

A gateway for capacity development

# Capacity.ORG

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### Engagement or empowerment? Experiences with networks in Ghana

Drawing on the experiences of civil society networks in the PRSP process in Ghana, Emmanuel Akwetey discusses whether engagement has actually led to their empowerment.

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### ICTs, capacities and networks

Peter Ballantyne and Denise Clarke discuss how ICTs can enable networks and their members to achieve their goals.

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A photograph of two men shaking hands outdoors. The man on the left is wearing a light-colored short-sleeved shirt and dark trousers. The man on the right is wearing a dark patterned long-sleeved shirt and dark trousers. They are both smiling and looking at each other. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with trees and a building.

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*Rafael Uribe Iregui*

In recent months I have seen two issues of your magazine. This initiative is the right thing at the right time. It brings pioneer information to target groups. Congratulations and thank you very much.

*Erik De Smedt, Bertem, Belgium*

May I suggest you consider writing more about capacity building of NGOs? Even if an organisation has a good management team, but the middle managers and staff are not qualified to achieve the project targets, then the organisation will not meet its objectives. That may result in donors or top management pulling the plug on the project.

*Saray, Cambodia*

We will attempt to address capacity building across all types of organisations and institutions. This issue features articles on NGOs on pages 4, 9 and 12. – Ed.

Issue 26 of Capacity.org contained an interesting contribution entitled 'Independent monitoring: promoting mutual accountability'. Drawing on experience in Tanzania, the article illustrated how independent monitors can aid development partners – in that instance the Tanzanian government and a donor group – by serving as an honest broker. Mutually selected monitors assessed working relationships by applying similar levels of scrutiny to all actors. The report helped make the assessment of aid relationships more objective with suggestions on specific actions to improve them.

With some adaptation, the concept of independent observation and advice can apply more broadly in development work. Although monitoring is important where relations have become 'strained', there are many other moments in the establishment, evolution and operation of development relationships when a neutral and impartial person or entity can be beneficial. This task can be broadly described as the 'facilitation' of relationships or partnerships.

As professional input, independently facilitated negotiations can help participants make decisions about: common objectives and expectations; the optimal role for each actor; how to best use resources; joint management of activities; fair and

transparent decision-making processes; and the prevention and resolution of conflicts. A neutral facilitator can also guide periodic assessments of the collaboration or partnership, and can make recommendations about how to advance working relationships.

Today's approach to development work calls for more relationships between diverse institutions at different scales of operation, levels of social organisation and relative power. Experience has convinced us that, by improving 'relational capacity', skilled facilitation has a valuable role to play in making complex relationships more effective and equitable.

Spurred by this conviction, we have formed a specialised NGO, called Inter-Mediation ([www.inter-mediation.org](http://www.inter-mediation.org)), to advance the idea and practice of using neutral and impartial third parties to assist development relationships. Comments and feedback are more than welcome.

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Thank you for the first issue of the new-style Capacity.org, which takes a more in-depth look at the issues surrounding capacity development.

The analysis of the different understandings of capacity development was most touching and challenging. In subsequent issues I hope to see a follow-up on this debate in the form of a broader discourse and considerations of widest perceptions on the topic. A particular question that might be interesting to follow up on in the future concerns the sustainability of the capacity development momentum that has been started in almost all past and ongoing development initiatives in developing countries, many of which unfortunately have been short-lived and disjointed. This is a challenge for most developing nations.

I look forward to an interactive discourse on this topic in future issues, and possibly case studies from the South.

*George Kasumba-Ddumba, Director  
Assess Africa Development Consultants,  
Kampala, Uganda*

Thank you. We will certainly be looking at the question of sustainability. You can find case studies from the South on pages 4, 9 and 12 of this issue. – Ed.

# Networks and partnerships

Check any job ad at random, and you are likely to come across 'excellent networking abilities' as one of the requirements. Although it often simply means having useful and well connected people in your address book, the term is increasingly being used to refer to the ability to engage in, organise, or even lead a network of professionals. A network in this sense refers to a group of individuals or organisations that share a concern or interest. And who contribute knowledge, experience and resources for joint learning and action, or to achieve a common purpose.

Such networks have been gaining ground in many fields, and international development cooperation is no exception. According to the UNDP, in 2003 there were some 20,000 international NGO networks. This number is on the rise, thanks to improved (access to) technology and information, and donor recognition that networks can be useful vehicles for development – and hence are worth funding.

