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Health education in Ghana: Can digital media offer anything new?

In February 2003, the Health Foundation of Ghana hosted two workshops to increase awareness of possibilities offered by digital media to help stimulate local digital health content in Ghana. Implemented by the Health Foundation of Ghana with Gamos and BigWorld and sponsored by IICD, the project aim is to stimulate the creation and distribution of local health knowledge in a digital format using low-tech digital technologies, such as digital video and Video Compact Disc (VCD).

The concept of using digital media to support health education programmes is still largely unknown in Ghana, whilst the opportunities presented are huge. Therefore a first objective of the workshops was to create awareness among actors in the health sector in Ghana of these new possibilities for production and delivery of local content. The workshops also consulted with various local actors - to test the applicability of the concept to the Ghana context, and to identify agencies that would be interested in working together on these issues.

Dr Simon Batchelor (Gamos) introduced the concept of 'local content' by using a model developed in an IICD workshop in Tanzania (2002). This model outlines the arena in which content is both created and consumed. The importance of local content for effective communication of development messages was highlighted.

Practical possibilities of low-cost digital technology were demonstrated by showing work done by Gamos/BigWorld partners in Cambodia, Bangladesh and Moldova in the area of mother and child health messages (adaptations of Unicef's Facts for Life for local context). And 3-minute videos in local language on diarrhoea, produced by Health Foundation of Ghana (HFG) staff with no prior experience in production of videos were shown.

The discussion afterwards indicated that participants had understood the value of local development content and had started brainstorming about applications in areas of advocacy, documentation of indigenous knowledge, and dissemination of 'best practices', to name but a few.

The workshops helped to generate direct feedback from health education experts (on both national/regional office level and field level) in Ghana on the applicability of local

content generation and propagation through digital media. The feedback suggests that within the context of rural Ghana there is a clear need for communication strategies that deal with illiteracy. Locally produced video could help fill that need.

Finally the feedback from participants clearly indicated a genuine enthusiasm for the concept. This seems to go beyond the predictable interest for cutting-edge technology, but is instead displayed by concrete ideas of participants to integrate digital media into existing health education strategies, with the aim to increase effectiveness.

The next step is training on digital video production in Accra for HFG staff and other interested agencies. This will give HFG a good basis to continue to produce local footage of Facts For Life and other local health content, and edit it down to short messages with audio tracks in local languages. These will be distributed among interested parties in Ghana.

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Sustainable Initiatives

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www.sustainableicts.org

Using ICTs to enhance the skills of rural health workers

In April 2003, IICD joined Cordaid and CEDHA in organizing a conference to explore ways in which ICTs can be used to develop and deliver continuing medical education to healthcare workers in rural areas of Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia. Here we introduce and report back on some of the issues that were discussed.

Health workers are the most important asset of any healthcare system. However, they need to continually learn and apply new skills and knowledge. Without such learning opportunities, healthcare workers, particularly those in rural or remote areas, will experience a decline in skills and knowledge, professional dissatisfaction, low morale, disillusion, lack of commitment, and reduced interest in their work. They miss opportunities for career advancement and they frequently look to urban areas for work. Most important, 'disconnected' from learning, knowledge and information, the quality of the care they provide is suffering.

In response to these problems, many countries are looking at continuing medical education (CME). This umbrella term refers to all learning by healthcare providers, after basic training. It is essentially a way to 'connect' rural health workers to education and information thus enhancing their capacities and motivations. Over the years, various approaches to CME have been tried.

However, experiences from the five countries indicate that CME activities are falling behind and cannot keep up with the demand. Participants in the workshop, held in Moshi in April 2003, concluded that current paper and workshop based approaches are quite inefficient and costly, they are poorly coordinated, supply driven, and that the content of the information and learning provided is frequently not relevant to the diverse needs of today's rural health care workers. Finally, the motivations and incentives of the health workers to participate in CME efforts were queried.

The question discussed in Tanzania was therefore whether and how ICTs can be used to develop and deliver more effective CME services in the countries represented.

