

The Internet...

Why? and What for?

Thoughts on Information and Communication Technologies
for Development in Latin America and the Caribbean



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Ricardo Gómez
Juliana Martínez

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Appendix:
Towards a social use of the Internet



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The Internet...
Why? and What for?



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Introduction

"Digital divide" is a term used to describe one aspect of the deeply rooted inequalities of modern societies. Eliminating and/or redressing these inequalities requires, among other things, a social vision of information and communication technologies (ICTs) that places them at the service of human development.

Based on research conducted in Latin America and the Caribbean with the support of Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), this document explores some of the conditions required to realize this vision.

The social vision of ICTs for development outlined in this document is based on the following premises:

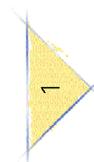
- s Connectivity per se is important, but it is not sufficient to contribute to development.
- s Equitable access, meaningful use, and social appropriation of ICT resources are all necessary to take advantage of available opportunities and achieve positive results.
- s Certain enabling environments must exist for ICTs to contribute effectively to development.
- s Risks and threats exist and should be avoided or minimized in the use of ICTs for development.

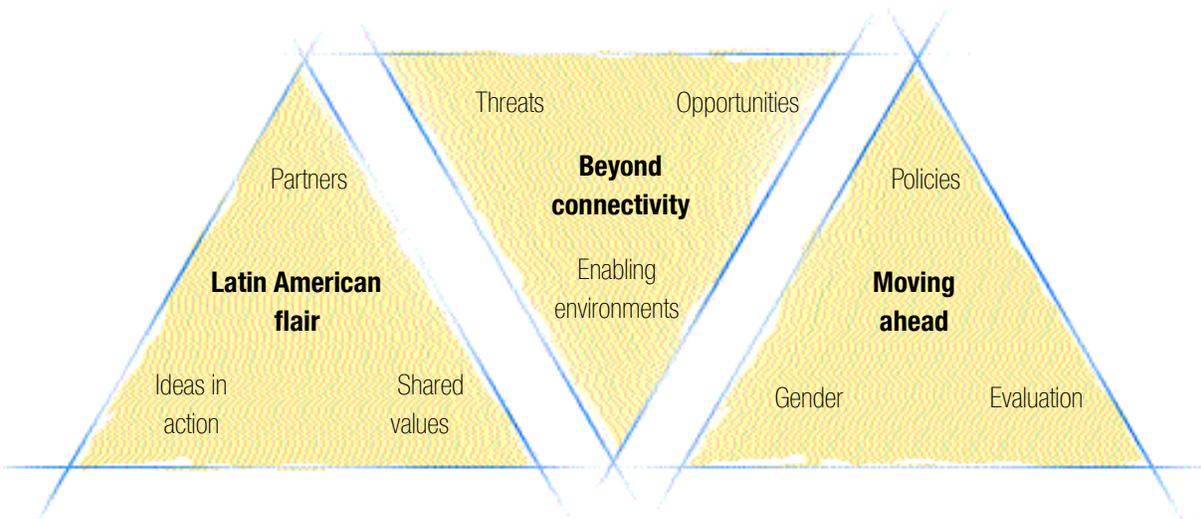
After presenting examples of how the Internet is used for development in Latin America and the Caribbean, this document points out important areas where more in-depth work is needed if a social vision is to be strengthened:

- s transforming public policy;
- s incorporating gender analysis;
- s strengthening evaluation for learning.

The challenge is immense, and success will be possible only with collaboration among the different sectors of society. To take advantage of the potential of ICTs for development in the region, there is an urgent need to integrate a social vision of ICTs for development, to bolster the creation of new knowledge, and to promote concerted action among governments, the private sector and civil society organizations.

ICTs are neither positive nor negative in themselves, but they are not neutral. Left alone, they end up reproducing and deepening existing inequalities in society.





Schematic representation of the ideas in this document

Starting points

This document is a response to an urgent need: to pause and reflect about the complex process underway to use Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) as tools for development in Latin America and the Caribbean. Far from being the last word, this document seeks to offer a set of ideas that will be useful to people who are not specialists, but wish to be better informed so that they can make better decisions.

The term "digital divide" describes many of the political, economic, and social inequalities that exist in communities, countries, continents, and the world. Today, this divide threatens to widen existing gaps or divisions within society: it is therefore essential to rethink the potential of ICTs as tools for building more equitable and democratic societies.

There are no magic formulas

These ideas do not represent a magic formula. Instead, they seek to clarify and synthesize a vision based on the experiences of some 50 teams and projects in the Latin American region that have worked on these issues for several years, with IDRC support.

