend to the disaggregation of data between different social groups, with special attention to priority target groups such as the very poor and/or marginalised (multiply disadvantaged).
- Specific attention might be given to anticipating the unexpected, by considering, with project participants, where ICD initiatives are most likely to have results beyond their immediate objectives, and preparing for their assessment by ensuring that relevant baseline and indicator data are collected.
- Early attention might also be given to stakeholder mapping of initiatives, in order to gain input throughout the monitoring period from all who are intended to be or may in practice be affected by implementation. This should significantly help to ensure full stakeholder engagement in the final impact assessment process.

Implementation stage

Major additional challenges at the implementation stage include:

- Rapid changes in the communications environment (especially access to and use of ICT facilities) which result from changes in technology deployment, business strategy or regulation, and are not related to the intervention itself.
- Rapid changes in information and communications behaviour connected with these changes in the communications environment.
- Changes in the implementation strategies for interventions that result from these changes in the communications environment and behaviour, and from assessment of monitoring findings.

Some approaches which may be useful in this context are as follows:

- Programme and project managers need to engage in continuous monitoring of the communications environment affecting an intervention in order to adjust implementation to changing needs. This monitoring will also contribute significantly to their ability to address the challenge of attribution, i.e., to place the impact of the intervention itself on “lasting and sustainable change” within the wider context of “lasting and sustainable change” which takes place around it.
- In many cases, it will be necessary to adopt a rolling baseline, i.e., to adjust the baseline at various time points within the implementation phase in order to recognise the scale of changes which have occurred in the communications environment. This will make the baseline more sensitive to what is taking place at different times

within the implementation period, particularly if there are clearly recognisable stages in project implementation (or a number of phases in user behaviour).

- It may also be valuable to identify and monitor control groups outside an intervention's target beneficiaries. Assessment of control groups (i.e., groups which are comparable to those taking an active part in a particular study except for the fact that they are not themselves the subjects of the intervention being studied) is widely used in scientific and social science research, though there have been some ethical concerns about their use in development research. In this context, however, control groups would not be deliberately excluded from project implementation, but groups (for example, neighbouring communities) who do not form part of the intervention plan but which have similar social and economic characteristics and (particularly important) share the same experience of change in communications technology and markets. They would therefore help to isolate the effect of the intervention itself from the "background noise" of environmental change. Control groups may be particularly appropriate for pilot projects.

Analysis and interpretation

Major additional challenges at the analysis and interpretation stage include:

- The fact that technology and user groups at the end of an intervention are likely to differ significantly from those at its start.
- A high degree of difficulty in determining attribution.
- A high level of potential unexpected outcomes.
- Significant differences of perception regarding outcomes between different groups of project participants and other stakeholders, particularly concerning the distribution of outcomes.
- The fact that impact is essentially long-term, so that much impact may not be readily discernable at project end, when impact assessment is usually undertaken.
- The likelihood that available technologies and prevailing patterns of communications use will have changed significantly between project initiation and completion, making issues of scalability and replicability particularly difficult to assess.

Some approaches which may be useful in this context are as follows:

- Care should be taken to distinguish between technological and behavioural change. It is not technological change that brings about changes in people's lives, but the behavioural change that results from it. To accommodate the long-term nature of impact, it may be necessary to use at-

titudinal indicators as proxies for subsequent behavioural change (although this technique requires caution).

- The evidence of project participants and other stakeholders will be crucial to understanding what is going on. Differences in perception between different participants and stakeholders – intersubjectivity – should not be seen as a problem or a complication here, but as an essential part of the grain of impact, which adds richness to understanding of what has happened, to whom and why. It may be particularly important to understanding impacts on the very poor and most marginalised.
- Participant and stakeholder engagement are insufficient for interpretation on their own. In addition, it will be valuable to draw on expertise and experience in comparable interventions, both in identifying impact assessment questions and in validating findings – provided (and this is a big proviso) that the other experiences in question have themselves been assessed with sufficient rigour.
- Additional longitudinal studies or tracker studies should be undertaken, if possible, once a significant period has elapsed from the end date of the intervention (six months, a year, two years). Such studies are difficult to finance in the development sector because they are unattractive to donors and do not offer immediate answers to questions. However, the quality of insight which they can contribute to understanding, especially in such a new and uncertain area as ICD, has very high potential value, and investment in such studies of major interventions would almost certainly justify the cost. (Studies of this kind are probably much easier to finance in areas such as medical research where the importance of long-term assessment of impact is better recognised.)

Use of findings

Major challenges in the use of findings include:

- The lack of an established good quality evidence base with which findings can be compared.
- The reluctance of implementing agencies to share inconclusive or negative findings with other stakeholders.

The lack of an established good quality evidence base in this field is a major factor in donor uncertainty. What donors require here is an improved evidence base which offers credible, validated findings on the basis of which they can make future funding decisions with confidence. Although it is not surprising that implementing agencies are often unwilling to share inconclusive or negative findings with donors and peer agencies (as they are in other development sectors), this is likely to lead to continued lack of understanding amongst donors and to sub-optimal project design and implementation – neither of which is going to meet the needs of the poor and marginalised in the longer term.