ICT opportunities

With the arrival of new ICTs, health educators and health information specialists are beginning to see many new opportunities to deliver CME. Examining some of these during the three-day conference, participants concluded that ICTs can help to overcome or reduce barriers associated with distance and isolation. This allows health workers to learn in their own workplace and in their own time. ICTs can also provide opportunities for interactive communication and networking and offer opportunities for health information to be generated locally to suit local situations, thus enhancing its relevance. Finally, they offer many opportunities to bring new information and ideas from around the world to the individual workplaces of even the most isolated health workers.

Participants also considered the added value of ICTs to continuing medical education, examining why ICTs should be used. Four important reasons could be discerned; ICTs can make CME more efficient, more

demand responsive, more sustainable and more attractive.

Grandiose ideas were kept in check during the meeting, as participants reviewed lessons and experiences. It was clearly recognised that ICTs can only make a difference to CME when certain conditions are met. These included:

- CME itself should be recognised as a high priority at all levels, including by government and health workers. The political commitment is critical; the health workers also need to be motivated;
- The local education and information needs of the health workers should be clearly defined and understood so that CME producers or suppliers are responding to real demands. Moreover, the health workers themselves need to participate in these demand assessment processes;
- The content available and the delivery mechanisms used must be relevant and appropriate and well-targeted to the demands that have been identified;
- The ICT and information/communication skills of the health workers need to be enhanced to make most effective use of the ICT-enabled CME on offer;
- The abilities of the suppliers/producers to develop and deliver relevant content needs to be upgraded to address the digital environment;
- The suppliers/producers should work together, locally, nationally, internationally, ensuring maximum coordination and value on the ground;
- Necessary 'infstructures' – hardware, software, connectivity, infrastructure, etc. needs to be present;
- The application of ICTs in CME should be guided by visions, plans, and policies developed in consultation with all stakeholders, especially with governments;
- The actual introduction of ICTs in the local situations needs to be carefully managed, particularly with regard to issues of local ownership and local hierarchy that often restrict access to ICTs that are actually available.

Next steps

The final sessions of the conference brought participants together in different configurations, providing 'country' and 'actor' perspectives on the issues raised. Each country group outlined a process by which it would take the ideas forward in their own countries. The educational institutions present decided to continue working together to survey current efforts in the respective institutions, to jointly develop some CME modules, and to enhance their capacities in this area. The proposals and plans from the countries will be taken up by IICD and Cordaid through their partnership to promote ICT-enabled health programmes and projects in Africa.

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Socio-cultural factors and ICT adoption

How important are local socio-cultural factors in the implementation of an ICT project? Drawing on research from Jamaica and Tanzania, Marjon Hagenaaers concludes that the cultural dimensions of an ICT development project are as important as the organisational, technical and financial dimensions that are normally addressed. A technology is never only a technical artefact – it is also a social construction. Thus, the meaning given to a technology can differ among regions and among groups of people.

Different perceptions of information and communication technologies (ICTs) by people in less developed or more developed areas are caused by a variety of 'forces' present in the local environment in which technologies are introduced. So-called socio-cultural aspects like cultural values, regional priorities, institutional relations, political dynamics, and educational background influence the perception of potential user groups, and therefore have an impact on the adoption and use of the technology. Socio-cultural aspects can be highly influential in the adoption process of ICT services in developing regions but are seldom studied.

Four months of fieldwork was carried out in both Jamaica and Tanzania, working with IICD supported agricultural projects. In both countries, ICTs were identified as a crucial component in the strategy to improve the production and marketing of agricultural commodities. Through ICTs, information on prices, volumes, logistics, best practices and intermediate services would be made available to farmers. The provision of information was planned to take place either in a telecentre or via extension officers who would give the information to farmers in printed form or face-to-face.

A few research findings are given here to illustrate the influential character of socio-cultural factors in the agricultural sector in relation to ICT introduction.

Jamaica: Higglers, commitment, and the MacDonald's Farmers Almanac

'Higglers' (individual small-scale middlemen, mostly women), are the dominant actors in the marketing of crops. They are entrenched in the agricultural distribution system, which makes it very difficult if not inconceivable to operate without them. Higglers are crucial actors in ICT development projects because of their strong relationship with farmers and the important transport functions they fulfil. When ICT development projects cut higglers out of the loop, a project has to expand its own information services between farmers and transporters.

