Strategic Framework 2006-2010
Making the Most of our Experience

The International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD) has earned global respect for its ability to alleviate poverty in the developing world through the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Our strong track record was confirmed by a formal evaluation carried out by the Dutch Directorate-General for International Cooperation in 2005.

From 2006-2010, IICD will focus on becoming an expert knowledge-based organisation in the field of ICT for development. Throughout this period, we will promote awareness about ICT as a development tool, share the lessons we have learned with the international development community, and develop strategic partnerships with organisations from the private, public and non-profit sectors.

Background

IICD was founded in 1996 as a non-profit foundation specialising in the use of ICT for development (ICT4D). Our mission is "to assist developing countries in the use of ICT as a strategic tool for sustainable development and poverty alleviation".

Since those early days, IICD has shifted from being a project-focused organisation to a programme-focused one. We also concentrate on having a wider impact on poverty alleviation through changing the policies that affect people's lives. Sector-Wide Approaches (SWAps) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are key to our work.

Our involvement with ICT includes both traditional technologies (radio, television and telephones) and modern ones (computers and the Internet).To us, technology is just a means to an end. So rather than focusing on the technology itself, we concern ourselves with ensuring that it is used appropriately and in a sustainable way, as such that will really help end-users and their communities.

Approach

Our work is based on two types of activities: Country Programmes and Thematic Networks. Country Programmes bring organisations from a country together and strengthen local institutional capabilities. The aim is to draw up and carry out development policies and projects supported by ICT.

Thematic Networks collect ICT4D experience and link local organisations to the international community working in similar areas. In this way, they connect local knowledge with global knowledge. IICD is currently active in nine countries: Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Ecuador, Ghana, Jamaica, Mali, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

In the past, our method of generating such projects and policies normally began with a Round Table workshop involving a range of stakeholders. The wide-ranging knowledge this method has produced now enables us to operate in a more direct and targeted way. Today, the starting point is to identify and work with a small network of committed local organisations. We learned early on that ownership of projects should remain with project partners, with the emphasis on promoting operational and financial independence. As well as helping local partners to formulate policy and implement

IICD's guiding principles

To ensure that results are sustainable and address local needs, seven guiding principles are applied to all activities

• Capacity development
• Multi-stakeholder involvement
• Partnerships
• Local ownership
• Demand-responsiveness
• Learning by doing
• Gender equality

projects, we now increase their institutional capacities too by teaching them new skills. We also use our evidence base to promote ICTs at the policy level. Our experience has taught us that working with small networks is key to strengthening the capacity of local partners and local institutions to develop and manage projects.

Throughout the process of executing projects and policies, local partners are empowered to make effective everyday use of ICT as a tool for development, and to bring relevant technologies into key development sectors. IICD specialises in five sectors: livelihoods (particularly agriculture), health, education, good governance and environment. We support local partners in three ways: with ICT training and education for capacity development, through Information exchange and Networking (IN) activities, and with a unique Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system. IICD's guiding principles greatly contribute to making our work effective and sustainable. For the strategic period of 2006-2010, we have added gender equality as an additional principle.

Strategic priorities 2006-2010

For the strategic period 2006-2010, we intend to draw on our uniquely valuable experience to establish ourselves as an expertise organisation in the field of ICT4D. Over the years, our organisation has built up a strong ICT4D knowledge base. This continues to grow, and provides us every day with experience from which lessons can be learned, shared and reinvested to improve our existing work and to create new opportunities. In the light of our move towards becoming an expertise organisation, IICD will make optimum use of this ICT4D knowledge base. We have therefore identified three strategic priorities: Embedding, Harvesting and Leveraging. All three are either already being translated into operational approaches or will begin this process during the current strategic period.

Embedding

Our wealth of experience has demonstrated that individual projects alone are not enough to sustain the full potential of ICT4D in the long term. What is needed is a wider level of impact that broadens and deepens the ability to have a real (economic) impact on poverty alleviation. The sustainability and long-term potential of ICT-enabled development are key to our philosophy. Both of these depend on successfully incorporating ICT at the project, organisational and policy level – a process we describe as 'embedding'.

The rationale behind embedding must rest firmly upon a very strong evidence base. We therefore focus on achieving a critical mass of projects and knowledge exchange that clearly demonstrates the efficacy of ICT in all sectors. IICD will continue to build upon this in order to stimulate real change in the way that poverty alleviation is handled.

Sustaining long-term potential

The sustainability of projects and the incorporation of ICT at several levels are also a question of capacity. IICD therefore focuses clearly on capacity development within each country. Our aim is to strengthen both individual capacities (skills and knowledge) and institutional capacities (internal structures and procedures and the collective capacities of the staff). These new skills are acquired through a series of Life-Long Learning workshops, Peer-to-Peer learning exchanges, Technical Update Seminars and Train-the-Trainer seminars.

We continuously maintain a high level of capacity development by working with training partners in the relevant country, and by entering into strategic alliances to complement local expertise and knowledge.

Learning from experience

When IICD's Country Programmes began to expand, partners indicated that it was difficult to find information on the status and impact of local ICT-enabled initiatives. Without opportunities to learn from other experiences, informed decision-making was problematic. Over and over again, the wheel was being reinvented. Because of this, scarce resources - human, financial and/or knowledge-related - were being wasted. Our partners therefore identified an urgent need to set up effective tools and platforms where local ICT4D plans, progress, results and experiences could be discussed and assessed. We realised that local Information exchange and Networking (IN) would provide a means of deepening the impact of our Country Programmes. Now IN has also become an essential part of lobbying policy-makers with the aim of 'embedding' the use of ICT at a national level. During the current strategic period, IN will focus on strengthening multi-stakeholder networks by raising awareness, exchanging experiences and influencing policy processes about ICT4D.