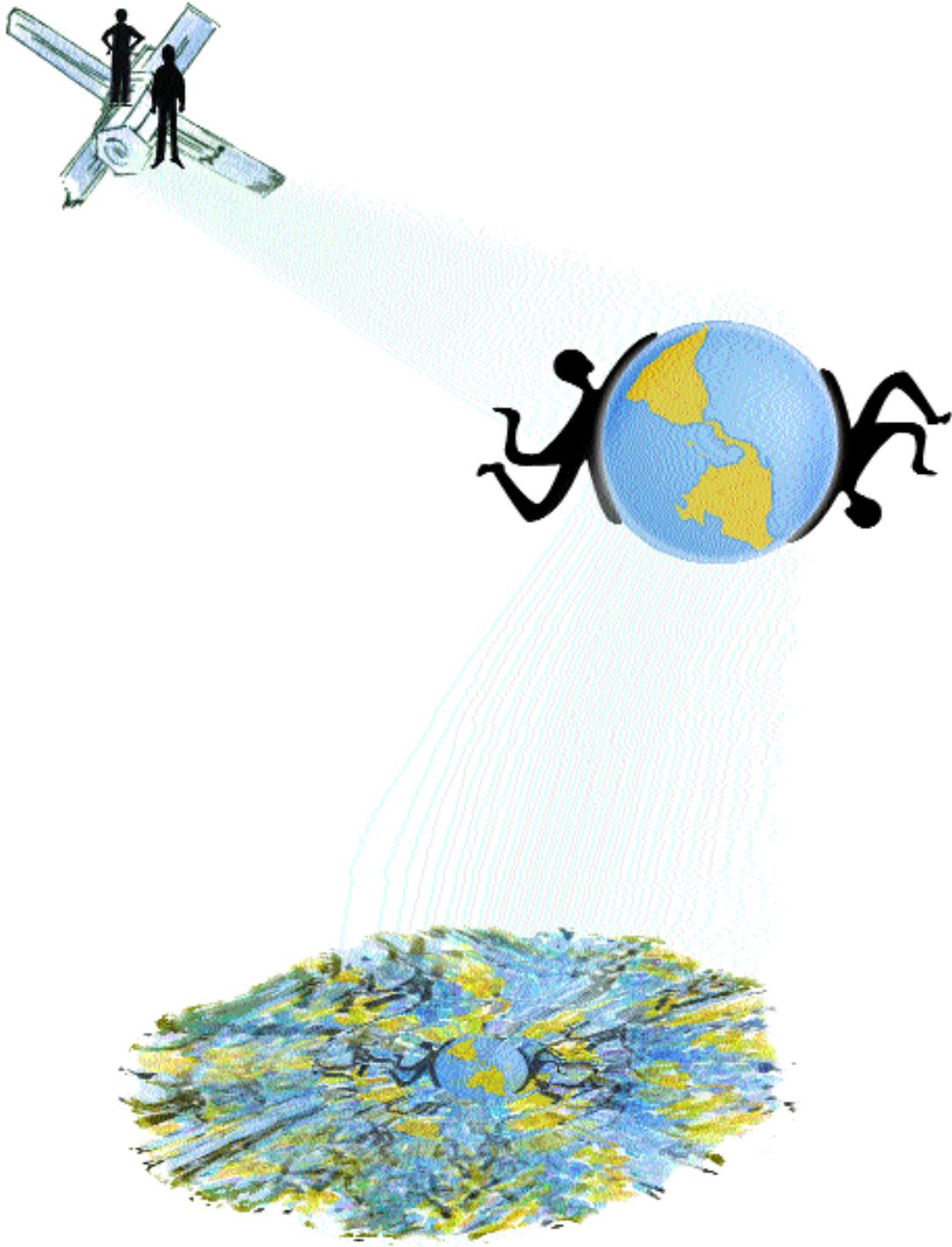
ICTs and the Internet

Different new technologies, practices, and means of communication converge on the Internet. This document regards the Internet as a hub where a wider set of ICTs for development can be explored and used.

Holistic view of development

This document rejects the view that equates development with economic growth. Instead, it adopts a holistic approach to development, characterized by the realization of human potential in its multiple facets, the achievement of economic prosperity with social equality, and the strengthening of democracy with transparency and social justice. This necessarily implies the elimination of inequalities in the distribution of power and resources in society.





A social vision of the Internet

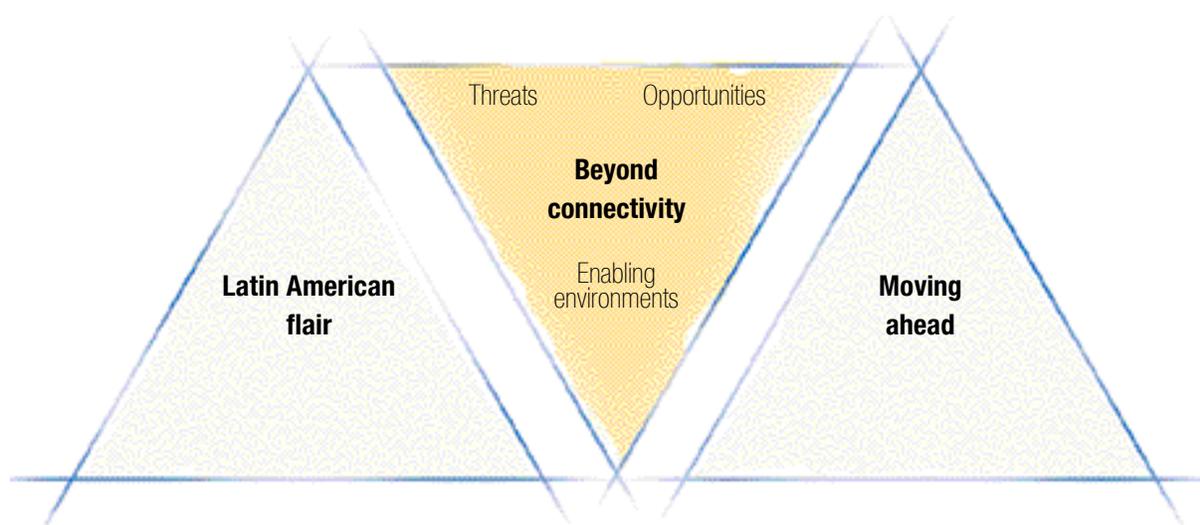
ICTs for development and, in particular, the Internet, are receiving increasing attention from governments, private industry, donors, and civil society organizations in both North and South.

It is clear that ICTs are neither a sufficient nor a necessary condition for development. However, it is also evident that ICTs, primarily driven by commercial interests, are here to stay. It is therefore urgent that a social vision that puts the Internet at the service of development be strengthened.

The social vision proposed rests on four central elements:

- S Going beyond connectivity;
- S Promoting enabling environments;
- S Minimizing threats and risks;
- S Maximizing positive results.

In the social vision proposed, ICTs are not inherently necessary or beneficial. The challenge is, precisely, to be able to tell when, and under what conditions, the Internet can contribute to development.



Connectivity is not enough

The assessment of ICTs for development must go beyond the availability and access to technologies, and include an analysis of the social transformations that occur as a result of their use and social appropriation.

Just a few years ago, only a few people thought that the Internet could contribute to social development. Now that the idea is more widely accepted, it is time to take it a step further. While it is no longer possible to think that access to ICTs alone will solve the problems of human development, the Latin American experience teaches us that ICTs *can* contribute to development on condition that they go beyond connectivity, to ensure equitable access, meaningful use, and social appropriation of ICT resources.

Equitable access

Strengthening public access to Internet resources continues to be a priority in the region. Equitable access means the ability to connect at a reasonable price and the ready availability of basic training in the use of the tools so that an increasing number of people can use these resources, regardless of their sex, class, religion, language, or race.

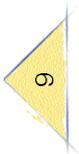
By itself, access to ICTs alone does not result in the generation of knowledge or the redress of social inequalities. This requires encouraging meaningful use and social appropriation.

Meaningful use

Meaningful use is defined as the ability to effectively use ICT resources and combine them with other appropriate forms of communication. Meaningful use also includes the possibility of people producing their own content and having access to other useful content in their own language. People make meaningful use of ICTs when they know how to combine Internet resources with community radio, face-to-face meetings, printed materials, and video, among others.

Beyond their functional uses, ICTs can contribute to development when there is social appropriation of Internet resources.

Social appropriation



Social appropriation occurs when Internet resources help transform daily life by contributing to the solution of concrete problems. Evidence of appropriation is not found in the use of ICTs, but rather in the changes that they have brought about in the real world. Only when Internet resources become useful tools for transforming everyday life do ICTs reach their full development potential.

The social appropriation of ICTs for development can be demonstrated in a number of ways, such as: by offering better medical information to patients; improving the quality of education through the use of innovative teaching resources; introducing varied, relevant programming into community radio broadcasting; increasing sales of local products in the marketplace; disseminating the results of local research; and coordinating action among diverse groups with common goals.

The challenge is to go beyond connectivity, which by itself is not enough, to include the dimensions of equitable access, meaningful use, and social appropriation of ICTs for development.

Note: The concepts of equitable access, meaningful use, and social appropriation were developed in collaboration with Kemly Camacho and the Acceso team, and with the MISTICA virtual community.

Defining beyond connectivity

Equitable access: Connectivity at a reasonable price, with basic training in the use of the tools.

Meaningful use: Effective use of ICT resources, both alone and in combination with other appropriate means of communication.

Social appropriation: Transforming reality by solving concrete problems with the help of ICTs.

Enabling environments

The introduction of ICTs is no guarantee of development. Their use must be understood within the context of social, economic, and political inequalities that the Internet alone cannot change. One of the lessons learned in Latin America and the Caribbean is that ICT's contribution to transforming social inequalities depends on the existence of enabling environments and favourable conditions.

In addition to infrastructure, political will, and other macro factors that facilitate change, four conditions are necessary for ICTs to contribute to development.

Integration into existing social practices

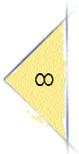
For ICTs to contribute to human development, they must be integrated into the existing practices of individuals, groups, or organizations. By starting with these practices, ICTs can become effective tools with practical applications in the real world. It is more beneficial to use ICTs to enhance existing practices than to promote new activities for the primary purpose of using ICTs.