One approach to this would be stronger collaboration between donors and implementing agencies to share impact assessment findings – positive and negative, intended and unexpected – in a more open-minded fashion. Donors and implementing agencies might also do more to share experience of impact assessment methodologies. BCO partners might like to discuss how these desirable outcomes might be achieved.

Conclusion

Impact assessment is not a luxury, but an important part of understanding what happens in development processes and ensuring that development interventions contribute positively and sustainably to improving the lives of the poor and the communities in which they live. If anything, its importance is greatest in development sectors like ICD where the evidence base is weak, where assumptions need to be tested, and where the underlying context is in constant flux.

Impact assessment, however, is not easy.

- It requires sustained commitment on the part of implementing agencies, from project design through to project completion *and beyond*.

- It requires understanding on the part of donors, including the willingness to recognise that unexpected and even negative impacts need to be identified and understood; and that impact assessment is not about the validation of past decisions but about the improvement of those that will be made in future.
- It requires the participation of project users (target beneficiaries) and of other stakeholders at all stages in the project cycle.
- Above all, in the words of Save the Children, it “requires an honest and self-critical approach and a learning culture with good and trusting relations between partners.”

Discussions about BCO experience and the relationship between ICD and other areas of development practice, which were held during the BCO impact assessment workshop in March 2008, showed that BCO partners are concerned to develop approaches to impact assessment which are consistent with their development objectives and strategies for programme/project design and implementation. It is hoped that this report will contribute to the further development of their ideas and practice. ■

ANNEX 1

BCO partner input

BCO partners provided a number of documents to the investigation in order to facilitate understanding of how they currently approach evaluation and impact assessment. These documents are as follows:

AMARC, <i>Community Radio Social Impact Assessment: Removing Barriers, Increasing Effectiveness</i> , 2007.	BCO, <i>Impact Assessment Component 1 Report</i> , 2007.	Panos London, <i>Monitoring and Evaluation Guidelines</i> , 2004.
AMARC, <i>Community Radio Social Impact Assessment – Project Implementation Report No. 1: Methodologies and Activities Specifications</i> , 2006.	DFID, <i>Monitoring and Evaluating Information and Communication for Development (ICD) Programmes: Guidelines</i> , 2005.	Panos London, <i>Guidelines for Developing a Theory of Change</i> .
APC, <i>Evaluation Report on Communications and Information Policy Programme</i> , 2005.	Hivos, <i>Policy Framework for Improved Result Orientation and Result Awareness</i> , 2004.	SDC, <i>Presentation on ICD Integration, Context and Trends</i> , 2006
APC, <i>Gender Evaluation Methodology for Internet and ICTs: A learning tool for change and empowerment</i> , 2003.	IICD, <i>Manual for Monitoring and Evaluation Partners</i> , 2006.	
	IICD, <i>Monitoring and Evaluation for Learning: IICD's experience</i> .	

ANNEX 2

Selected list of resources

There is a substantial literature on impact assessment, which BCO partners can use to develop thinking about the issues included in this report. The following brief list of resources identifies some which the author thinks may be of particular value or interest.

Bakewell, O. (2003) <i>Sharpening the Development Process: A Practical Guide to Monitoring and Evaluation</i> . Oxford: INTRAC.	Earl, S., Carden, F. & Smutylo, T. (2001) <i>Outcome Mapping: Building Learning and Reflection into Development Programs</i> . Ottawa: IDRC. www.idrc.ca/openbooks/959-3/	Sayce, K. & Norrish, P. (2006) <i>Perceptions and Practice: An Anthology of Impact Assessment Experiences</i> . Wageningen, The Netherlands: CTA. www.anancy.net/uploads/file_en/impact%20assessment.pdf .
Center for Global Development (2006) <i>When Will We Ever Learn? Improving Lives Through Impact</i> . Washington: Center for Global Development. www.cgdev.org/content/publications/detail/7973	Gosling, L. & Edwards, M. (2003) <i>Toolkits: A Practical Guide to Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Impact Assessment</i> . London: Save the Children.	Tacchi, J., Slater, D. & Hearn, G. (2003) <i>Ethnographic Action Research</i> . New Delhi: UNESCO Regional Bureau for Communication and Information. portal.unesco.org/ci/en/files/13276/10672478597Ethnographic_Action_Research.pdf/Ethnographic%2BAction%2BResearch.pdf
Clark, M & Sartorius, R. (2004) <i>Monitoring & Evaluation: Some Tools, Methods and Approaches</i> . Washington: World Bank. Inweb18.worldbank.org/oed/oeddoclib.nsf/b57456d58aba40e585256ad400736404/a5efbb5d776b67d285256b1e0079c9a3/\$FILE/MandE_tools_methods_approaches.pdf	Hovland, I. (2007) <i>Making a Difference: M&E of policy research</i> . London: ODI. www.odi.org.uk/publications/working_papers/wp281.pdf	UNDP Evaluation Office (2002) <i>Handbook on Monitoring and Evaluating for Results</i> . New York: UNDP. www.undp.org/eo/documents/HandBook/ME-HandBook.pdf
Davies, R. Editor, MandE NEWS website: www.mande.co.uk	infoDev (2005) <i>Framework for the Assessment of Pilot Projects: Beyond Monitoring and Evaluation to Applied Research</i> . Washington: World Bank. www.infodev.org/en/Publication.4.html	White, H. (2005) <i>Challenges in Evaluating Development Effectiveness</i> . Brighton: IDS. www.ntd.co.uk/idsbookshop/details.asp?id=861
DFID Central Research Department (2006) <i>Monitoring and Evaluation: A Guide for DFID-contracted Research Programmes</i> . London: DFID. www.dfid.gov.uk/research/me-guide-contracted-research.pdf	Oakley, P., Pratt, B. & Clayton, A. (1998) <i>Outcomes and Impact: Evaluating Change in Social Development</i> . Oxford: INTRAC.	
	Roche, C. (1999) <i>Impact Assessment for Development Agencies: Learning to Value Change</i> . Oxford: Oxfam.	