Harvesting

After gathering experiences and lessons learned in a country, we are now able to collect and disseminate (harvest) the results of our work. One significant way in which evidence can be brought to the foreground is through our Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) activities. As IICD moves towards becoming an expertise organisation, M&E will become increasingly significant. The system has been fine-tuned over the last years and is now achieving its purpose: to ensure that both local partners and IICD personnel can learn lessons for the future through reflection on the past. A unique aspect of M&E is the fact that effects are measured at the level of the end user. The results teach us about the level of awareness, empowerment, economic impact and sector impact that a particular project has achieved. In this way, the overall development impact and project success can be assessed. In addition, the M&E system critically analyses the effectiveness of our
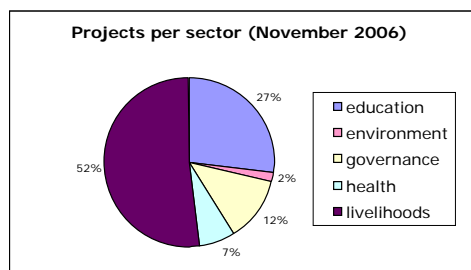
own abilities to learn and develop as an organisation. This 'virtuous circle' of continuously applying results and evidence into learning and more effective activities clearly distinguishes IICD within the ICT4D field.

We have also embarked on a number of ways to publish this evidence – including with a series of booklets highlighting the effects that our work has at the process, country and sector level. In addition, IICD will continue to work with partners on sharing techniques and indicators for evaluating ICT as a tool for development. This is mainly a matter of translating learning into evidence.

Connecting and innovating

Thematic Networks, or communities of practice, are yet another way in which sector-specific lessons, news and ideas are shared throughout the countries where we operate. Each network supports IICD's local partners by bringing them expertise and knowledge, and by providing a platform where their experiences can be shared more widely. These Networks link practitioners of ICT4D with other interested parties. They connect local knowledge with global knowledge and promote South-South and South-North exchanges focusing on IICD's five key sectors. By doing so, Thematic Networks contribute to IICD's base of expertise - which can then be reinvested into new and existing activities.

Thematic Networks are a means to analyse and disseminate learning and accountability to a variety of target groups. These Networks are interlinked with Country Programmes and therefore focus strongly on sharing knowledge, particularly about best practices. In practical terms, experiences and lessons learned are disseminated, such as impact booklets, e-networks, advisory notes and

Projects per sector (November 2006)

- education 27%
- environment 2%
- governance 12%
- health 7%
- livelihoods 52%

advisory projects. Parallel to this, 'knowledge partner' networks and cross-country learning events are organised to maximise learning and experience.

Leveraging

It is becoming increasingly important to make the most of IICD's existing resources in order to influence the ICT development agenda. Our unique combination of experience and learning-by-doing means that we have a comparative advantage from which to demonstrate and lift our work to a broader set of stakeholders (leveraging). This will enable us to reap the richness of our knowledge and to develop a function as a strategic advisor and facilitator for governments, development organisations, and local donor agencies.

One key way in which we can influence the ICT4D agenda is by using our expertise to bridge the gap between the private and public sector. This means that partnerships form a core part of our new strategy. IICD already works with other Dutch NGOs and European Governments to increase understanding among policymakers and the public about the importance of ICT to global development. In addition to deepening these relationships, we are engaging with private companies that can help meet the needs and demands of our partners in the South. Knowledge-based strategic alliances with companies in the long term will demonstrate how the non-profit and private sector can work together and benefit from this cooperation. Southern partners will receive expert training in the latest technological advancements, while private partners will be challenged intellectually to develop new and innovative ICT solutions and strategies that also support IICD. Private-sector companies will therefore fulfil their corporate social responsibilities – while also finding that the solutions they develop may prove to be commercially invaluable in the long run. We are seeking to develop these public-private partnerships, and remain committed to welcoming public and private sector investment to stimulate these exciting opportunities.

IICD facts and figures (November 2006)

• IICD is a non-profit foundation, founded in 1996 by the Netherlands Ministry for Development Cooperation. 33 members of staff work at IICD's office in The Hague, in the Netherlands.

• Our main sponsors are the Dutch, Swiss and English departments for development cooperation. Other important partners are Dutch non-governmental institutions like Cordaid, Hivos and PSO.

• We work with partners in Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Ecuador, Ghana, Jamaica, Mali, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia in the following sectors: education, governance, health, livelihoods (mainly agriculture), and the environment. Most of our activities are geared towards improving livelihoods, followed by education, governance, health and the environment.

• All activities are demand-driven and locally owned by partners in the South. 60% of our partners are grass-roots organisations and NGOs working directly with the poor at the community level.

• By the end of 2006, IICD supported more than 130 project and policy processes, of which 30% continued independently without our support. This means that these projects have found their own financial revenues and are incorporated within an institution or have been upscaled into new projects. The rest of the projects have just started to be implemented or are about to reach the same stage of continuation.

• We estimate that our programmes have reached over 200,000 end-users directly and 2,500,000 end-users indirectly, the majority of whom live in rural areas.
• More than 5,000 people participated in over 120 seminars and training courses related to these projects.

• Throughout the years, project team members and end users filled out over 10,000 questionnaires and 63% of the local partners were satisfied with IICD's direct assistance to the projects during project implementation. This percentage is increasing annually.