IICD's approach for telecentres in Africa and South America

For more than six years, IICD has been supporting telecentres in rural areas throughout Africa and South America. The telecentres it supports provide access to information services on a wide variety of topics from agricultural information and weather forecasts to educational information.

Telecentres are public places where people can access Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools such as computers, the internet, and other digital technologies. The common focus for telecentres is that they contribute to sustainable human development and empower communities both socially and economically by using ICT. IICD does not consider setting up telecentres to be an end in itself, but rather as the first step towards providing access to ICT to larger groups of users who would otherwise be unable to use, or incapable of using, these technologies. IICD favours a bottom-up approach whereby our project partners in Africa and South America themselves indicate what type of telecentre is needed and take ownership from the very beginning to run the centre and make it sustainable.

Independently run

In **Bolivia**, IICD partner organisations are running over 90 rural information centres that both provide and generate information which is relevant to farmers, indigenous people, teachers and students. Many of these information centres are run independently by grassroots organisations and their activities are funded by contributions from end users. A particularly innovative aspect of the telecentres in Bolivia is the use of shared connectivity (satellite or ADSL) between community organisations based on wireless solutions which provide a sustainable solution for connectivity.

In **Burkina Faso**, IICD is working closely with telecentre.org and Burkina NTIC, the national ICT for development network, to support the creation of a national telecentre network. Providing farmers with information on how to improve their crops, parents with information on how to prevent diseases, and teachers with access to badly needed educational materials are just some of the practical ways in which Burkinabe telecentres have been helping the rural communities

Participants of the Telecentre Network in Tanzania

they serve. Since April 2007, knowledge sharing and capacity building events have been organised, with about 30 telecentre managers participating in them so far.

Members include representatives of agricultural organisations and secondary schools that run projects on content creation which are supported by IICD. In May 2008, the network presented its three-year strategy: Telecentre.org and IICD are supporting its implementation.

Governments and telecentres

In **Ecuador**, IICD and a number of its project partners are advising the national government on the implementation of an initiative to set up 1000 telecentres. The initiative is being funded by the Ecuadorian government and the World Bank, and implemented by a private sector consortium. The main areas of advice include sustainable connectivity models and content models derived from experiences gained in Ecuador and other countries. Where possible, project partners collaborate in the programme at the locations in which their particular target groups are situated.

The Centre for Information and Communication Technology is a similar initiative and is currently being pursued by the Ministry of Communication in **Ghana**. In this particular case, the government is implementing community telecentres in all districts. IICD supports the programme with strategic advice, capacity development, connectivity solutions at the community level, and content development, particularly in the northern part of Ghana. The project partners who are active in this area are directly involved as local consultants.

Evaluating telecentres

In addition to the above, IICD also began a telecentre pilot project in 2002 in **Mali**. Its goal was to establish telecentres in three different communes in close cooperation with local private operators. Four years later, IICD initiated a cross-documentation process to evaluate the three pioneering models of telecentres developed by IICD, USAID and UNESCO. The documentation also looked at the social, economic and technical sustainability of telecentres. It consisted of the production of a film on the three telecentre models (in 2006), a TV debate, and a stakeholders meeting in the field of telecentres in Mali (in 2007). IICD organised this meeting together with Afriklinks, an organisation that implements the Community Telecentre Support project jointly with telecentre.org.

In **Jamaica**, the national ICT for development network 'ICT4D Jamaica' is involved in the Communities without Borders Initiative, which was set up by the Ministry of Industry, Energy, Technology and Commerce. A pilot site for this programme began in 2007.

Meanwhile, in **Tanzania** IICD supported the launch workshop of the Tanzania Telecentre

Network (TTN) in October 2007. During this workshop, members exchanged experiences and developed the mission, vision and objectives, focusing on content exchange and creation, capacity development and policy participation. In a participatory mapping exercise, the telecentres mapped their activities, capacity, development goals, reach and demographic characteristics. Later, in 2008, TTN went on to build a wireless internet network in Sengerema: it is the first shared wireless community network in Tanzania and make the internet connection at the Sengerema Telecentre available and affordable to a large number of people living in the surrounding rural areas.

Three golden rules for sustainability

In September 2008, a telecentre workshop was held in **Zambia** by the Technical Centre for Rural and Agricultural operations (CTA) together with IICD and other organisations involved such as Infobridge and Telecentre.org. Participants from twenty countries around the world shared their experiences in rural telecentre work in Africa. It was generally agreed that sustainability can be reached by having a good location, dedicated centre staff members, and by offering services and products that respond to the needs of the local communities targeted by the telecentres.

More information

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