Small-scale farmers in Jamaica cultivate and market their produce under dreadful circumstances like drought, expensive inputs, theft of crops from the field and bad roads. For these reasons, farmers prefer to conduct 'cash-in hand' business, to sell perishable crops rapidly due to a lack of storage, and to seize the first opportunity to sell their produce as a hedge against perceived impending losses. The farmers who sell directly to processors or exporters often do not feel obliged to live up to commitments they made to those buyers. Even if they signed a contract at a factory, it is not uncommon that a farmer will sell his produce to a higher bidder. This mentality, which is understandable in the current context of small-scale farmers, does not meet the presupposed marketing-practice within the ICT projects where it is expected that farmers will sell according to promises they made.

Apart from informal contacts and trustworthy acquaintances considered as reliable information sources, many farmers also rely on the authority of the 'MacDonald's Farmers Almanac'. This booklet tells farmers when to plant and harvest by the position of the moon. It contains predictions per year about crops, the weather, sickness, lucky days and future events. To make the ICT-services less alien to farmers and to meet a practice they are used to, the ICT services could incorporate some of the familiar indigenous local knowledge and planting directions of the MacDonald's Almanac.

Tanzania: Community feeling, information as social construction and corrupted scales

The majority of people in the Magu District project-region belong to the Sukuma ethnic group. Characterized by a strong community feeling, this group does not tend to appreciate movement away from communal activities or the carrying out of individual initiatives. Harmony is thought to be very important and, to achieve this, individual actions should conform to collective standards. This means that an ICT system should serve collective well-being and not be introduced as a means that supports the well-being of individuals.

In Western societies, people are challenged to learn, are rewarded for development, and it is not regarded as unusual to strive for 'more' and to be 'better' at certain tasks. In Magu District, it is not normal to focus on improvement, to be eager to learn or to aim at higher achievements than others. It can even be a disadvantage to retrieve a lot of information or to express one's knowledge. Elevating oneself above the average community level can result in social sanctions. Many ICT projects assume that individual small-scale farmers value access to agricultural information and that they feel free to act on it. In such communities, a more effective introduction strategy may be to stress that information is for collective use, and that it benefits the whole community.

Many small-scale farmers in Magu District complain that the scales used by middlemen to weigh their produce are incorrect. While an ICT service might provide farmers with adequate price information, the use of biased scales by middlemen means that farmers will still be taken advantage of. An ICT project could have added value if it can expand services by directing farmers to independent weighing locations, or if reliable people employed within the project carry out this weighing service. As well as the farmers, the middlemen may also welcome such a service if it includes a basic quality check. Middlemen and processors complain that farmers offer their produce wet in order to increase its weight, and that they mix different grades of cotton.

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NEWS FROM BDO PARTNERS

The Building Digital Opportunities (BDO) programme is a package of cross-sectoral initiatives to address key barriers and opportunities for ICTs in achieving development targets. Funded by DFID, DGIS and SDC, the programme has been put together as a partnership with a number of key organisations – the Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC), the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation (CTO), the International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD), OneWorld International, and the Panos Institute. Its five key areas of activity are:

- Strengthening local capacity in developing countries to address policy and regulatory environments.
 - Support for a programme of demand led pilot projects, implemented as part of an ongoing series of stakeholder ICT roundtable processes in selected developing countries.
 - Support for information inclusion for the poor through activities on community media and linking old and new ICTs.
 - A strategic partnership with a global 'development' Internet partner.
 - Knowledge and research activities in key areas to support the above programme.
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BDO Learning Study

In April 2003, BDO partner organisations and sponsors launched a 'learning study.' Focusing on selected regions and areas of activities, the study will map BDO implementing partners' experience with ICTs and poverty reduction. The emphasis will be on qualitative information, with key findings exemplified by illustrative short stories. Led by Gerster Consulting from Switzerland, the information gathered will enable BDO partners to improve their understanding of the role of ICTs in poverty reduction and to adapt their operations accordingly.

Looking at efforts by all of the partners, the study will examine the experiences made along three dimensions: national, regional, and global. In geographic terms, the study will include a regional perspective from Southern Africa together with national case studies by African consultants in Mali, Uganda and Zambia. Thematic emphasis will be given to work on HIV/AIDS-health, governance, livelihoods, and capacity development.