Like organisations, networks come in different shapes and sizes. At one extreme, they are informal, loosely structured communities of practice, with a shared leadership or none at all. At the other, they have a secretariat, a recognised leader and a clear agenda. The form of a network can evolve over time, according to the purpose it aims to serve, and in response to internal and external factors. Thus we can distinguish several kinds of networks – communities of practice, knowledge networks, sectoral networks, social change or advocacy networks and service delivery networks. This issue of Capacity.org focuses on advocacy and sectoral networks. We will address other types of networks in future issues.

Although networks are frequently heralded for their potential, our understanding of how they develop remains limited. Are impact and sustainability merely a function of size, or does leadership also play an important role? Should networks necessarily be sustainable? And what is the effect of donor involvement? Do potential members

make a cost-benefit analysis before joining a network? Are there transaction costs involved? Although there is no fixed formula for failure or success, there are indications that effective networks – that is, those that achieve their goals – are characterised by strong social capital, leadership, governance and management, joint learning and mutually beneficial partnerships with donors. Each of these issues merits further research.

Regarding capacity development by and through networks, again there are many questions. Is the capacity of a network simply the combined capacities of its members, or is it more than the sum of its parts? What capacities does a network need to make it work? How can networks make optimal use of modern communication technologies? And what capacities are generated once the network is in place?

The articles in this issue of Capacity.org offer tentative answers to some of these questions, and raise additional issues. The lead article even argues, controversially, that in practice networks do not necessarily strengthen the influence of civil society; rather, once co-opted, they use much of their energy on internal collaboration.

You are invited to share your insights and views through our website: [www.capacity.org](http://www.capacity.org)

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## ORGANISATIONS, NETWORKS AND INITIATIVES

This section offers a selection of organisations, networks and initiatives concerned with capacity development. A more extensive list can be found at [www.capacity.org](http://www.capacity.org).

### International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD)

IICD assists developing countries to realise locally owned sustainable development by harnessing the potential of ICTs. IICD works with partner organisations in nine countries, helping to assess the potential uses of ICTs, and to strengthen their capacities to formulate, implement and manage ICT projects. IICD's contributions to this issue of Capacity.org, in terms of its experiences with ICTs and networking, and its financial support, are gratefully acknowledged. [www.iicd.org](http://www.iicd.org)

### Southern African NGO Network (SANGONeT)

SANGONeT, the development

information portal for South African NGOs, is working to strengthen management and institutional capacity of NGOs by providing access to information, mapping NGOs and their activities, and promoting ICTs in support of the work of civil society. <http://sangonet.org.za>

### Groupe initiatives

Created in 1993, Groupe initiatives is a platform of five French development NGOs working to eradicate poverty through action research and institutional capacity building. Groupe initiatives publishes *Traverses*, a series for practitioners that examines different types of interventions. [www.groupe-initiatives.org/uk](http://www.groupe-initiatives.org/uk)

### Building Partnerships for Development (BPD)

BPD is an informal network that seeks to demonstrate that strategic partnerships involving business, government and civil society can achieve more at the local level to improve access to safe water and effective sanitation than any of the groups acting individually. [www.bpd-waterandsanitation.org](http://www.bpd-waterandsanitation.org)

### Capacity Building Network for IWRM (Cap-Net)

Partners in the Cap-Net network are international, regional and national institutions and networks committed to capacity building in the sector, including WaterNet, WANet, and the Global Water Partnership (GWP). [www.cap-net.org](http://www.cap-net.org)

### Global Development Learning Network (GDLN)

GDLN is a global partnership of learning centres using ICTs to connect people around the world, enabling them to communicate, share knowledge, and learn from each others' experiences. [www.gdln.org](http://www.gdln.org)

### Partnerships Central

This international alliance of civil society, governments, intergovernmental organisations and industry associations creates a framework to disseminate to stakeholders the means, motivation and opportunity necessary for partnerships to become a major force in sustainable development. <http://partnershipscentral.org>

Engagement or empowerment?

# Experiences with networks in Ghana



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Throughout Africa civil society networks are successfully engaging with the state and attempting to influence public policy in order to accelerate poverty reduction and national development. Drawing on the experiences of civil society networks in the PRSP process in Ghana, this article discusses whether engagement has actually led to their empowerment.

The recent shift in the development paradigm from structural adjustment programming to poverty reduction strategies has created opportunities for the emergence of civil society networks and their entry into the public policy arena. In many developing countries these networks are now addressing crucial issues such as poverty reduction, debt cancellation, fair trade, education for girls, and HIV/AIDS, and are calling for greater transparency and accountability. The Southern Africa Regional Poverty Network (SARPN), the Uganda Debt Network (UDN), the Civil Society for Poverty Reduction (CSPR) network in Zambia, and the Ghana HIPC Watch are but a handful of the multitude of such networks that have emerged in recent years.