In this light, the creation of telecentres that are disconnected from existing community organizations and initiatives is unlikely to contribute to development. By inserting ICTs into practices that already foster development, such as the work of community associations, public libraries, or schools, they are more likely to make real contributions to development.

Strategic view of communication

ICTs must be used as part of a coherent communication strategy, in which they are conceived as tools to accomplish clearly defined objectives.

Without a strategic view of communications and the role of ICTs, social organizations easily become "bogged down" in



solving the technical problems of connectivity and trying to manage new and ever-changing technologies. In this case, ICTs become an end in themselves, and thus become an obstacle to achieving human development.

Democracy and participation

ICTs can contribute to making societies more pluralistic and democratic. However, their use, in and of itself, does not necessarily encourage citizen participation and democracy, especially when they are newly introduced. Achieving greater democratization is a precondition for the use of ICTs.

As in all development activities, ICT programs must include broad citizen participation from the outset, including the definition of problems and identification of possible solutions. Citizen participation, whether at the local, regional, or national level, improves the possibilities of appropriation, relevance, and the future sustainability of the activities being undertaken.

Ethics and values

Half a century of research and development work show that there is far more to human development than economic growth. Political, social, and cultural concerns—as well as the inclusion of values that touch people's minds, hearts, and souls—are increasingly important.

The use and appropriation of ICTs for development should be inscribed in an ethic of solidarity, reciprocity, and enthusiasm, based on deep-seated values that seek to transform individuals and their relationships. This is one dimension that needs to be explored and strengthened in a creative fashion.

It is not a matter of just learning to use computers or digital technology. It is a matter of learning to take advantage of the information that these tools can help access, produce, or process, and of making the work of solving real problems and improving the quality of life more effective.

Not all outcomes are beneficial

Much has been said about the potential social benefits of using the Internet for human development, but much less has been said about its possible negative consequences. The Latin American experience shows that Internet use can have negative effects, although these are usually unintentional. It is also important to identify the potential threats posed by ICT use so that strategies can be designed to neutralize or minimize them.

The following four major risks and threats are highlighted:

Increasing inequalities

As with any communication technology, the Internet can reinforce existing social and economic inequalities and limit access to new opportunities to those who, because of their social class, race, language, sex, or age, already have access to them. In this way, inequalities in the distribution of power and resources can continue to increase in the real world, as they are mirrored in the virtual one.

By fostering access to the Internet with no concern for its use and appropriation, we may merely be opening up the markets to passive consumers of goods and services produced by others, at the expense of local providers or producers—without necessarily redressing social inequalities or contributing to development. Furthermore, those who encourage sectarianism, fundamentalism, xenophobia, and intolerance also use the Internet. This often results in practices that are contrary to human development.

Homogenisation and imposition

The content, language, class, and culture that dominate the Internet can have negative effects by generating a uniformity of ideas, preferences, and world visions. The illusion of increased democracy and plurality produced by the

intertive capacity of the Internet may be misleading if it, in fact, reinforces existing relationships of centralized control and domination in society.

Saturation and paralysis

Easy and direct access to information resources can easily lead to saturation: an unstoppable torrent of data with no purpose for anyone. More information does not necessarily mean greater knowledge. The ease with which people can become receivers and transmitters of information (through e-mail, discussion lists, web pages, etc.) carries with it the risk of trivializing the information.

Like the sun, which warms with the same rays that burn, the Internet can paralyse individuals and organizations by flooding them with the same resources and tools that make social action more dynamic. Instead of improving people's living conditions, ICTs can lead to overwork, stress, consumerism, and a deteriorating quality of life.

Isolation and fragmentation

The use of ICTs can create new barriers and isolate people from their environment if their virtual world becomes more important, more interesting, or receives more attention than the real world.

Furthermore, the growth and diversification of available information sources on the Internet can lead to over-specialization and compartmentalization: people and groups may reduce their spheres of interest to small "bubbles" of cybernetic exchanges, as a defence mechanism against information overdose.

Just as ICTs can contribute to development, they can also threaten the realization of human potential, the strengthening of democracy, and the achievement of equitable economic prosperity. Only citizens who are informed, organized, and capable of using and appropriating Internet resources can confront the threats posed by introducing ICTs into society.

We must anticipate that the use of ICTs can have adverse effects on development and look for ways of reducing these from the outset. Project monitoring and evaluation projects should go beyond documenting success and progress, and also identify negative results in the use and appropriation of the Internet for development.

Promising results

The Latin American experience shows us that the results of using ICTs for development have not been as numerous or as positive as many enthusiasts initially believed. Nonetheless, when certain enabling conditions are in place and risks and threats are minimized, the meaningful use and social appropriation of ICTs can contribute -- albeit indirectly -- to human development.

There are three important types of positive results:

Participation in a larger world

The Internet makes it easier and quicker to access more sources of current information, as well as to exchange information and communicate quickly and at low-cost. It facilitates communication among geographically dispersed people and groups, and, with some limitations, between different cultures and languages. As a result, new "windows" are opened on the world, and many organizations and groups, including small or minority ones, can position themselves to participate in a virtual community of global interests.

Diversification of up-to-date information sources

Researchers and activists in the region are no longer as isolated and dependent on poorly funded local libraries. Now they can find out what their global colleagues are thinking and publishing at the moment, thereby becoming active participants in broader continental and global discussions and exchanges that generate new knowledge.

New forms of collaborative work

ICTs are used to help establish new alliances and to engage in decentralized, collaborative efforts. These uses of ICTs can create conditions that facilitate public advocacy and government accountability. They also foster complementary actions at the local, national, and global level. Instead of "thinking globally and acting locally," as the saying goes, it is increasingly necessary and possible to also think locally

More than direct impacts, the Internet can, under certain conditions, make indirect contributions to human development.

and act globally. The Internet provides opportunities for "glocal" reflection and action.

S Decentralized collaboration

In Costa Rica, a strong citizen movement defends the social and public service interests of telecommunications. Indigenous groups, labour unions, environmentalists, students, and women have formed a decentralized network, expressing themselves by means of cellular phones, the Internet, flyers, the radio, and the press. This network allows each group to work autonomously, but in coordination with others. By joining forces and respecting the diversity of initiatives represented, the movement is able to have an impact on public policymaking.

With the Internet, "We are an assembly when we are together and we are a network when we are in our homeland."