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NEWS FROM AMARC

Community radio and HIV/AIDS

In December 2002, grassroots communities from Africa had the opportunity to share stories on their communities coping with HIV/AIDS through an internet-based programme swap. The programme/story swap is one of AMARC's exchange projects set up to enable community radio stations to share experiences and learn from each other.

Uganda

From Uganda came the story of Radio APAC, located in the APAC district of Uganda. Jimmy Okello, the station manager of APAC, highlighted the story of Odong - a one-time successful and well-known businessman who earned his money making and selling bricks in the district, but who now sits by the side of the road selling chickens, his body weakened by the AIDS virus.

The radio station regularly invites well-known personalities of the community who have contracted the disease to its programmes. Okello says that the uniqueness of community radio is that it draws its information from the local community and therefore people feel the impact of the information, in contrast to distant and national programmes set in the capital city, which make the disease seem far away.

Tanzania

Orkonerei Community Radio Station gave isolated Maasai communities in Northern Tanzania an opportunity to talk openly about the stigma and discrimination against HIV/AIDS infected people. The discussion was significant for a community whose knowledge about the disease is largely based on hearsay and has led to the alienation of HIV-positive people, says station manager Martin Saning'o. The radio station decided to organise the special broadcast to mark the UN World HIV/AIDS Day on December 1 and to facilitate an exchange of views about the stigma associated with HIV/AIDS.

Community radio is a new phenomenon in Tanzania but it is playing an important role in bridging information gaps in communities. Orkonerei CR is one of the few community radio stations in Tanzania and caters for a community located in a very remote area south of Arusha city in Northern Tanzania.

More: www.africa.amarc.org

Community radio connectivity

This is a project inspired by the AMARC Africa ICT programme, which aims to promote sustainable ICT use. The programme seeks to provide all community radio stations outside of the Information Highway in South Africa with access to e-mail and eventually to the web. About 40 percent of South Africa's community radios are yet to be connected to the Internet.

AMARC Africa in collaboration with Sangonet and NCRF (National Community Radio Forum) will investigate the possibilities of providing a server/hub to enable all community radio stations (that to date all have telephone

lines) to gain access to an e-mail news service. In order to provide, in the first instance, some degree of access to e-mail via a selection of news groups and create a uniform and equal address based messaging and information system available to all community radio stations.

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Setting up country networks

AMARC Africa and NiZA (the Netherlands institute for Southern Africa) are collaborating in a programme that seeks to assist different SADC countries' member stations and NGO's (Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho and Swaziland) to set up a country based community radio network. This network will engage all country stakeholders to lobby for an enabling environment for the growth of community radio in these countries. The programme is in its infancy and so far two (Zimbabwe and Swaziland) of the 5 planned country meetings have taken place.

More: www.africa.amarc.org

NEWS FROM CTO

eGov success/failure resources

An online resource on e-government success/failure in developing/transitional countries has been created as part of the "eGovernment for Development Information Exchange" project.

The resource contains:

- results on the extent and impact of project success and failure
- thirty new case examples of e-gov success and failure
- models explaining e-gov success and failure
- practical techniques for evaluation and analysis of success and failure
- practical techniques for risk assessment and mitigation on current e-gov projects
- a complete guide to running training workshops on e-gov success and failure

The "eGovernment for Development Information Exchange" project is coordinated by the University of Manchester's Institute for Development Policy and Management. The project is funded and managed by the Commonwealth Telecommunications Organisation (CTO) as part of the UK DfID's "Building Digital Opportunities" programme.

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More: www.egov4dev.org/topic1.htm

NEWS FROM IICD

Potential uses of ICTs by small and micro enterprises in Ghana and Kenya

Research from Ghana and Kenya indicates that small businesses in Africa lack awareness regarding ICT potentials in their operations. Business clustering

however seems to have a positive effect on the uptake of ICTs by individual enterprises. This project was launched in 2001 as a joint venture by UNU/INTECH and IICD. The aim was to look at two business trends – clustering and ICTs – among micro and small enterprises (MSEs) in Africa.

The study shows that a significant percentage of MSEs are ignorant about ICTs and their importance for conducting business in this era of globalisation. It further shows that learning within the clusters is mainly through on-the-job exposure and informal training. There is a need to explore how necessary ICT learning can best be provided, through formal as well as informal means.