The spread of these networks highlights several important changes. Networks are clearly growing in number and variety. Their entry into the public policy

domain suggests that a major political sphere, which until recently had been closed to non-state actors, is now being opened up. It also signals that policy and decision-making processes are being reformed to accommodate civil society actors.

## Ghana's experiences

Ghana adopted the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRSP) policy framework in 2000, after almost two decades of protests against structural adjustment policies, and growing demands for change. The PRSP promised to open up the entire process of public policy making – from conception, formulation and implementation, to monitoring and evaluation – to civil society and private sector actors. It also raised the prospect that, for the first time, non-state actors would be able to influence economic and social policy making.



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*The civil society groups and organisations fell into three categories: optimists, cynics, explorers.*

Ghana has completed the first round of the PRSP process, resulting in the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy I (GPRS I, 2003–2005), and has now embarked on the second. Many civil society actors – including community-based organisations, NGOs, gender-based advocacy groups, trade unions, student associations, policy research institutes and think tanks – welcomed the opportunity to participate in the dozens of consultation workshops that were held at national, regional and local levels.

### Mixed reactions

Based on their experiences of participating in the GPRS I process, the reactions of civil society groups and organisations fell into three categories. First, there were the ‘optimists’, who believed that the consultation workshops offered them a rare opportunity to participate in public dialogue on policy issues, options, priorities and choices. Many of them were disappointed, however. They found there was little scope for real dialogue on the policy issues and choices available, and felt powerless to influence decisions. Some claimed that the government and international financial institutions had already decided on the macro-economic and social policies within which the poverty reduction programmes were to be pursued.

The second group, the ‘cynics’, took part in the workshops out of curiosity, but soon found that the space for critical debate was rather limited and the process inadequate to meet their expectations. They became even more cynical and withdrew from the consultation process altogether.

Those in the third group, the ‘explorers’ or ‘learners’, appear to have decided it might be worthwhile continuing their involvement in the PRSP process. They tried to push the frontiers of their participation beyond policy formulation to implementation, in the hope of learning more about the public policy system so they would be better able to reform it. The members of this group opted to

engage in the implementation of the strategy, in particular in monitoring the process to track ‘deliverables’, and reporting their findings to the public and their constituents. It was from this third group that the networks and networking on the GPRS emerged. For more information about the activities of these networks, visit [www.capacity.org](http://www.capacity.org).

### Shifting approaches

Needless to say, the civil society networks that emerged in Ghana have different interests and so tend to focus on different aspects of the policy process. Based on their experiences in 2000–2005, it could be argued that ‘networking’ was not their main purpose or approach, especially during the consultation phase. However, it soon became apparent that networking was the way to go when the process advanced to the implementation phase. What could account for this shift?

Taschereau and Bolger (2005) remind us that networks are diverse forms of organisation that link the capacities of individuals and groups in order to exchange ideas, generate knowledge and mobilise for collective action. They emerge when a number of independent organisations or individuals embrace the need for collaboration and joint decision making. They then begin to act as coherent entities in order to address development issues more effectively in dynamic, complex and challenging environments.

The emergence of networks and networking in Ghana clearly corroborates the views of these and other analysts (see box below). The PRSP process was complex in terms of its reform agenda and in the way it sought to mobilise and engage diverse civil society groups, especially in the consultation phase. However, the high turnover of participants meant that the relations between civil society and the government were somewhat unpredictable.

In another sense, the PRSP process in Ghana, as an interface between government and civil society, has also been challenging for all parties. For more than

### Further reading

B. Bucheli and G. Romo (2005) *Communities of Practice: Lessons from Latin America*, Praxis Note 16, INTRAC. [www.intrac.org/pages/PraxisNote16.html](http://www.intrac.org/pages/PraxisNote16.html)

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JICA (2004) *Capacity Development, from Concept to Practice: Exploring Productive Partnerships*, Proceedings of an International Symposium, Tokyo, Japan. [www.jica-net.com/CD/P176](http://www.jica-net.com/CD/P176)

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D. Wheeler *et al.* (2005) *Creating sustainable local enterprise networks*, *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 47(1): 33–40. <http://sloanreview.mit.edu>