ICD and Impact Assessment: Report of a workshop held in London on 18-19 March 2008

DAVID SOUTER

Introduction

A workshop was held in Development House, London on 18 and 19 March 2008 as part of Investigation 4 of the BCO Impact Assessment.

The workshop was intended for personnel from BCO partners who are concerned with evaluation and impact assessment issues. It was attended by four participants from AMARC, ten from APC, one from DFID, one from Hivos, one from IICD, one from OneWorld South Asia, nine from Panos London, two from Panos South Asia and two participants from non-BCO organisations. It was facilitated by Kate Wild.

The draft report of Investigation 4, written by David Souter of *ict Development Associates Ltd.*, was circulated as the background document for the workshop. In addition, expert contributions were made by Sarah Lilley of Save the Children, Anthony Makumbi of Plan International (Uganda), Alice Munyua of KICTANet (Kenya), Kerry McNamara (formerly of *infoDev*), Pam Muckosy of the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), Brian Pratt of INTRAC, and Claire Sibthorpe (formerly manager of the CATIA programme). A full list of participants can be found in Annex 1.¹

This document briefly summarises the discussions held during the workshop. A copy of the programme can be found in Annex 2.

Background

BCO (Building Communication Opportunities) is a three-year programme supported by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), with the involvement of six international development NGOs: the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC), the Association for Progressive Communications (APC), Hivos, the International Institute for Communications and Development (IICD), OneWorld (members in Africa, Asia and the Americas) and two Panos Institutes (Panos London and Panos South Asia). Impact Assessment work within BCO is supported by DFID.

The BCO programme has supported a range of work undertaken by the BCO partner agencies, which is summarised in Component 1 of the BCO Impact Assessment.²

Component 3 of the Impact Assessment consists of investigations into BCO, and ICD experience in general, in four areas:

- Radio and political change (with particular emphasis on Nepal)
- ICT, markets and the poor (with particular emphasis on Ecuador)
- ICT networking for policy change (with particular emphasis on gender/ICT networking)
- Evaluation and impact assessment of ICD activities.

BCO partners agreed that the scope of Investigation 4 should be as follows:

- To review the approaches to evaluation and impact assessment which are used by BCO partners and other ICD agencies.
- To compare these with approaches to evaluation and impact assessment which are used in other development organisations, including both donor agencies and mainstream development NGOs.
- To assess whether, how and where the evaluation and impact assessment requirements of ICD activities differ from those of other development contexts.
- To identify measures which BCO partners and other ICD agencies can take to improve the quality and value of their monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment.

The Investigation has been made up of two components:

- A written report which provides a general review of impact assessment literature and experience, and explores possible areas in which ICD impact assessment may have different requirements to those in other development sectors.
- The workshop here reported, which was intended to provide an opportunity for BCO partners to review their own approaches to evaluation and impact assessment and compare these with practice in other organisations and the requirements of other stakeholders.

¹ All annexes, including copies of the draft report and presentation slides, are accessible through the BCO website: www.bcoalliance.org

² www.bcoalliance.org/system/files/BCOImpact+Assessment_C1Report.pdf

Workshop objectives and programme

The agreed aims of the workshop were as follows:

- To establish the relationship between implementation, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and impact assessment.
- To discuss objectives and best practice in impact assessment.
- To review BCO partner experience to date and compare it with experience of selected NGOs with substantial impact assessment experience and established models of practice.
- To understand donor perspectives on impact assessment.
- To identify areas in which ICD impact assessment may differ from that in other sectors.
- To identify ways in which BCO partners – and other ICD agencies – can move forward in this area.

The programme for the workshop can be found in Annex 2. Over the course of two days, it focused in turn on:

- Impact assessment principles and practice (Day 1 Session 2)
- BCO partner experience (Day 1 Session 3)
- Experience in other NGOs and development agencies (Day 1 Session 4)
- Stakeholder requirements for impact assessment (Day 2 Session 1)
- The relationship between ICD impact assessment and that in other development sectors (Day 2 Session 2)
- BCO partner discussions and ideas for the future (Day 2 Sessions 3 and 4)

Workshop report

Day 1 Session 1: Introduction and purpose of workshop

The workshop was opened by the facilitator, Kate Wild, who outlined the background (above) and emphasised the workshop's aims – in particular, developing understanding of the role of impact assessment and assisting BCO partners to improve their practice in this area.

Day 1 Session 2: Implementation, evaluation, impact assessment – principles and practice

David Souter presented Part 1 of the draft report of Investigation 4, which sets out the broad understanding of impact assessment which is found in development practitioner literature and development agency practice.