Indian Network of Oaxaca

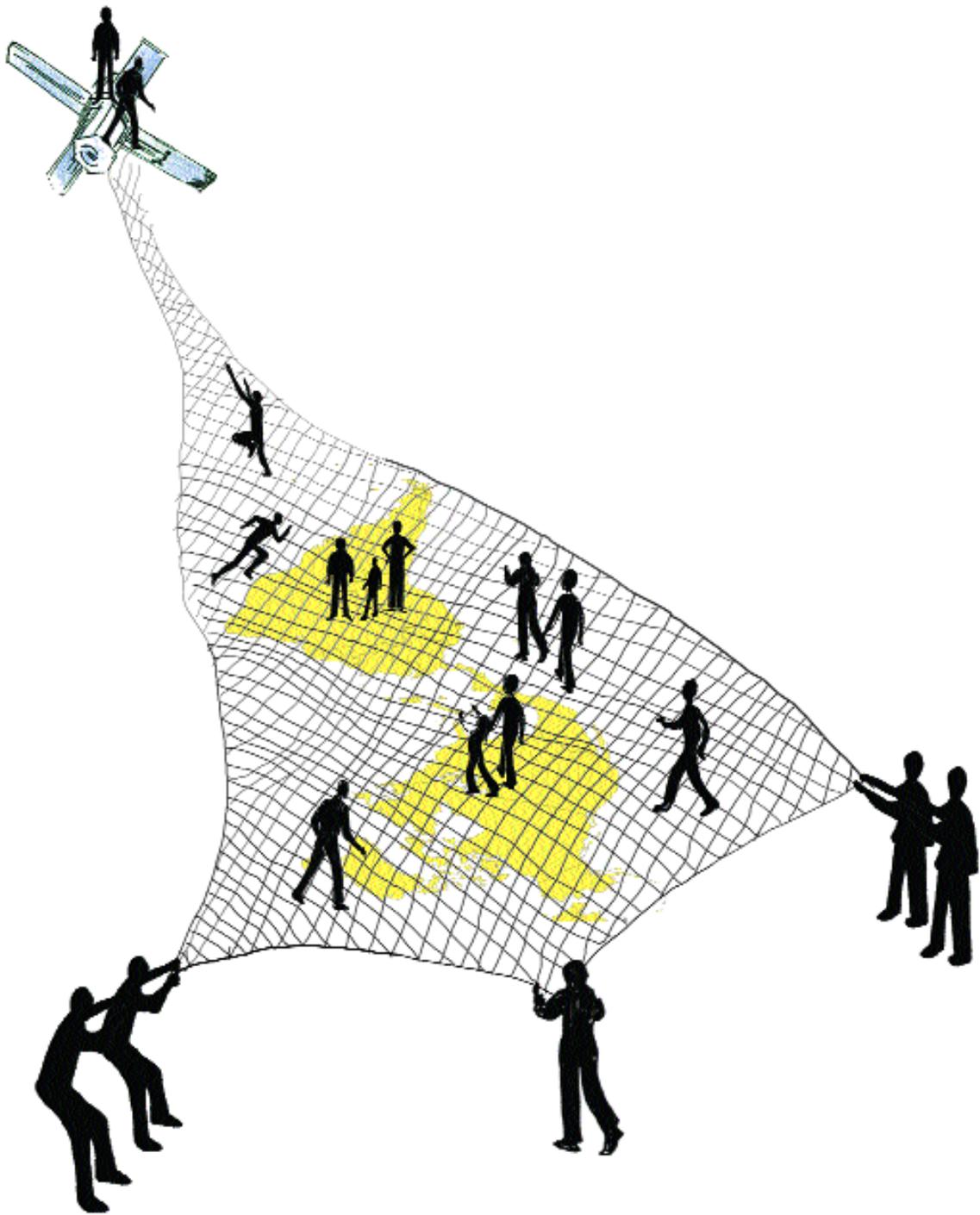
Strengthening multiple voices

ICTs help empower people and organizations by strengthening their self-image and self-esteem. Before using ICT tools to tell the world about their views and priorities, or to describe their successes and failures, people and organizations are forced to clarify what they want to say. In this way, the Internet acts as a tool for building real alternatives to homogenization, by creating a favourable atmosphere for diversity, pluralism, and cultural and linguistic identity.

The Internet for empowerment

The use of the Internet as part of integral rehabilitation and educational programs for street children in Colombia and Ecuador has been a powerful incentive for the girls and boys to return to their studies and improve their reading and writing skills. In addition, the Internet has made them feel capable and active in a society that has systematically excluded and exploited them.





The Internet... Why? and What for?

A social vision with Latin American flair

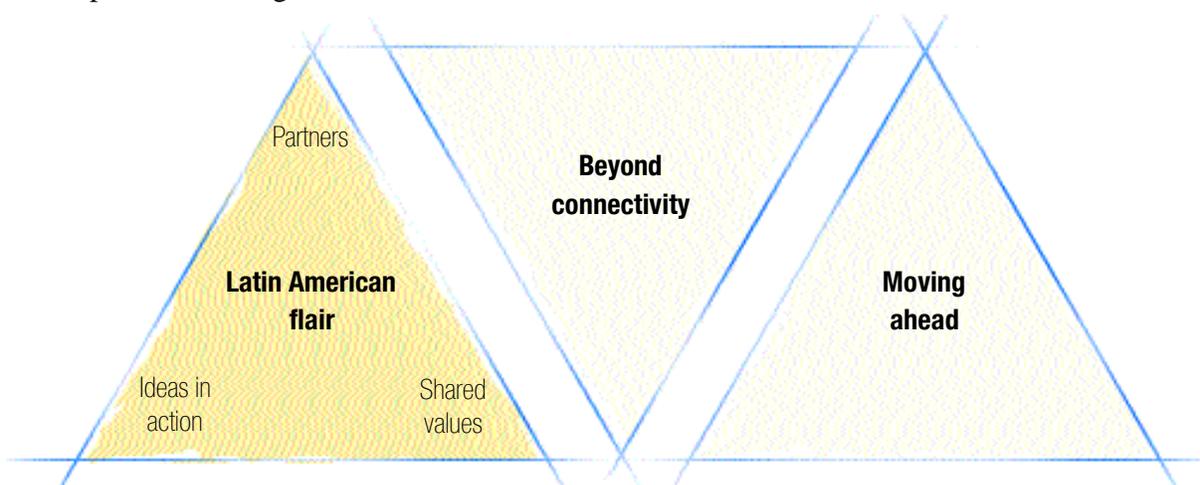
This section describes some of the experiences in Latin America and the Caribbean that spurred this document. The initiatives described are drawn from a network of partners that includes Latin American researchers, activists, and academics that are carrying out research on ICTs and development in the region, with IDRC support.

In 2000, this network initiated a process of critical analysis and collective learning that helped identify the values and strategies that inspire the work in the region. This document is one of the results of that collaborative process.

The following pages contain:

- S A map of partners in the region;
- S An explanation of the values and strategies that inspire regional work;
- S Some examples of ongoing initiatives.

The examples cited are ongoing regional initiatives that were designed to respond to specific conditions. Each initiative operates in the context of different enabling environments and threats, and offers different lessons on the use of ICTs for development in the region.



Partners in the region

Argentina

Centro de Estudios e investigación sobre la Infancia
Fundación Evolución
Instituto de Investigación para la Justicia
Universidad de Buenos Aires
Universidad Nacional de Quilmes

Bolivia

Centro Internacional de Información y Documentación de los Pueblos Indígenas

Brasil

Ministerio de Saúde
Rede Mulher
Rits
Universidade de Sao Paulo

Canadá

Association for Progressive Communication
Canadian Advanced Technology Association
International Institute for Sustainable Development
Universalia Management Group
University of New Brunswick

Chile

ISIS Internacional
Programa Interdisciplinario de Investigaciones en
Centro de Estudios Sociales y Educación

Colombia

Asociación de Mujeres de La Calera
Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular
Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical
COLNODO
Fundación Colombia Multicolor
Fundación Renacer
Instituto de Cultura y Bellas Artes
Universidad de los Andes,

Costa Rica

Asociación InCorpore
Fundación Acceso
Fundación Omar Dengo

Cuba

Centro de Estudios en Ingeniería de Sistemas

Ecuador

Agencia Latinoamericana de Información
Asociación Mundial de Radios Comunitarias
Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales
Fundación ChasquiNet
Intercom Nodo EcuaneX
Universidad Tecnológica Equinoccial

Haití

Sosyete Animasyon Kominikasyon Sosyal

México

Red India de Oaxaca
Tecader
Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana

Nicaragua

Fundación Desafíos
Puntos de Encuentro
Red de Desarrollo Sostenible

Panamá

Red Alforja

Perú

Asociación Civil Transparencia
Comunidad Indígena Asháninka

República Dominicana

Fundación Redes y Desarrollo
Kiskeya Alternativa

Uruguay

Programa de Desarrollo Regional
Red de América Latina

Venezuela

Centro de Animación Juvenil

Complete contact details at www.idrc.ca/pan/partners

Common values and strategies

These are some of the ideas that emerged from the collective reflection of network members in the region about how to better use ICTs for development.

s Values

Cultivate diversity and encourage inclusion

Respect gender, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic differences, in order to build societies in which there is room for everyone.