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## Networks and networking

It is generally believed that by coming together to collaborate, the members of a network tend to generate a capacity to achieve a much greater impact on the processes of social change than could have been attained if the members had acted alone.<sup>1,2</sup> By sharing their knowledge, experiences and resources, the network members contribute to learning, as well as joint action to achieve a common purpose or goal. Networking is about cooperation and leveraging individual efforts through bonds of mutual trust and reciprocity.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Milward, H.B. and Provan, K.G. (2003) *Managing Networks Effectively*. Paper presented at the National Public Management Research Conference, Washington, DC. <http://pmranet.org>

<sup>2</sup> Taschereau, S. and Bolger, J. (2005) *Networks and Capacity*. ECDPM study on Capacity, Change and Performance (draft). [www.ecdpm.org](http://www.ecdpm.org)

<sup>3</sup> Granovetter, M. (1983) The strength of weak ties: A network theory revisited, *American J. Sociology*, 78: 1360.

*A wide range of individuals and organisations bring with them capabilities (hard or soft) and resources, including finance, ideas, culture, experiences and technical competencies, which together define each network's collective strengths*

four decades, there had been no interaction between public officials and civil society actors in a democratic setting, nor were there systems or mechanisms to promote and maintain constructive policy dialogue. Thus, both new rules of the game, and new procedures for their engagement were, and still are, urgently needed.

### Complexity

The complexity of the PRSP process could well be spurring the move towards networks and networking. This complexity is manifest at two levels – in the broad membership of the networks themselves, and also in the divergent programmes and activities of state and non-state actors in relation to the public policy process.

First, the networks that have emerged in Ghana in recent years are neither exclusive 'knowledge networks' constituted by think tanks, or 'communities of practice'. Their members often include a wide range of individuals and organisations that bring with them capabilities (hard or soft) and resources, including finance, ideas, culture, experiences and technical competencies, which together define each network's collective strengths.

In their newly assembled form, however, these capabilities may not be ready for use, and frequently need to be moulded and made suitable for deployment in collective action. This process is time consuming – it involves cultivating trust and confidence, as well as defining the rules for, and of, collective action. It also requires the harmonisation of leadership styles, values, incentives and motivation, legitimacy, power relations and organisational culture.

As civil society actors have attempted to engage in

national policy dialogue, a growing number have come to realise that dealing with the state and its agencies is a complex undertaking. It calls on them not only to mobilise their diverse and complementary strengths, but also to reconstitute themselves into more coherent entities that are better able to participate in dynamic dialogue with the state.

At the second level, the complexity of the PRSP process is evident in the programmes and activities undertaken by both parties. Currently, the policy formulation, deliberation and dialogue processes of the state are not aligned with those of the civil society networks. There is very little exchange of information about programmes among civil society organisations and networks, and certainly none at all between them and government agencies. As a result, the two sets of actors are hardly able to align or harmonise their programmes and activities in a manner that will facilitate systematic engagement. So far, the interface between civil society and state actors remains *ad hoc* and reactive at best, and disjointed and even conflicting at worst.

Undoubtedly, the adoption of the PRSP framework has opened up the public policy space in many African states such as Ghana, and has encouraged the formation of networks as civil society organisations search for more effective ways to proactively engage with the state and influence its decisions. The evidence so far, however, suggests that whilst the emergence of networking appears to confer some form of capacity for more effective interaction with the state by civil society organisations, those involved do not feel sufficiently empowered or able to influence policy choices in the PRSP process. <

### Links

Civil Society for Poverty Reduction (CSPR) network, Zambia: [www.cspr.org.zm](http://www.cspr.org.zm)

Ghana HIPC Watch, SEND Foundation West Africa: [www.sendfoundation.org/watch](http://www.sendfoundation.org/watch)

Integrated Social Development Centre (ISODEC): [www.isodec.org.gh](http://www.isodec.org.gh)

Southern African Regional Poverty Network (SARPN): [www.sarpn.org.za](http://www.sarpn.org.za)

Third World Network Africa: <http://twnafrica.org>

Uganda Debt Network (UDN): [www.udn.or.ug](http://www.udn.or.ug)

### Workshop on 'Networks as a Form of Capacity'

In September 2005, ECDPM, SNV and UNDP hosted a workshop on 'Networks as a Form of Capacity', which brought together Northern and Southern researchers and practitioners to discuss networks and the capacities they comprise and create.

The participants saw networks as falling along a continuum, ranging from simple 'networking', to informal alliances, to formal networks with clearly defined goals and leadership. Networks are dynamic, and evolve over time in response to the challenges they address, such as to improve access to information or resources.