The draft report itself is not summarised in this workshop report, but should be reviewed in conjunction with it. A copy of this original workshop report can be found in Annex 14. A revised version is included separately in the overall BCO Impact Assessment report.

A copy of David Souter's presentation can be found in Annex 3. A principal objective of this presentation was to build a common vocabulary for the workshop by clarifying the understanding of key terms in impact assessment literature and practice, including the relationship between different aspects of "result assessment" (monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment).

Two key definitions of "impact assessment" cited in this context were as follows:

- "Impact assessment refers to an evaluation of how, and to what extent, development interventions cause sustainable changes in living conditions and behaviour of beneficiaries and the differential effects of these on women and men." (Peter Oakley, Brian Pratt and Andrew Clayton, *Outcomes & Impact*, INTRAC).
- "Impact assessment is the systematic analysis of the lasting or significant changes – positive or negative, intended or not – in people's lives brought about by a given action or series of actions." (Chris Roche, *Impact Assessment for Development Agencies*, Oxfam).

This understanding of "impact assessment" was contrasted in development literature and practice with "evaluation", defined in the presentation as "the periodic assessment of the relevance, performance, efficiency and impact of a piece of work with respect to its stated objectives."

In the presentation, David Souter emphasised that impact assessment, as understood by development agencies, is concerned with the measurement of change for individuals, communities and societies and is therefore much broader in purpose and requirements than the evaluation of specific development interventions. The development literature on impact assessment pays particular attention to the importance of understanding context; engaging stakeholders (including donors, participants and non-participants) in the impact assessment process; establishing appropriate indicators and baseline data; exploring unexpected and negative outcomes; and facilitating learning which will improve future intervention design and implementation.

The presentation identified ten major challenges (or difficulties) faced by those engaged with impact assessment, as follows:

- The complexity of change
- The challenge of context
- The challenge of the baseline

- The challenge of attribution
- The challenge of aggregation
- The challenge of disaggregation
- The challenge of the non-participant
- The challenge of the unexpected
- The challenge of perception
- The “longitudinal” problem

These are described in the presentation (Annex 3) and the draft report (Annex 14). David Souter closed by emphasising that these challenges made impact assessment complex rather than unachievable; that there was increasing experience in addressing them; and that experience suggested that the ability to do so depended as much on organisational commitment as on other necessary resources.

An initial plenary discussion followed this presentation. This focused in particular on:

- The relationship between monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment, and different ways of integrating these into a common framework of understanding and practice.
- The relationship between different terms of measurement used at different stages or levels of results assessment (such as “outputs”, “outcomes”, “effects” and “impact”).
- The engagement of participants and other stakeholders in impact assessment design and implementation.
- The role which interventions themselves play in changing the context within which they are implemented during the course of implementation.
- The difficulty of establishing impact in advocacy and media activities, which are directed at intermediaries rather than intended “beneficiaries” of interventions.
- The difficulty of establishing “lasting and sustainable” impact without available funds for longitudinal research or retrospective studies undertaken some time after an intervention has been completed.
- The competing pressures placed on agencies by the desire to understand as well as possible what they have and have not achieved (on the one hand) and the need to secure donor funding by demonstrating the effectiveness of their work.

These issues were taken forward during subsequent discussions.

Day 1 Session 3: BCO partner experiences

The third session of the workshop was devoted to BCO partner experiences and brief question and answer sessions resulting from these.

A.S. Panneerselvam, from Panos South Asia, put the case (based on PSA experience) that communications is not so much instrumental as a central feature of human existence which cannot be judged as a development activity aimed at defined outcomes. A copy of his presentation can be found in Annex 4.

Kitty Warnock, from Panos London, discussed the different levels that need to be considered when exploring the impact of media and described Panos’ experience in evaluating its media work in Uganda. A copy of her presentation can be found in Annex 5.

Marcelo Solervicens, from AMARC, described the Community Radio Social Impact Assessment work undertaken by AMARC in 2006.³

Chat Garcia described the Gender Evaluation Methodology (GEM) which has been developed and used by APC.⁴ A copy of her presentation can be found in Annex 6.

Anne Podt, from IICD, described the systematic approach which IICD has adopted to securing end-user evaluations of our country programmes. Her presentation is attached in Annex 7.

Among the issues raised during the discussion following these presentations were:

- The importance and difficulty of establishing baselines, particularly given their high degree of dependence on context.
- The importance of relating intervention objectives to implementation activities, in particular of having a realistic understanding of what a particular intervention can achieve.
- The importance of identifying local partners and other informants for inclusion in evaluation and impact assessment, including at the planning stage, and of valuing the different perceptions that arise from their inclusion (“intersubjectivity”).
- The importance of triangulating data – comparing findings from different methodologies – in order to gain a richer and more reliable understanding of what has taken place.

In his summary at the end of the session, Brian Pratt of INTRAC raised a number of examples of impact assessment experience in non-ICD sectors which suggested points of comparison and discussion for ICD agencies. He concluded by emphasising the importance of being able to answer what he called the “So what?” question, as it might be put by different stakeholders (donors, project participants, governments, other NGOs, and the implementing agency itself). The fact that an intervention has been implemented is not evidence of developmental value (impact); developmental value can only be established

³ The resulting report is available at evaluation.amarc.org/evaluation_2007.pdf

⁴ Details on GEM and its use are available at www.apcwomen.org/gem

through a more thorough understanding of what actually took place, and an honest assessment of what worked and what did not. No one involved in the intervention (donor, implementing agency, intended “beneficiary”) should be satisfied, he concluded, if the “So what?” question can’t be answered.