The costs of ICTs are prohibitive to many MSEs and initial provision needs perhaps to be subsidised, possibly through MSE associations. This can be done on a pilot scale initially, followed by awareness creation and the promotion of the adoption of ICTs by MSEs.

Once enterprises are aware of the cost benefit and the multiplier effect of the technology, they should be encouraged to source the service on their own. This is possible since the study shows that over fifty percent of entrepreneurs have paid for other forms of training within respective clusters. Furthermore, MSEs already source ICT services, notably fixed and mobile telephone, at a fee from commercial service centres in their clusters.

Associations play a key role within clusters and most entrepreneurs belong to them. While it is clear that they provide adequate social capital for entrepreneurs, this study shows that apart from providing credit, they are hardly used in building and improving enterprises, especially through ICTs.

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ICT practitioners in Tanzania and Uganda share e-Learning experiences

On 19th March 2003, the Tanzania Global Development Learning Centre was the Tanzanian end of a videoconference that brought together more than 50 people to discuss e-Learning opportunities and challenges in Africa. Supported by IICD, the event was a partnership between Tanzania's SWOPNet and I-Network Uganda.

I-Network Uganda provided two excellent resource persons who presented e-Learning in theory and practice. The experience of SchoolNet Uganda in installing the first school-based VSAT network in Africa was especially stimulating. In his presentation Mr. Daniel Kakinda, National Coordinator of SchoolNet Uganda, took the participants through the implementation process of eLearning, its impact on the community and the benefits thereof. The network uses a combination of satellite-based technologies including C-Band, Ku-Band and Microwave connections.

The Schoolnet Uganda approach has recently moved from face-to-face training to e-Learning. In other words this is a shift from the "lecture method" of education to activity-based learning centred on the student, whereby the teacher becomes a mentor.

Following the success of the videoconference, SWOPNet promised to 'host' a similar event in May 2003, with the content coming from Tanzania.

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Sharing With Other People Network sets up in Tanzania

Efforts to share knowledge on the applications of ICTs to development in Tanzania have been boosted with the establishment of a local networking initiative. The first activity, organised by the Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology, was a networking event that brought together ICT project owners in November 2002. Following a retreat in February 2003, steering committee members agreed to form a non-governmental organisation called "Sharing With Other People Network", in short SWOPNet

It is key that activities undertaken by SWOPNet are not restricted to Dar es Salaam but embrace the whole of Tanzania, with ICT and Development as core themes. In addition we intend to swap experiences, thus learn from our partners and counterparts in other countries.

Finally, it is useful to share a motto that informs what we are trying to do: Knowledge is power, but only if shared!

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NEWS FROM ONEWORLD

MTV on the OneWorld Radio AIDS network helps raise AIDS awareness

"There is nothing to fear from those who are HIV positive. People living with HIV deserve respect for having the courage to be open about their status in order to protect others from the virus," says Nelson Mandela in a spot produced by MTV/Staying Alive for World AIDS Day on 1 December 2002, dedicated to removing stigma and discrimination of those living with the virus.

Throughout December 2002, OneWorld Radio had an agreement with MTV to allow its members to download and re-broadcast copyright free music by superstars like P.Diddy, Alicia Keys, Missy Elliot, Michelle Branch and soundbites featuring Destiny's Child, Enrique Iglesias, Bono and others speaking up against stigma, encouraging the use of condoms and wider HIV/AIDS awareness.

These clips were excerpts from two MTV Staying Alive concerts in Cape Town, South Africa, and Seattle, US in November. OneWorld Radio distributed these clips via the OneWorld Radio AIDS Network site (www.oneworld.net/radio/aids), a theme-specific channel of OneWorld Radio, bringing together broadcasters, NGOs and activists from around the world in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Today, radio is taking a lead in communicating HIV/AIDS awareness issues, as it is the most effective way of reaching listeners both in urban and rural areas especially of the global south. OneWorld Radio is

combining this potential with the power of the Internet, to enlarge the audiences for vital radio productions. It is offering a platform to upload, download and exchange multi-lingual AIDS programming. Broadcasters from seven different countries downloaded the MTV clips reaching audiences in Europe, Australasia, the Caribbean and across Africa by Internet, short-wave and on FM stations.