Networks are influenced by several factors, including their leadership, which can range from authoritarian to facilitating. A network's abilities to learn and to adapt to changing circumstances also determine its lifespan and impact.

The workshop emphasised the distinction between the capacity of a network, and that of its individual members. A network can generate capacity that is greater than the sum of its parts, yet can also have a 'decapacitating' effect, such as when there is competition for financial resources.

The workshop report and a discussion paper, *Networks and Capacity*, by Suzanne Taschereau and Joe Bolger, can be found at [www.ecdpm.org](http://www.ecdpm.org).

Achieving individual and collective goals

## ICTs, capacities and networks

This article considers the collective capabilities of networks in relation to their use of ICTs, information and knowledge management. ICTs can enable networks and their members to achieve their goals more effectively, and are often part of the 'offer' that a network makes to its members.

Development cooperation is increasingly reliant on networks and networking as ways to mobilise the capacities of organisations. There is also a growing appreciation of the contributions that information, knowledge, and information and communications technologies (ICTs) can make to achieve network, organisation and development goals.

Most networks can hardly operate without the capabilities offered by the Internet and other tools of the information and communication revolution. Indeed, some only exist because of ICTs!

There are two primary uses of ICTs in structured networks. The first is where development stakeholders, in health or agriculture for example, use ICTs to make their networks and networking more effective. Their focus is on doing development better, through the use of ICTs. The second is where individuals and organisations with a focus on information or knowledge in development use ICTs to enhance their collective efforts. Their focus is on doing ICT-enabled or knowledge-based development better.

Using ICTs, these networks provide shared 'spaces' where their members can access competencies they need, develop their own capabilities, widen their circles of influence, and collectively create new capacities that did not exist before.

ICTs are also used to enable many less formal individual and social networking activities, as well as informal 'communities' and collaborations, some of which share the characteristics of networks.

### Internal energies

It is useful to distinguish between networks according to their 'energy' sources. Some emerge from and are energised by the interests of members to join forces – their internal motivations 'fuel' their activities. The Knowledge Management for Development (KM4Dev) community, for example, grew out of the desire of individuals to share knowledge and to contribute their competencies to the network. Similarly, AfriAfya was set up by health workers who wanted to foster collective learning, knowledge sharing and networking using ICTs.

Others are created or enabled by third parties who perceive a need for the various members to work together, or consider networks to be an effective way to achieve a desired result. In such cases, the challenge is to generate sufficient internal energy for the network to sustain itself.

ICTs are themselves part of the capacity conundrum. They contribute to processes by which

members meet and communicate, and pool, share, learn about and re-use their competencies. ICTs are often a major part of the collective capabilities developed by the network or offered to its members. ICTs can also be a challenge. Depending on the tools chosen, certain levels of information and digital literacy and connectivity are necessary for members to participate in the network. The technologies can get in the way of 'real' communication and, perhaps, discourage members who lack certain technological capacities or whose knowledge-sharing and learning styles are more traditional.

As networks move online, a network facilitator needs to be able to make ICTs work for the diverse needs of the wider network, adjusting information and communication systems to meet both the evolving competencies of members and the collective ambitions of the network. <



Roel Burgler

### ICT-enabled development network

- AfriAfya was launched in 2000 by leading NGOs and the Kenyan government to improve coherence in the health sector. It provides learning spaces where organisations can work together and share information, knowledge and experiences. [www.afriafya.org](http://www.afriafya.org)

### ICT-oriented networks

- The Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP) facilitates the development of collective agendas and actions, and provides spaces where members can collaborate and share information. [www.globalknowledge.org](http://www.globalknowledge.org)
- Knowledge Management for Development (KM4Dev) is a community of development practitioners who share ideas and experiences in knowledge management. [www.km4dev.org](http://www.km4dev.org)
- Telecentre.org is working to strengthen national and regional networks, and is investing in services to build the capacities of telecentre operators worldwide. [www.telecentre.org](http://www.telecentre.org)



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The Partnering Toolkit

# Building cross-sector partnerships



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 from public-private  
 partnerships.

Can partnerships between public, business and civil society organisations be more effective than single-sector initiatives in addressing the challenges of sustainable development? For any organisation that decides to venture into cross-sector partnerships, *The Partnering Toolkit* is a good place to start.

It is rare to find a set of practical tools that is flexible and yet can add value to any collaborative endeavour. But that is what *The Partnering Toolkit* provides. Cross-sector partnerships can lead to innovative, coherent and integrated approaches to tackle the challenges of sustainable development, and can often succeed where single-sector initiatives have failed.