Day 1 Session 4: Examples of NGO practice and plenary discussion

Session 4 began with three presentations from external experts.

Sarah Lilley described Save the Children’s approach to impact assessment. Her presentation can be found in Annex 8. She emphasised the relationship between Save’s impact monitoring system, its overall rights-based approach to children’s development, and the different dimensions of change which Save seeks to enable in the lives of children, both directly and through other agencies including governments. From Save’s experience, she emphasised the challenge of attribution; the need to draw on both quantitative and qualitative methodologies; the problems posed by lack of funding for longitudinal/hindsight studies; the need to build internal impact assessment capacity; and the need to streamline reporting and make more effective use of findings gained.

Pam Muckosy reported on the investigation into networking experience which the ODI had undertaken as part of Investigation 3 of the Impact Assessment. Her presentation can be found in Annex 9.

Brian Pratt of INTRAC raised a number of issues in a wide-ranging discussion of impact assessment experience in development agencies, focusing in particular on current trends and emerging issues. In particular he emphasised:

- The dichotomy between the demand to meet short-term objectives (results-based management) and the need to understand longer-term impact concerns (learning from impact assessment).
- Increasing emphasis among donors on demonstration of impact, particularly in the context of the MDGs.
- The importance of using a variety of indicators (including both qualitative and quantitative, both of which are necessary to understanding impact).
- The importance of asking open questions in order to identify unexpected outcomes.
- The tendency within agencies to overcomplicate systems, establishing more indicators than can be readily assessed with available resources.
- The importance of understanding that evaluation and impact assessment may result in different conclusions about the same activity (because they are measuring different things).

- The risk that competition between agencies for donor resources will lead to distortions in the interpretation of impact assessment findings.

In conclusion, he suggested that impact assessment thinking was being affected by changes in the “aid architecture” – in particular, that donors are placing more emphasis on the state and less on civil society.

Session 4 continued with group discussions amongst participants on the following questions posed by the facilitator, Kate Wild:

- What can BCO partners learn from the experiences described during the workshop to date?
- What is going to challenge BCO partners most at different stages of impact assessment?
- Can BCO partners learn from others in the following areas:
 - a. diagnostics and design?
 - b. implementation?
 - c. analysis and interpretation?
 - d. use of findings?

The following paragraphs report briefly on the subsequent presentations on group discussions.

Group 1, reported by Anne Podt of IICD, had begun to address the issues by exploring the purpose of impact assessment in the light of diverse experiences with donors and own practice. In this context, the group felt it was important a) to emphasise change rather than attribution when thinking about future impact assessment work; b) to understand the difference between evaluation and impact assessment (valuing the distinctiveness of evaluation rather than viewing it as inferior); and c) to focus on achieving credible evidence of results rather than seeking to establish (unattainable) proof. It felt that there was much to learn from Save the Children’s experience of learning from disappointing results and its emphasis on separating learning from funding/finance (which is also the practice in IICD).

The group suggested that BCO might be able to undertake studies or trials aimed at establishing “realistic levels of evidence”.

Group 2, reported by Marcelo Solervicens of AMARC, had brainstormed around the three questions raised by the facilitator. In its presentation, it emphasised a) the importance of seeing civil society as an actor within the assessment itself; b) the need to integrate impact assessment into the whole intervention process, rather than seeing it as something to be undertaken at the end of the intervention; and c) the importance of involving “the people on the ground” fully in the assessment process.

The group suggested that BCO and other agencies could do more to share both data-gathering and results. In this context,

it emphasised the importance of evidential rigour and quality in enabling credible results and advocacy.

Group 3, reported by Natasha Primo of APC, raised a number of additional points. In particular, it a) stressed the value of selecting a small number of appropriate and measurable indicators, even if this meant sacrificing some richness of detail; b) suggested focusing attention on collaboration (and aggregation) rather than seeking to establish (or contest) attribution; and c) recommended involving all stakeholders in establishing the framework for impact assessment work.

It noted five particular challenges: i) the high cost of impact assessment, particularly for small agencies; ii) the difficulty of measuring change in the policy environment, particularly where this can only be measured in the longer term; iii) the difficulty of ensuring commitment to the process throughout the organisation; iv) the challenge of encouraging honesty around difficulties; and v) the establishment of effective feedback mechanisms between impact assessment and future practice.

Concluding the first day of the workshop, the facilitator Kate Wild noted that discussions throughout the day had emphasised that, while impact assessment was challenging, and different for different organisations, it was not something that could be set aside or ignored if agencies wanted to achieve objectives. The “So what?” question, in other words, was crucial. She pointed to considerable convergence during discussions around a number of themes, including a) the need for stakeholder involvement, b) the importance of assessing process as well as outcomes, c) the need to be open to unexpected results, and d) the challenge of limited funding.

Day 2 Session 1: Stakeholders in impact assessment

The second day of the workshop began with a session focusing on impact assessment as it is seen by different stakeholders, in particular by donors, project participants and governments.