SW Radio Africa, a UK-based radio broadcasting on short-wave to Zimbabwe, used some of the copyright free music in their broadcast on World AIDS Day. Plus Forte Radio in Tetovo, Macedonia, broadcast messages using voice-overs. Youthcomm, an Internet radio for and by young people, used the MTV clips to launch their new "YOUTHCOMM world:report", featuring community news and views affecting young people from around the world.

Accessing audio from the Internet for some is still not an easy task. OneWorld Radio members such as Channel Africa from South Africa or Club NTG from Zambia were able to listen to the MTV materials online, but their Internet connections didn't allow them to download audio files. Trying to find alternative solutions like downloading in the OneWorld Africa office in Zambia, failed because of lack of training or equipment.

Despite such drawbacks, OneWorld Radio considers the MTV campaign for World AIDS Day a big success, as it enabled more broadcasters to spread these important messages: "5500 deaths every day. 5,3 million in 2000. The world must wake up." (P.Diddy)

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OneWorld ICT survey – South Asian case studies

An 'ICT survey' is one of the OneWorld elements of the BDO programme. A first round of case studies was conducted in February 2003 in India and Sri Lanka. The objective was to examine the use and impact of ICTs by civil society organisations. Seven OneWorld partners were selected and their use of ICTs studied, both internally (level of organisation) and externally (level of activities). The impact was measured in terms of *empowerment, opportunity and security*.

Near Dehra Dun (North India), nomadic tribes are using a wireless communication system for emergencies (like accidents and forest fires), getting organised (to meet up with forest officials) and for livelihood purposes (know when the buffalo milk is picked up at the highway).

In Delhi, slum children are learning how to use computers from an early age, because "nowadays computers are like ABC". Communicating with peers around the world empowers them and the computer skills increase their chances on the labour market.

The reports of these and the other South Asian case studies will be published on the Digital Opportunities Channel (www.digitalopportunity.org) soon. The second round of ICT case studies will take place in April in South Africa and Zambia.

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DFID's ICT Knowledge and Research Projects

Each year, DFID issues a call for Knowledge and Research (KaR) project proposals. It is intended that ICT KaR projects lead to a better understanding of the realistic potentials of ICTs and of how such technologies can contribute towards a more suitable pro-poor ICT policy framework.

Linking ICTs to sustainable livelihoods through the Reflect approach

The project seeks to establish the feasibility of linking the strategic development of ICTs to participatory adult learning programmes that focus on strengthening the capacity of poor people to communicate. An action research programme in three diverse contexts, on different scales, will focus on the learning and organisational processes necessary at community level to ensure that the introduction of ICTs reduces rather than increases in-country and local divides, digital or otherwise. This is essential if ICTs are to contribute to achieving international development targets.

In the first stage (year one), the pilot will build on Reflect processes and methods to enable poor people in marginalized communities to identify their information gaps and communication needs, and marry these to available technology. From this a more detailed log frame will be developed detailing the second stage in which appropriate equipment will be provided in resource centres and monitored. In this way, groups and their facilitators can develop ways of using ICTs to strengthen their capacity to communicate – as a means of accessing information and communicating to others.

The specific outputs in each of the locations will be determined in detail during the first stage of the project with full participation of the target beneficiaries. At the end of the first year a detailed plan and log frame for the second stage will be available, with clear definition of strategies, indicators, uses and types of technologies and project management, based on the research, consultation and learning process of year one.

Overall, the outputs will include:

- A useable model for incorporating learning from the pilot experiences into new and proposed ICT for development projects.
- Detailed reports of the three separate case studies showing the impact of ICTs where people determine the types and uses available to them.
- Website to share learning and processes throughout.
- Resource centres up and running in three pilot locations.
- Resource pages to share techniques and outcomes with Reflect practitioners worldwide.

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Catalysing the creation and exchange of local content

Focusing on 'local content', this British and Canadian funded project supports efforts by poor people in developing countries to create and exchange useful, potentially wealth-generating, content via ICTs. The project pursues two complementary approaches: a range of 'on the ground' capacity building initiatives that strengthen the local 'push' for local content (a 'capacity building' stream) and the development of an Open Knowledge Network (OKN) that provides a development content 'channel' to local and community access centres in developing countries.