Many organisations have not yet institutionalised cross-sector partnerships, supported by investments in people and budgets. According to author Ros Tennyson, 'If the world had to wait for non-profits, or any other sector, to be "ready to partner", the partnership movement would never get off the ground'. For organisations that are ready to take the plunge, the Toolkit offers a good starting point – with some reservations.

### The partnering process

The Toolkit first presents the rationale for partnering, and describes a 12-phase approach to building successful partnerships. This 'one size fits all' approach is so flexible, however, that it jeopardises its usefulness. For example, 'resourcing' the partnership follows the 'building' and 'planning' phases. Yet for a private sector organisation keen to make a business case, and a cash-strapped NGO, resources are likely to be the first priority. Thus the phases in the process, and their sequence, will depend on the needs of the partners involved.

The three key partnering principles – equity, transparency and mutual benefit – may be obvious, but perhaps mutual benefit needs to be reconsidered. At times, it may seem unlikely that partners from very different sectors will find common ground, yet it is often the most diverse partners that benefit most. Transparency among the partners is essential, about their agendas and the anticipated benefits, regardless of whether they are the same. Perhaps a more appropriate third principle would be mutual respect.

The process of exploring the potential benefits of cross-sector partnerships can be stimulating for some, but daunting for others. The Toolkit therefore



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*The process of building a partnership will work only if it is supported by individuals with the right skills.*

recommends that the partners compile a resource map outlining what each can bring to the partnership. Often the mapping process can suggest new approaches, identify unexpected opportunities, and broaden the view of what is possible.

### Partnering skills

The process of building and maintaining a partnership is complex, and will work only if it is supported by individuals with the right skills. It requires a champion, a broker and a donor, as well as a manager with a strategic vision who can persuade and negotiate. The key is self-awareness at the individual, organisational and sector levels, as well as the ability to overcome ingrained perspectives and patterns of decision making. Unfortunately, the Toolkit does not discuss one failing that is common to NGOs and private sector organisations alike – their unwillingness to acknowledge the importance of partnerships and invest in them.

Any partnering approach, no matter where applied, must be complemented by a clear understanding of the partners and the organisations involved. Partnerships will only take off when the organisations behind them are ready to let go of entrenched views of their roles and responsibilities, and are willing to explore the potential of real cross-sector collaboration. <

### Further reading

Ros Tennyson (2004)  
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<http://thepartneringinitiative.org/mainpages/rb/pt/>

Ros Tennyson (2006)  
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<http://thepartneringinitiative.org/>

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Contributing to a national ICT strategy

# The TICBolivia network



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In just five years, the ICT projects launched by the TICBolivia network have benefited many marginalised communities throughout the country. This article explains how the network has effectively fed those experiences into the process of preparing a national ICT strategy.

Bolivia is a multi-ethnic country that faces acute problems, including poverty, inequality and social exclusion. Many civil society organisations are working to strengthen the social fabric by improving the processes of governance, which are still dominated by a partisan economic and political elite. Against this background, the TICBolivia network is promoting information and communication technologies (ICTs) as effective means of building a more inclusive society. Established in 2001, the network brings together public, private and non-profit organisations that share the conviction that information and knowledge are essential for socio-economic development.

The 14 ICT projects being implemented by the members of this multi-stakeholder network aim to improve access to information in three sectors – agriculture, education and governance. These projects are directly benefiting some 50,000 end users, including small farmers, leaders of indigenous groups, school students and teachers, community-based organisations and government officials. Through the Internet, publications and radio programmes, they are also indirectly benefiting perhaps a million more people throughout the country.

## A national ICT strategy

Some of the network's projects have received wide recognition, and have even won international awards, yet within Bolivia they have been largely ignored by national policy makers. Despite some initial scepticism regarding the government's ICT policy, the network members saw this as an opportunity to work together to make a difference at the local level, and to bring their experiences to national attention.

TICBolivia decided to tackle this challenge in two ways. First, at local and national consultative meetings, the members would feed information about their practical experiences into the policy process. Second, the network would advocate for an ICT-enabling environment under themes such as rural connectivity, the production of local content, and human capacity development. It would also press for a legal framework for ensuring universal access to ICTs, and sustainability at all levels.

Based on its work to integrate ICTs in development processes, the network has been able to contribute to the formulation of an ICT policy for agriculture, and of a strategy and programme for the education sector. In this, the network has promoted a 'bottom-up' participatory process, rather than rely on the usual 'top-down' approach. It has therefore been able to use its experiences to influence the design of policies that reflect the true situation in Bolivia.