Leading by example

Strengthen a social vision of development and ICTs that involves civil society in the formulation of appropriate policies.

s Work styles

Cultivate collaborative work

Take better advantage of available resources, based on relationships of trust and solidarity.

Strengthen local capabilities

Train critical users, not just passive consumers of information and resources.

Revise and update the collective vision

Keep the vision up-to-date, within the ever-changing context of values, policies, and technologies.

s Strategies

Work at different levels

From local to national and international, and from fieldwork to theoretical research.

Maintain effective networks

Make intelligent use of ICTs to facilitate the exchange of information, lessons, and experiences.

Strengthen alliances

Between governments, the private sector, and civil society organizations to work together for human development.

Influence the formulation of policies

That reinforce a social vision of ICTs that goes beyond connectivity, strengthening the use, and appropriation of available resources.

Social vision in action

Many practical initiatives and research projects have been launched in Latin America and the Caribbean to make the Internet serve human development. This section describes some of the initiatives and projects supported by IDRC in the region, in which the following themes are of particular importance:

- S Strengthening collaborative work;
- S Improving community access to the Internet;
- S Promoting social movements;
- S Taking advantage of various media;
- S Learning from evaluation.

Each example includes links where more information can be found. The complete set of activities underway is documented at www.idrc.ca/pan



Asháninka Indigenous Community, Peru

Strengthening collaborative work

Building and strengthening collaborative networks in the region is both a mechanism and a research subject. What makes a virtual community? How can the Internet be used to strengthen it?

MISTICA - OLISTICA

The MISTICA (Methodology and Social Impact of ICTs in Latin America and the Caribbean) virtual community is the result of collaborative efforts that bring together more than 200 researchers and activists to experiment with on-line work methodologies and explore the social impacts of the Internet in the region. By using a variety of ICT tools and methods the community has formed a diverse group that is interested in and dedicated to the idea of using ICTs for development. These people and tools are shaping a vibrant virtual community seeking to understand the social impacts of the Internet from a Latin American perspective.

Building on this experience, OLISTICA (Latin American Observatory of ICTs in Action) is collectively engaged in creating an instrument -- nicknamed the isticometer -- for assessing the social impact of the Internet in the region. It combines qualitative and quantitative indicators to facilitate analysis and the production of reports to shape decision-making and influence the formulation of ICT policies for human development.

Somos@Telecentros

The Latin American telecentre network, Somos@Telecentros, supports efforts to strengthen the development of community Internet access centres in the region. The network promotes education and exchange programs, produces tools for telecentre operation on open-source Linux platforms, and designs appropriate methodologies for monitoring and evaluation.

Links:

www.funredes.org/mistica
www.funredes.org/olistica
www.tele-centros.org

The Internet for community use: telecentres

The Latin American network Somos@Telecentros is a virtual community of telecentres that seeks to:

- S** Strengthen the operation and performance of the telecentres.
- S** Facilitate the exchange of experiences and the adaptation of management tools relevant to the social mission of telecentres.
- S** Identify and quantify the results of the telecentres and their contribution to local development, with evaluation frameworks and tools that are appropriate, flexible, and useful.

20

In the past few years, strong efforts have been made to create community access centres to the Internet to aid human development in Latin America. These telecentres, as they are generically called, offer diverse Internet-related communication services (mostly e-mail, web, and chat) and the use of computers and related hardware (scanners, printers, CD-ROM readers and/or burners). Computer use is possible even when the connection to the Internet is not working (which is fairly common). In many cases these centres also offer typing, photocopying, fax, and telephone services. In addition, telecentres generally provide training and user support.

Some of these centres are located in community and cultural centres, schools, and public libraries. Others operate in the offices of non-governmental organizations or in local government offices. In general, commercial Internet access operations, such as cyber cafés, are not geared to social development and are therefore not considered telecentres. Solving concrete problems through the telecentres

The various telecentre experiences in the region have made some ICT resources more accessible to the population, particularly in remote areas. Although it may seem paradoxical, one of the most common problems faced is that telecentres offer solutions that do not seem to respond to the local population's most pressing needs. Local people usually find the phone or typing services offered at the telecentres to be of great value, but they are seldom familiar with the more advanced resources offered, and do not know how they can be used to solve their problems. The lack of local support is another serious limitation.

Links:

Latin American network Somos@Telecentros:

www.tele-centros.org

Unidades Informativas Barriales, Colombia:

www.uib.colnodo.org.co

InforCauca, Colombia:

www.ciat.cgiar.org

Strengthening multiple voices

One of the Internet's most significant contributions to human development is its ability to strengthen the voices of sectors excluded from the dominant centres of information and decision-making. In Latin America and the Caribbean, there are examples of the use and appropriation of the Internet as a tool for self-expression to the rest of the world. Examples range from a local association of peasant women in Colombia, to an international coalition that develops communication and citizenship strategies for a global forum.

The Web Community of Social Movements

Among other initiatives, the Web Community of Social Movements seeks to strengthen the ability of Latin American social movements to appropriate the Internet as a tool for self-affirmation and for solving problems. The Web Community is founded on these basic principles:

- s The Internet offers excluded sectors of society the possibility of expressing themselves and to collectively influence development.
- s The under-used capacity of these sectors for taking advantage of Internet resources must be strengthened.

The Internet for Indigenous peoples

Indigenous peoples are part of the traditionally excluded groups that today are looking to use ICTs. The Asháninka community in the Peruvian jungle and the Indigenous groups of Oaxaca in Mexico, among others, are using the Internet to strengthen their identity and increase their participation in global society.

The foremost users of the Internet, and the ones who most establish their dominant character, are commercial enterprises. This makes it urgent for civil society to fill its own spaces in order to make the Internet a diverse, democratic arena where the entire global society, not only a few interest groups can express themselves.

Sally Burch y Osvaldo León
Comunidad Web de
Movimientos Sociales

Links:

Web Community of Social Movements

www.movimientos.org

Asháninka Indigenous Community

www.idrc.ca/pan/pr04240_1_e.htm

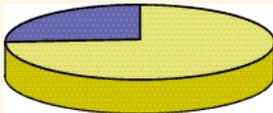
Indian Network of Oaxaca (RIO, in Spanish)

www.rio.org.mx

What about civil society?

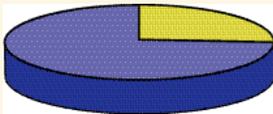
The mediating role of CSOs is of vital importance. Although organizations use the Internet, most of the populations they work with do not. How can the bridge between the two be strengthened?