It opened with a presentation (delivered remotely from Washington DC) by Kerry McNamara, formerly of *infoDev*. A copy of his presentation can be found in Annex 10. This presentation built upon the opening presentation by David Souter on Day 1. In it, Kerry McNamara focused in particular on the following points:

- The difficulty (and importance) of trying to understand causal links or “results chains” in development work, particularly in ICD.
- The importance of asking counterfactual questions about experience (i.e., asking what would have happened if an intervention had not taken place).
- The value of using several methodological approaches in order to triangulate research findings.

- The need to understand potential trade-offs between different approaches when learning from experience.
- The particular difficulty of dealing with impact assessment in policy and advocacy contexts.
- The special challenge of replication and scaling of interventions, particularly where ICD pilot projects are concerned.

The presentation also addressed some of the issues concerned with the relationship between impact assessment for ICD and impact assessment in other, more established development sectors.

Kerry McNamara discussed recent increased interest in impact assessment in the World Bank, including the perceived need to build impact assessment capacity in developing countries, and increased interest in intermediate as well as final impacts. Finally, he raised some wider issues about the broader development context. In particular, he raised three points which were the subject of further discussion later in the day:

- The relationship between the impact of changes in the context for development (e.g., the widespread availability of mobile phones) and that of specific development interventions.
- The relationship between impact assessment and different broad conceptions of development – in particular the emphasis of some development specialists on measurable specific development outcomes (such as the MDGs), while others concentrate more on changes in the context/environment for development (including participation and empowerment).
- The possibility that impact assessment of information and communications interventions might need to focus more equally on “environmental” and “instrumental” aspects of change, given the cross-cutting nature of some IC activities, and that this may require some different framing of impact assessment from other areas of development activity. Such reframing did not mean avoiding the question, he added, but might make it less restrictive.

The session continued with a presentation by Jappe Kok of Hivos on the results orientation and results assessment which it applies to the work of its development partners. A copy of his presentation can be found in Annex 11.

In this presentation, Jappe Kok emphasised the importance which Hivos attaches to result (or impact) assessment: although difficult, this was considered an essential element in accountability, learning and programme development. He placed particular emphasis on the importance of building trust between Hivos (in its capacity as “donor”) and the implementing agencies with which it works. Hivos expects its partners to undertake results assessment work that will enable learning on the part of all concerned, but to make

use of approaches and methodologies that most suit their needs and circumstances – rather than trying to impose a template of Hivos' own devising. In discussion, a number of BCO partners stressed the importance of the "trust agenda" in enabling effective impact assessment to be undertaken.

Two further presentations were made in this session:

Anthony Makumbi of Plan International described the approach to child-centred community development within Plan, and its relationship with programme design, evaluation and post-evaluation. A copy of his presentation can be found in Annex 12.

Alice Munyua looked at impact assessment from the perspectives of a) a multi-stakeholder civil society-led network (such as KICTANet) and b) a government agency (such as the Communications Commission of Kenya). She emphasised the importance, from these perspectives, of thinking about impact assessment in terms of impacts on society and of social and economic development as a whole, as well as the specific outcomes of particular interventions. Developing this kind of approach, she said, was progressing but still in its early stages in Kenya. She noted the analogous use of consultation processes by government agencies such as CCK, and the importance which KICTANet attaches to measuring outreach and the impact of its networking on mobilisation of stakeholders for policy intervention. Finally, she suggested the possible need to bifurcate consideration of impact assessment of ICD, seeing it not so much (or not only) as a development sector but also (or primarily) as an enabling or cross-cutting factor that has most significance in terms of its interactions with other development sectors.

Day 2 Session 6: Impact assessment for ICD compared with impact assessment in other development contexts

This session took the form of a roundtable discussion exploring the question of whether (and how) impact assessment for ICD might differ from impact assessment in other development sectors (such as health, education or rural development).

David Souter opened the session with a brief presentation outlining some differences between ICD and other development sectors which might suggest that impact assessment challenges in the ICD context differ from those in other sectors or that common challenges might need to be addressed in different ways. A copy of his presentation can be found in Annex 13.

The possible differences raised in this presentation included:

- a. Organisational issues, including:
 - the difference between media and advocacy ICD interventions (which are concerned principally with change in the social or political environment) and service

delivery ICD interventions (which are instrumental in character);

- the small scale of most ICD agencies compared with mainstream agencies like Save the Children; and
- donor uncertainty about the risks and potentialities of ICD activities.

b. Issues to do with the nature of ICTs, including:

- their cross-cutting character (and the difficulty of segregating the specific contribution of ICTs);
- the importance of habituation (changes in behaviour as people become accustomed to the availability of goods and services); and
- the difficulty of disentangling the impact of interventions from changes in the environment around them.

c. The weakness of the established evidence base for ICD, which makes it more difficult to identify research questions and to establish appropriate indicators and baselines.

d. The rapid pace of change in information and communications technology and markets, resulting in:

- rapid and unpredictable changes in the context for interventions;
- difficulty in establishing baselines (even as trends); and
- frequent changes in implementation strategies during the intervention cycle.

e. Difficulties in assessing replicability and scalability, as technological change is likely to have made some aspects of interventions obsolete by the time impact assessment takes place.