The government has now acknowledged the expertise of the network, and invited members, together with other key players from civil society, to finalise the national ICT strategy document. The strategy recognises that ICT-enabled development is ultimately about people, and that access to technologies can help to improve social, economic and political equity, particularly for marginalised rural communities.

In the area of governance, the ICT projects have focused on providing access to information that has helped to empower many communities. Such local successes, together with the international recognition, have helped to boost the self-esteem of the members of the TICBolivia network.

The process of achieving a political impact has also been a valuable learning experience. In the process, the network members have been able to identify the most effective activities and mechanisms that could be strengthened in the future. These include:

- raising awareness of the potential of ICTs;
- developing the technical capacities of project staff and of end users in order to secure social ownership;
- encouraging the generation of local content and knowledge in ways that are socially and culturally appropriate; and
- building multi-stakeholder alliances.

Once the national ICT strategy is officially adopted, it is hoped that it will form the basis of a new policy, programmes and resources to promote ICTs for development for the benefit of all Bolivians. The members of TICBolivia have taken the first of many steps that will be needed along this road. <



The TICBolivia network is promoting ICTs as effective means of building a more inclusive society.

## Links

Red TICBolivia:  
[www.ticbolivia.net](http://www.ticbolivia.net)

IICD Country Programme  
Bolivia: [www.iicd.org/  
countries/bolivia/](http://www.iicd.org/countries/bolivia/)

## Further reading

IICD (2005) *The TICBolivia Country Programme: The impact of IICD support for poverty reduction and development using ICTs, 2000–2004.*  
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04.0286534514](http://www.iicd.org/articles/iicdnews.2005-11-04.0286534514)

## Government reform in Mali

# Trust is an essential ingredient

Ousmane Oumarou Sidibé has been given no mean assignment. He is responsible for reforming the entire system of governance in Mali. His aim is, first and foremost, to make government more client-oriented. At all levels. Ousmane Sidibé argues that the key to achieving that goal is a major shift in attitude. Such a shift can't be forced. Civil servants will have to be convinced, one at a time, that it is in their own interest. It can be done, he tells **Evelijne Bruning**, but it will take time, and a lot of money.

**Mr Sidibé, you have spent almost 30 years working within or for the government in Mali. What has been your motivation?**

I am convinced that good governance can solve problems. Any problem. Without good governance you cannot address any issue of scale. This is the most fundamental problem we face in Africa today. It is such a problem, because the states we have are based on imported colonial structures. These have often resulted in one-party, extremely authoritarian regimes. Such governance systems are not at all in line with the traditional organisational structures we used to have. In the past, everyone knew the rules and understood them. It was easy to participate, if you wanted to. But through these imported systems, people have lost any sense of responsibility for their

own destiny. They have become used to being told what to do, from above. To follow orders. That is why we have such a lack of democracy, and even human rights violations. It is all because of the colonial system.

**Is there a way out of this situation?**

Yes. Democracy has to be the basis. We have to promote democracy and decentralisation in all countries in Africa. We need to reform the existing institutions and governance structures. But this is a very long-term process. Here in Mali we have been working on this for ten years now. And we are heading in the right direction. Of course, there are good times as well as bad, but we are getting there.

**What have been the key ingredients for your success?**

We have put a lot of energy into the process of democratisation and decentralisation. We have ensured the real participation of the population. And we have successfully organised national consultations each time a social crisis threatened. For instance on issues such as education, the army, and the internal conflict in the North, we have been successful in pulling together all the different political forces. We have some advantages there over other African states. Because we have no ethnic problems in Mali, it is easier to share responsibilities. Different social groups are rather well organised. And we have a tradition of dialogue. People are used to talking to each other, at all levels of society. That also makes it easier to talk to each other at the political level.

But that does not explain it all. We have had to work very hard to get to where we are. In the past year, the Minister of State Reform and our reform team have visited all the actors who are affected by the current reform plans. And I do mean all of them, in every region of Mali. We have presented our plans, and we have listened to their responses. That was not



Roel Burgler

*You have to make sure that people get away from their desks and meet each other.*



Ousmane Oumarou Sidibé is currently Director of the Programme for Institutional Development in Mali. His previous positions include Minister of Employment and of Public Affairs, Director-General of the National School of Public Administration, Minister of State Reform, and coordinator of the African Programme for Workers' Participation. Sidibé has a law degree from the University of Bordeaux.

always pleasant. Mobilising the interest and support we needed took time. People were very sceptical, perhaps rightly so, if you consider their experiences in the past. Also, I have had to mobilise people over whom I have no authority.