Organizations



With Internet
Without Internet

Population



With Internet
Without Internet

Civil society organizations (CSOs) are important players in many development activities, but could contribute more if they were strengthened and worked more effectively. Could ICTs help CSOs improve their performance?

The case of Central America

One research project in Central America that combines qualitative and quantitative analyses has found that, despite a promising start, there is still much to do after five years of Internet in the region (see appendix for more details).

- s E-mail is the tool most commonly used by CSOs (representing 90% of their Internet use). However, it is not used much to participate in discussion lists or virtual communities on subjects related to the organizations' work.
- s Many organizations still don't feel that the Internet changes the products and services they offer.
- s Most organizations are worried about information saturation, the small demand for communication within the country, the difficulty of keeping web pages up to date, and the use of the Internet for purposes unrelated to work. In addition, they are faced with new challenges, such as how to deal with immediacy and the handling of direct requests.

The adoption of the Internet as a tool to help improve organizational performance requires creating new visions, new capabilities, new knowledge, and new working procedures. These must be constructed in a collective and permanent fashion by the organizations in the region.

Link:

www.acceso.or.cr/impacto

The Internet ... and beyond

In Latin America and the Caribbean, decades of experience with communication for development and alternative communication practices are now complemented and strengthened by the use of ICTs. One of the most powerful features of the Internet is the convergence of multiple communication tools, from text and image processing to remote handling of audio and video files. Internet resources can be combined with other means to become part of the toolbox available for development activities.

One of the most powerful examples of integration is the link between the Internet and community radio. These radio stations operate as local broadcasting centres for content that is distributed over the Internet. They make content accessible to thousands of people through an inexpensive and versatile medium that is compatible with the fundamentally oral tradition of the region. At the same time, the Internet spreads local information and facilitates the exchange of information and programs between the different community radio stations, becoming a basic tool for collaborative work.

Planet Radio

The International Community Radio Association, AMARC, provides an online centre for information and exchange among Latin American community radio broadcasters. They can share questions and experiences, radio scripts, and audio files in digital formats. AMARC accompanies this initiative with a motivational and educational program of activities, whose lessons are being adapted to other areas of the world.

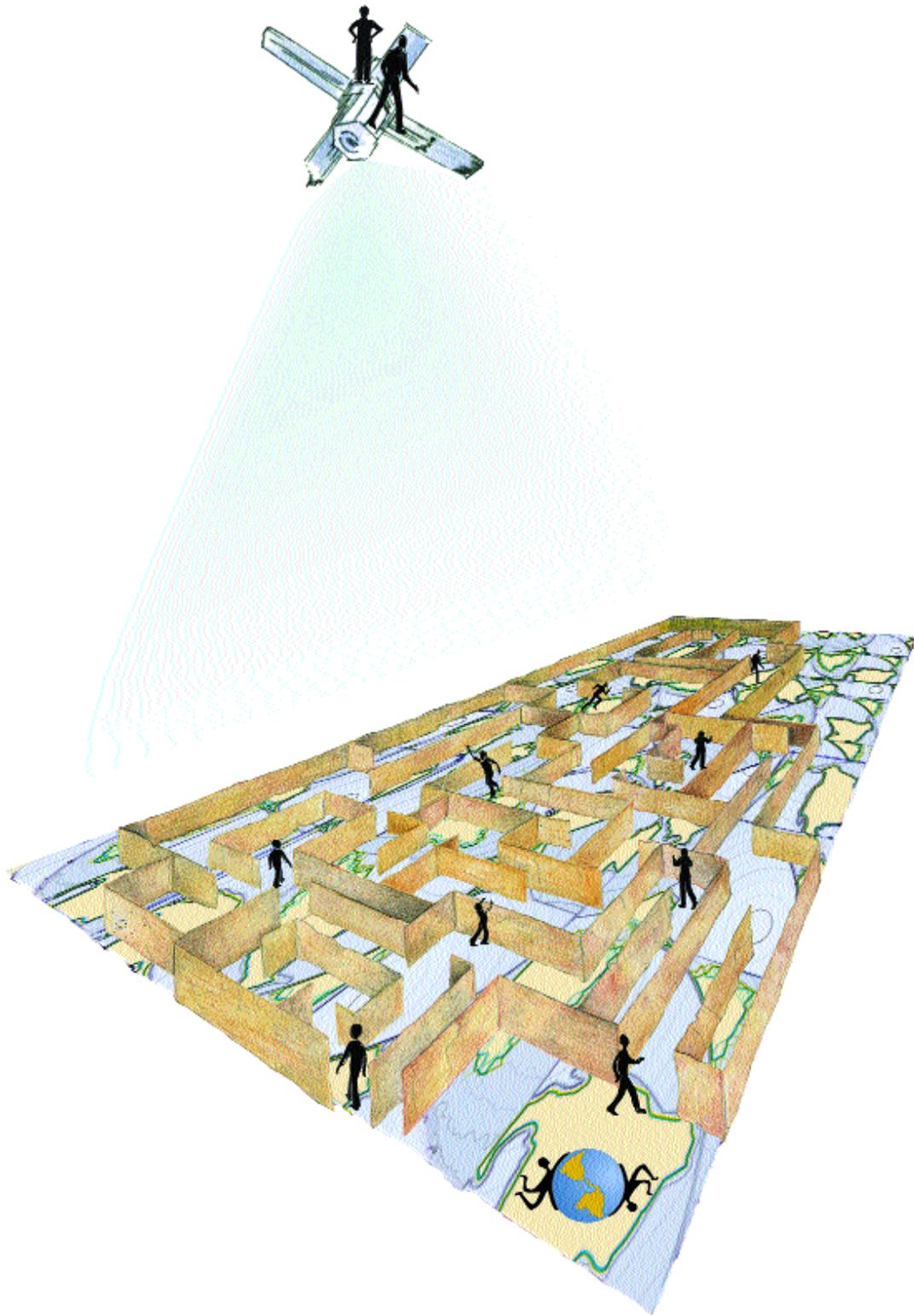
www.amarc.org

SIPAZ

System of Communication for Peace

In the midst of the violent conflict that ravages Colombia, there are numerous citizen initiatives that seek to build peace. These are supported by SIPAZ, which uses the Internet to exchange experiences and information between several sites in the country. SIPAZ fosters citizen education and community organization in conflict zones, and trains local correspondents in news gathering and reporting.

www.sipaz.net



The Internet... Why? and What for?