A number of important issues were raised during the following discussion, which fed into subsequent group sessions. These included the following:

- The importance of the distinction between information and communications as agents of environmental change (participation, empowerment, media, etc.) and as agents of instrumental change (service delivery in areas such as health and education) – and therefore of considering approaches to impact assessment appropriate to both these contexts.
- The question of whether, in light of this, it is more appropriate to think of ICD as a development sector *per se* or to emphasise its mainstream/cross-cutting/environmental role (and whether this is a matter that can be determined by the ICD sector or one which is determined in practice by perceptions of ICD in the development community as a whole).

- The importance of the distinction between technical (including technological) and behavioural change, the interplay between these, and the complex relationships which they have individually and collectively with social change.
- The need to include assessment of the value of access to communications and the value of participation in communications alongside other factors in impact assessment.
- The need to relate the impact of interventions taken against the impact of “environmental” changes such as (for example) the increase in mobile telephony access which has occurred in most developing countries independently of any development intervention (an issue that might be summarised as “own agency vs. development agency”).
- The question of whether evaluation and impact assessment are primarily tools of donor accountability, or should be seen instead primarily (or equally) as tools for implementing agency learning and improvement – and whether, in either case, they are essential or necessary for ICD NGOs.
- The likelihood that ICD interventions will coincide and intersect with one another, often/usually without implementing agencies cooperating or sharing common objectives and assessment methodologies.
- The significance of governance issues in enabling and assessing impact.
- The degree to which donors emphasise the MDGs in impact assessment and the extent to which this is relevant or helpful in the ICD context.
- The potential for structuring impact assessment of ICD interventions in ways that reach beyond the ICD sector into the relationship between information, communication and ICTs (on the one hand) and other development sectors (on the other).
- The need for BCO partners and ICD agencies to develop a clear understanding of how to assess impact and how to articulate and present results to donors.

In his summary, Kerry McNamara described this debate as raising two core issues for further discussion:

- How to develop more rigorous models and tools for understanding whether particular interventions (or agencies) are making “a difference”
- How to express the impact which interventions/agencies are having in a way that engages effectively with other stakeholders, notably with donors.

Day 2 Session 7: BCO partner group discussions

A number of participants had to leave the workshop before or during the afternoon sessions on Day 2 of the workshop. In Session 7, the remaining participants from Panos and APC were invited by the facilitator to discuss (in groups made up of representatives from their own agency alone) the implications of the issues raised so far for their own organisations. Other participants were invited to consider the question raised in Kerry McNamara’s presentation, about whether the impact assessment of ICD could be reframed in ways that took account of its specific and distinct dimensions. (The Panos and APC groups were also invited to discuss this question if they had time available.) The following paragraphs summarise the feedback presentations from these sessions.

The Panos group had begun by focusing on the question of what would be most useful for it to evaluate or assess, in line with Panos network objectives to establish a common approach to evaluation and impact assessment. It was envisaged that a more common approach would help Panos Institutes better understand the “big picture” issues with which they are concerned, as well as in developing aggregate indicators, exchanging findings, learning from one another’s experience and running joint programmes in the future. It was hoped that this approach would also assist in seeking and securing funding, not least for impact assessment itself. “Stimulating debate around development issues” emerged as a theme that could form the basis of an evaluation approach shared by all the Panos Institutes, as it was a shared basic principle that embraced much of Panos’ work as well as being a specific objective of many projects and programmes. The group also discussed the balance between “media development” and “media for development”, which cuts across many aspects of Panos’ work.

The APC group noted that many of its activities had an evaluation component, but that these were not fed into a more institutionalised system of monitoring and evaluation across the organisation. It had discussed possible ways of addressing this, including the viability of a centralised monitoring system; the desirability of encouraging donors to move away from project-based evaluation to programme-wide assessments; and the possibility of aggregating impact findings through the framework of the APC strategic plan. One possible approach would be a comprehensive evaluation of what APC has achieved over the past eighteen years, which would contribute towards future prioritisation and strategisation. Finally, the group noted that, in discussion, many of its members preferred to use the term “evaluation and learning” rather than “impact assessment”.

The third group, which focused on the question of whether it would be possible or desirable to reframe the meaning of impact assessment in the ICD context, raised a number of questions which fed into subsequent discussion – in particular, about whether ICD should be seen primarily as a sector or as

a cross-cutting activity; a tool or a process; an issue of information or of communication; of knowledge or of governance. The group also raised the question of whether ICD agencies should base their thinking on this around pillars of activity (as Save the Children does) or around knowledge-sharing indicators.

A number of important issues were raised during discussion following these presentations.