OKN

In March 2003, an OKN West African consultation workshop was held in Senegal, which offered insights into the ideas and opinions of the Francophone region regarding the OKN. An audience of grassroots organisations, NGOs and other regional stakeholders was present and very actively involved in discussions on the OKN theory and framework. Following on from this workshop, an OKN pilot is planned for the West African region in the third quarter of 2003.

At this moment organisation of the OKN pilot for the East African region is in full swing, as it is to take place in Kenya in June 2003.

A big achievement for the OKN was the announcement from the Vodafone Group Foundation supporting the use of mobile phones in Africa for sharing local knowledge. The system, to be piloted in Kenya and South Africa, will focus on vital information for local communities like market prices and HIV/AIDS issues.

Capacity building

For the capacity building stream, focussing on the health sector, the first 2 awareness raising/consultation workshops have taken place in Tanzania. The focus was on local creation, adaptation and exchange of health information at community level. The second workshop looked at this theme from a national perspective. Similar workshops are scheduled to take place in Uganda and Kenya in May 2003, with a regional workshop planned for in Kenya in July 2003.

As part of efforts to promote the visibility of local content in Africa, and to stimulate work on these issues, IICD joined with UNECA in sponsoring 2 African Information Society Initiative (AISI) Media Awards on local content and local content applications. The winners will be announced on May 13.

More information: www.openknowledge.net/
www.dgroups.org/groups/okn, www.dgroups.org/groups/c3net,
www.uneca.org/aisi/mediaaward.htm

Protecting local knowledge in the information society

No matter what the official outcome of the upcoming World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) will be, positive developments seem to be emerging. With borders fading and the virtual community gaining in importance, the potential reach of information and knowledge published on the Internet dramatically intensifies. Whilst content provided on the Internet becomes increasingly powerful, on the one hand empowering people to access knowledge, on the other hand it emphasises the disparities, which access restrictions imply.

In the health sector for example, these restrictions on vital information can cost lives. However, the protection of information is increasingly an issue as boundaries, copyrights and property rights become vague.

Restrictive copyrights laws and patents on knowledge are devised, strengthening the disparities in access to information. This has led to numerous cases whereby local knowledge is patented by powerful content owners, restricting the use of local knowledge which has been the – unrestricted – public property of indigenous peoples for hundreds if not thousands of years.

The WSIS discussions have forced the international community to extend its vision towards horizons otherwise neglected. Questions normally restricted to courts of law or philosophy classes on the intrinsic power of information and knowledge are being addressed in the international domain. The discussion on the ownership of this content in turn gains importance, as national legislation has but a limited scope in the virtual domain.

On the one hand, the Information Society needs to address concerns about the overwhelming predominance of 'Western content' on the Internet, whilst on the other the economic value of content is protected by restrictive patents on intellectual property, hampering developing nations in taking full advantage of the opportunities presented by the Information Society. Whilst negotiations on the Draft Declaration and Draft Action Plan are yet to begin, the WSIS has generated significant attention for the promotion, conservation and institutionalisation of local knowledge. A concern in the discussions seems to be to protect the rights of all stakeholders, by endeavouring to achieve an "adequate balance between intellectual property rights and needs of users", "in accordance with the legal system of each

country". What no action plan so far ventures into is an idea of what such a balance consists of, or how a national legal framework can apply when the information is launched into the trans-national realm of cyberspace.

International communication experts such as Cees Hamelink advocate that the solution lies rather in restoring IPR as an *enabling human right*, emphasising the *freedom* to dispose of intellectual property, rather than applying it as a law protecting patents and *restricting* people from accessing knowledge.

The British and Canadian funded project 'Catalysing the Creation and Exchange of Local Content' is an umbrella under which an Open Knowledge Network (OKN) aims to catalyse the sharing of local information and knowledge through a network of South-South exchange. The ultimate aim of the project is to empower local communities, not just by facilitating their access to information pertinent to their development, but to enhance their capacities to produce their own content.

An important aspect of the Open Knowledge Network is to develop standards for exchanging content worldwide, supporting an entrepreneurial approach to knowledge and promoting the licensing of information for the *common good* rather than for private profit.

While recognising that information cannot be shared internationally without careful attention being paid to Intellectual Property Rights, the OKN framework relies on working with others to develop new forms of copyright which aim to recognise the rights of the creators of content and, at the same time, to maximise the usefulness of their work for the public good.

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About iConnect

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