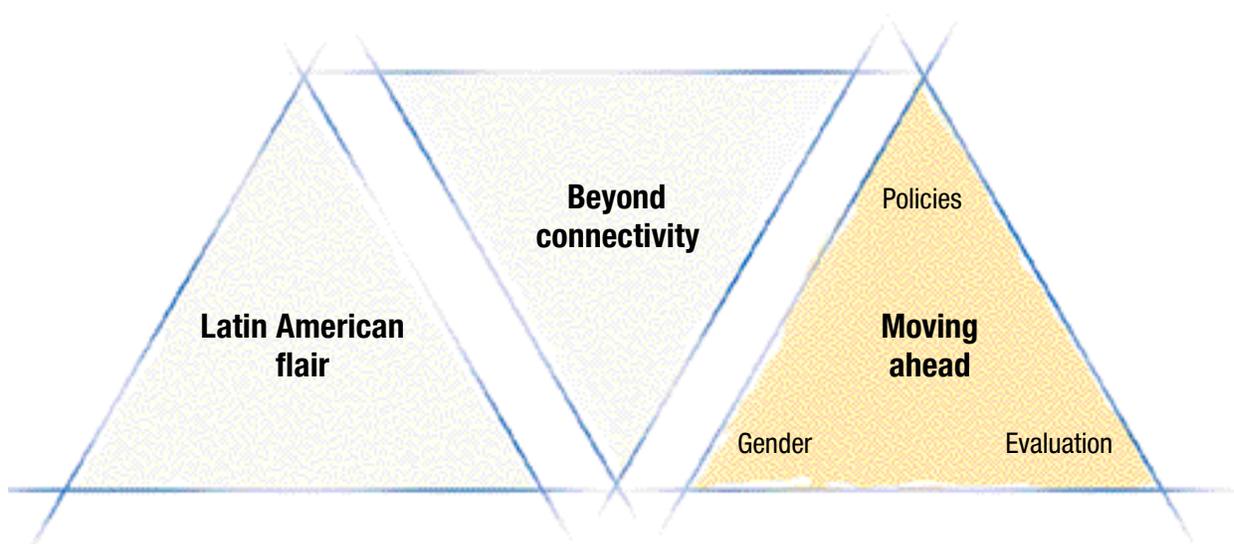
Moving ahead

This section talks about three key areas that need to be explored in more depth to strengthen ICTs' contribution to development in Latin America and the Caribbean:

- § Influencing the formulation of public policy;
- § Incorporating gender analysis;
- § Evaluating and effectively disseminating results.

Recognizing the strengths and capabilities of initiatives carried out in the region, these themes have just begun to be explored. Instead of results, therefore, we here offer some leads that could help advance more in-depth analyses.

Finally, three major challenges will determine future work: integrating a social vision into the dominant trends in ICTs; stimulating the generation of new knowledge and capacities that take advantage of the potential of ICTs for development; and strengthening alliances among civil society, private industry, and government.



Transforming public policy

ICTs are increasingly affecting economic, political, and social life in the region. Latin American governments are trying to modernize their policies to meet new demands, from regulating telecommunications and Internet-related services to modernizing the State and the administration of social programs, including health and education. The challenge is to take advantage of an unprecedented window of opportunity for the formulation of integrated, inclusive policies that contribute to making ICTs effective tools for human development.

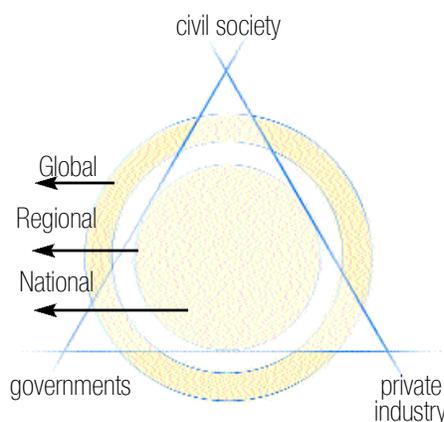
Civil society is absent in the formulation of policies

Public policies are courses of action to confront the problems that affect people in their personal lives, communities, countries, and in the world. Today, the state and the private sector are the most active participants in formulating policies that affect the social use of ICTs. But, without the participation of organized civil society, policy formulation is incomplete since not all initiatives that contribute to human development are economically profitable (as the private sector would like) or politically attractive (as the governments would wish).

Public policies require collaboration between sectors

The formulation of inclusive policies requires the participation of the state, the private sector, and civil society. Strengthening this relationship triangle is key to formulating successful public policies that promote ICTs for development at the local, national, regional, and global levels. Under these conditions:

- Civil society organizations have the opportunity to influence the formulation of policies that include their vision and experiences in identifying problems and possible solutions.



- S The private sector has the opportunity to contribute technically and economically feasible solutions, based on its business experience and social responsibility.
- S Governments have the opportunity to promote inclusive public policies that respond to the needs of society and the possibilities that ICTs offer in helping to solve them.

Focus for collaboration

Collaborative work in formulating public policies on ICTs calls for work in three major areas:

Promoting a social vision of the Internet

By encouraging a social vision of the Internet that goes beyond connectivity, public policies can promote the use of ICTs for human development.

Creating favourable environments

Public policies can create favourable political, economic, and social conditions to realize human potential and promote economic prosperity and democracy, under conditions of equality that foster the use of ICTs for development.

Carrying out concrete actions

By acting together, public, private, and civil society initiatives can increase their reach for accessing, using, and appropriating the Internet. Some examples include strengthening telecentres and other public services, improving the transparency of government actions, and offering secure electronic commerce transactions for promoting local goods and services.

The formulation of policies for the social use of ICTs requires the participation of the state, private industry, and the civil society. Only when these three sectors participate will policies be reached that respond to the interests of the society as a whole.

Integrating gender analysis

In Latin America and the Caribbean, ICTs for development projects are starting to include a gender perspective. While gender analysis is still in its early stages, it is the subject of multiple explorations in the region.

The challenge here is to strengthen this trend, so that opportunities to access, use, and appropriate ICTs do not depend on sex and contribute to the elimination of inequalities between men and women in society.

ICTs will not do away with gender inequality

By themselves, ICTs will not eliminate inequalities. However, their meaningful use and social appropriation can help redress these inequalities in gender relationships.

A gender perspective transcends connectivity

The first sign of a concern for gender analysis in ICT and development projects has been to ask how many women and how many men use the different services. These initial questions on access to technology should also consider issues of control, the type and quality of use, and the uses that are made of the resources. A more extensive gender analysis would also take into account differences in age, language, race, and religion.

A gender perspective promotes concrete solutions

From a gender perspective we need to encourage:

- S Actions that foster equal opportunities to use, access, and appropriate ICTs.
- S Mechanisms that compensate for existing inequalities in society and contribute to transforming them.

Links: Women's Networking Support
Program of the APC (Association for
Progressive Communication)
www.apcwomen.org
www.apc.org

It is quite probable that women are generally at a disadvantage in terms of access to and overall use of the new technologies, and that they suffer a greater proportion of the potential negative effects. For this reason, the strategic interests of women must be taken into account during the design, implementation, and evaluation of any project or action.



Gender analysis is a key aspect in the evaluation of ICT programs and development. This includes the disaggregation by gender of the information collected, but also implicitly calls for conditions where the information about women's access to and use of the Internet and ICTs comes from women themselves, and not only from their husbands or employers.

Note: This section was written with help from Sylvia Cadena and Sheri Dankey, and the results of the March 2001 meeting of the Women's Network Support Programme of APC, held in Manila, Philippines.

Major challenges for a gender analysis of ICTs

- S** Strengthening women's networks with a gender perspective in the use of ICTs.
- S** Generating and using gender-based data on access, use and appropriation of ICTs.
- S** Using ICTs to improve the quality of life of women, including the creation of new job opportunities.
- S** Strengthening a gender perspective in public policies on ICTs.
- S** Mobilizing resources for research, action, and evaluation from a gender perspective.

Learning from evaluation

The use of the Internet for development raises some difficult questions. How can we know if the Internet helps develop a community, organization, or country? In what way do ICTs help realize human potential and economic prosperity, and strengthen democracy? One of the biggest challenges is to answer these questions with something more than just picturesque anecdotes.