- There was significant discussion about the historical context for information and communication issues within development. Some participants argued that “the case for ICD” had been dominated around the turn of the century by ICT or ICT4D practitioners, that they had overstated the importance of technology, failed to deliver an adequate evidence base to back this emphasis, and so undermined the case for ICD as a whole with donors. However, it was suggested, donors were now moving back towards a more empowerment-focused approach to ICD rather than one based on the instrumental role of technology.
- This led to discussion about distinctions between different ICD (and BCO) agencies – for example, between those focused on empowerment and voice (such as APC) and those more focused on mainstream deployment of ICTs (such as IICD). The relationships between technology, communications and empowerment were obviously complex, and different BCO partners had different conceptualisations of them and their roles respecting them. Different agencies with different approaches to ICD, it was suggested, also required different approaches to impact assessment (as had been illustrated during the course of the workshop).
- One BCO partner, in particular, felt that scepticism among donors about the merits of ICD had a positive value for ICD agencies because it forced them to pay more attention to demonstrating the value of their work. More serious attention to impact assessment resulting from this challenge was beneficial not just in terms of donor relations, but also in improving agency performance and practice.
- There was further debate about the question of whether ICD should be treated as a sector in its own right, or as a set of strategies and tools that are enablers in other development sectors. Some argued that treating ICD as a separate sector, and certainly treating it as an “exceptional” sector, had meant that ICD agencies had failed to learn as much as they could from other, more experienced development agencies operating (and assessing impact) in less technology-enabled areas: “We have lost learning because of the exceptionalism that we have applied to ourselves.” One participant from AMARC summarised this debate as follows: “We are working in a sector where there is a duality. If communications is intrinsically valuable, it is a sector in itself. When we see it as instrumental, it is a cross-cutting tool. We need to understand this dual complexity.”

Day 2 Session 8: What can BCO do collectively?

The workshop ended with a discussion about whether there was scope for BCO collectively to follow up on the discussions and issues raised within the workshop. Two further suggestions were contributed during this discussion, in addition to points which had been previously raised.

- ICD agencies should look at communications itself, as well as the broader development objectives which ICD might help to serve. In particular, ICD agencies should not assess their work necessarily on the basis of its contribution to the MDGs. The focus of their work will depend on other dimensions of individual agencies’ work.
- BCO could provide a debating space in which issues such as impact assessment (and those raised in the previous session) could be explored further, not just between BCO partners but also with other stakeholders, including donors.

In summing up the workshop as a whole, the facilitator Kate Wild said that she felt it had met its objective of enabling discussion of impact assessment for ICD activities in the light of experience of BCO partners and other agencies, including those not concerned directly with ICD. There was a broad consensus among participants on the importance of understanding the results of interventions, but also a recognition that this required assessment of process as well as outcomes, and of aggregate as well as disaggregated impact. Understanding change and learning from experience were felt to be more important than attribution. Results needed to be seen – by donors and by implementing agencies – in terms of organisational learning as well as donor accountability. Result assessment needed to fit within the contexts and requirements of the agencies concerned, rather than restrictive templates; different methodologies were appropriate in different contexts for identifying rigorous and credible results.

The workshop ended with a brief evaluation exercise conducted by the BCO coordinator; and with thanks to the facilitator (Kate Wild), principal consultants (David Souter, Kerry McNamara) and BCO coordinator, Lauren Fok. ■

List of attachments available at BCO website

Annexes:

1. Participants list
2. Workshop programme
3. Presentation by David Souter (Day 1 Session 2)
4. Presentation by A.S. Paneerselvan, Panos South Asia (Day 1 Session 3)
5. Presentation by Kitty Warnock, Panos London (Day 1 Session 3)
6. Presentation by Chat Garcia, APC (Day 1 Session 3)
7. Presentation by Anne Podt, IICD (Day 1 Session 3)
8. Presentation by Sarah Lilley, Save the Children (Day 1 Session 4)
9. Presentation by Pam Muckosy, ODI (Day 1 Session 4)
10. Presentation by Kerry McNamara (Day 2 Session 1)
11. Presentation by Jappe Kok, Hivos (Day 2 Session 1)
12. Presentation by Anthony Makumbi, Plan International (Day 2 Session 1)
13. Presentation by David Souter (Day 2 Session 2)
14. Draft report of BCO Investigation 4 (by David Souter)

Building Communication Opportunities (BCO) is an alliance of development organisations concerned with information, communications and development issues. It was formed in 2004 with an initial three-year mandate to support activities which make use of information and communications resources and technologies to contribute to sustainable development and poverty alleviation, empowerment and human rights.

BCO agencies have been concerned from the outset to include impact assessment in their objectives for the alliance. This report includes the outputs from a series of investigations commissioned by BCO in 2007-2008 to look at different aspects of information, communications and development (ICD), including but reaching beyond work in which BCO partners were themselves involved.

- Investigation 1: Voice examines the relationship between radio and political change in developing countries, based on the hypothesis that information and communication resources and capabilities among the poor and marginalised deepen people's ability to influence their circumstances and participate in democratic processes and political change. It includes a practitioner's perspective based on personal experience in a number of countries and on the literature discussed within the professional journalist community, and a specific study of the relationship between radio and political change in Nepal.
- Investigation 2: Poverty Reduction explores the hypothesis that information and communications technologies (ICTs) help to make markets work for the poor. The investigation encompasses two parts: a general review of the evidence base concerning ICTs, markets and development, and a specific review of six market-related ICT4D interventions supported by BCO member organisations in Ecuador.
- Investigation 3: Networks focuses on the hypothesis that policy advocacy and networks influence and reshape the agendas of ICT policy-makers and development practitioners. It includes a general review of the literature on development networking, a study of an ICT advocacy network in Ecuador, and an analysis of gender/ICT networking within the framework of WSIS.
- Investigation 4: ICD and Impact Assessment provides a general review of impact assessment literature and experience, and explores possible areas in which ICD impact assessment may have different requirements from other development sectors.