Impact evaluation requires frameworks and tools that are solid, adaptable, and useful, and that allow us to learn systematically from our experiences. Evaluation results are useful if they serve to improve on past experiences with new knowledge, and have influence decision-making and the formulation of relevant policies. This is a new field in Latin America and the Caribbean, and one that requires resources and concerted efforts to be fruitful.

Evaluation is a learning process

Evaluation is a continuous process that starts at the very beginning of any project, not something that happens just at the end. More than an audit, evaluation is an educational process in which different groups and individuals participate. It enables us to take into account the perspectives and perceptions of different players, and helps us refine or improve activities before it's too late.

The impact of the Internet should be judged on the basis of people's ability to satisfy their needs as a consequence of the results obtained by using the information.

Michel Menou

Impacts occur on different levels

There are four levels at which ICT use can have a positive or negative impact:

- S On people, individually or collectively;
- S On organizations, whether they are private, public, or civil;
- S On countries;
- S On the region or world, i.e. beyond national borders.

On each of these levels the needs, questions, and evaluation methods are different.

The questions must be clear before we can evaluate

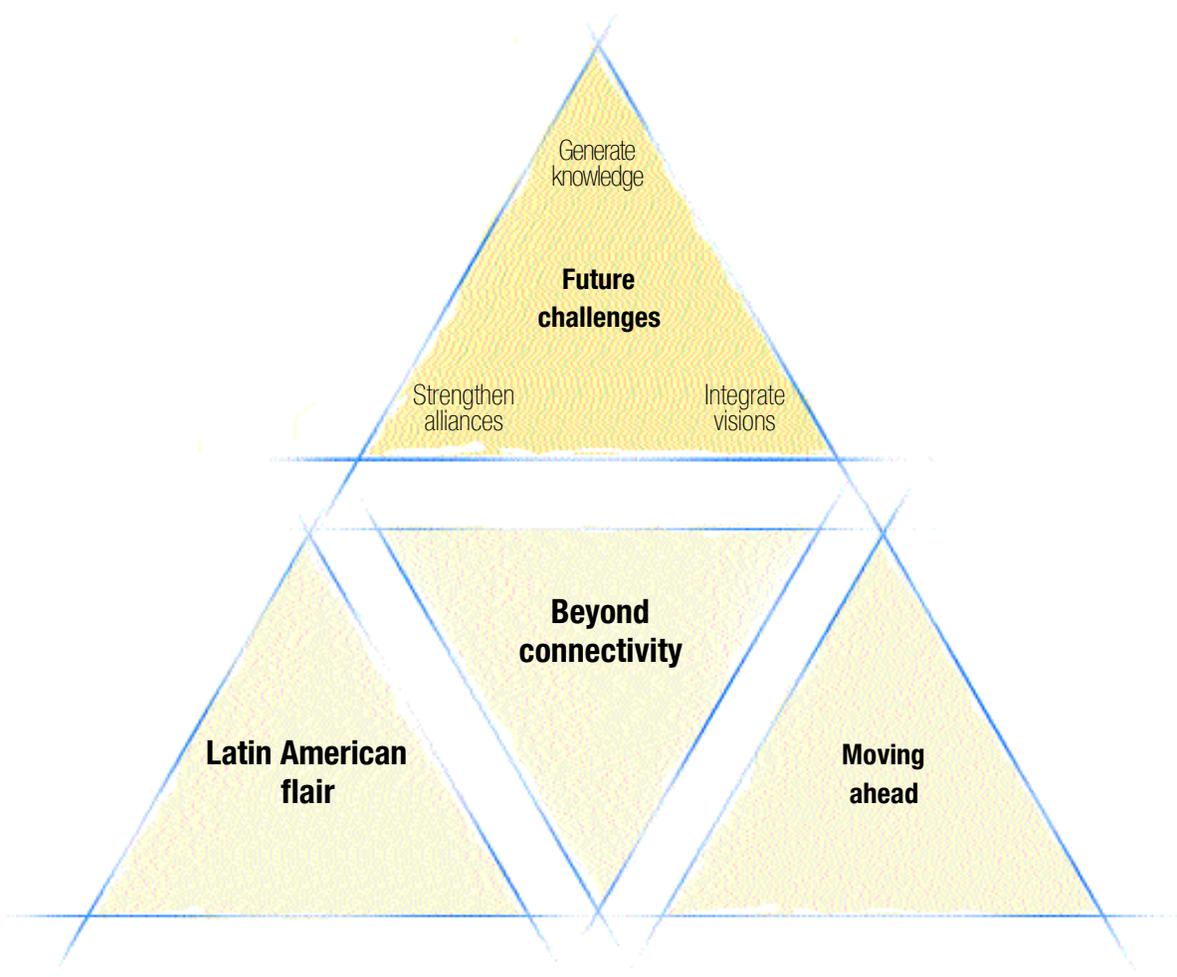
Evaluating the impact of ICTs on development requires clarifying the questions to which answers are needed for analyzing specific situations. These questions are not necessarily the same everywhere or for everyone. With clearer questions we can identify the most appropriate variables and indicators and prepare or adapt the instruments to be used for collecting information, using both qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Evaluation is good if the results are useful

For the results of an evaluation to be used, they must be collected and presented appropriately to the different target audiences. Effective dissemination of the results must be part of any evaluation's initial design process, since it is no longer enough to produce reports that gather dust on shelves or in filing cabinets, or get lost in the maze of the Web. Different users may require different types of products that allow them to understand what has been learned and apply it to their work, whether improving social practices or making decisions at different levels.

Links:

www.bellanet.org/leap/evaltica



Future challenges

This document proposes a social vision of ICTs for development inspired by the Latin American experience, and provides leads on how to go into greater depth in areas still needing work. To conclude, three major challenges are posited for maximizing the potential of ICTs for development.

- S Generate new knowledge and new capabilities needed to take advantage of the potential of ICTs for human development.
- S Integrate a social vision of ICTs for development into the predominant commercial and government visions, which are now the driving forces of the Internet.
- S Strengthen the alliances between state, civil society, and private industry, as a way to incorporate a social vision of the Internet into policies and concrete actions for development.

These challenges complete the portrait that we have drawn in this document, and invite to continue reflecting on the Internet: Why? and What for? from the perspective of human development.

Internet ... Why? and What for?

Thoughts on Information and
Communication Technologies for Development
in Latin America and the Caribbean

Ricardo Gómez, IDRC
Juliana Martínez, Fundación Acceso
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This document is the result of collective discussion process involving several partners in Latin America and the Caribbean. It was written during Ricardo Gómez's residency at Fundación Acceso in Costa Rica between February and March 2001. The authors wish to acknowledge the valuable contributions of the Acceso team and the MISTICA virtual community in the formulation of some of these ideas.

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Design:
World Graphics

Illustrations:
Laura Solano
World Graphics

Photos:
Ricardo Gómez

Back cover poster:
Luis Carlos Moreno,
Fundación ChasquiNet

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IDRC

International Development Research
Centre
250 Albert St.
PO Box 8500, Ottawa,
ON, Canada K1G 3H9
Tel (613) 236 6163
Fax (613) 567 7749

www.idrc.ca



FUNDACIÓN ACCESO

P.O.Box 288-2050
San José, Costa Rica
Tel (506) 283 2726
Fax (506) 283 2748
International Mail:
SJO (087) Box 02-5369
Miami, FL 33102 USA

www.acceso.or.cr