Yet in the end, that did not matter at all. Because there really is no point in ordering someone to change. You have to show people that the changes you are asking them to make are not a threat to their position. That they stand to gain from them. And you have to be really persistent. This is not difficult for me, because I have worked in the government for so long. I have become a very patient man. And then of course we can help in other ways as well. For example, by introducing an element of competition – we now select the best service providers, and we really value the winners.

**Competition can also be detrimental, though – didn't you also have some negative experiences in competing with other ministries and agencies involved in this reform project?**

Yes, that's true. In the beginning, there was quite a lot of confusion, and mistrust. We were simply not used to working together. But now, we have a perfect symbiosis. Really, we do. We have shared and coherent plans. Because we discovered that we don't actually have to compete at all. We have complementary responsibilities. My team is concerned with the vision, and the political aspects of the reform. And

the Ministry of State Reform works on the actual implementation of the plans.

**How did you get the different parties involved in this struggle to see that?**

You have to make sure that people get away from their desks and meet each other. You must create informal settings where people feel it is safe to talk. To really get to know each other, as real people with real problems. Once that is done, you can go in and explain that you are really not a threat, not aiming to take anybody's place. Only then will they believe you. Because they know you. It just takes time.

**For many donors good governance is a precondition for providing aid. Do you agree with that?**

No, I don't. You cannot have good governance if you do not invest in it. Government reform simply costs a lot of money, if you want to do it well. Donors need to have more confidence that things will change in due course. They often want too much too fast. Of course, you should encourage those countries that are making good progress. But you should not impose draconian measures on those who don't.

Also, investments are needed in civil society. Because civil society can push governments in the right direction. If the users do not demand better services, that change will not come on its own. Civil servants will not change of their own free will. Human nature does not work like that. <

## Further reading

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M. Robinson and S. Friedman (2005) *Civil Society, Democratization and Foreign Aid in Africa*. IDS Discussion Paper 383. [www.ids.ac.uk](http://www.ids.ac.uk)

UNCDF (2005) *Delivering the Goods: Building Local Government Capacity to Achieve the MDGs*. UN Capital Development Fund. [www.unctdf.org](http://www.unctdf.org)

*Reform Toolkits*: This series of toolkits for reform practitioners provide guidance on developing effective communications and outreach programmes, building the institutional capacity of business groups to support reform, and managing the reform process. <http://rru.worldbank.org>

## Links

### Development Policy Management Forum (DPMF)

A network focusing on consolidating and institutionalising democratic governance in Africa, and enhancing institutional capacities in order to address the challenges of development and reconstruction in post-conflict countries. [www.dpmf.org](http://www.dpmf.org)

### International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA)

IDEA uses comparative experience, analysis and dialogue with practitioners to identify examples of good practice and produce tools and guidelines on democracy support. It builds networks of experts, develops training materials and provides strategic advice for those engaged in political reform or supporting democracy. [www.idea.int](http://www.idea.int)

### Governance Resource Centre (GRC) Exchange

Hosted by DFID, and compiled by international experts, the GRC Exchange portal provides a focal point for sharing information and ideas about governance in development. [www.grc-exchange.org](http://www.grc-exchange.org)

### UNDP Democratic Governance

UNDP assists countries to develop institutions and processes that are more responsive to the needs of ordinary citizens, including the poor, by promoting participation, accountability and effectiveness at all levels. [www.undp.org/governance/sl-dlgud.htm](http://www.undp.org/governance/sl-dlgud.htm)

### Urbanet

Network for Regionalization, Decentralization and Municipal Development (GTZ): [www2.gtz.de/urbanet](http://www2.gtz.de/urbanet)



**Gweneth Barry**  
Technical advisor, and  
**Yabowerk Haile**  
Chair of the board,  
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Ethiopia (PANE),  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

## Civil society and the policy process

# Poverty Action Network Ethiopia

The Poverty Action Network Ethiopia has enabled civil society to engage in the PRSP process. This article explains how the network has grown, in spite of the lack of experience of its members, and the difficult political environment.

For Ethiopian civil society, NGOs in particular, engaging in advocacy presents many challenges. In this emerging democracy where the policy-making process has traditionally been closed, the work of NGOs has tended to focus on service delivery. In recent years, however, civil society has been able to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the poverty reduction strategy (PRSP) process, in particular the requirement that a broad range of stakeholders be consulted.

As part of the debt relief process, in 2001 the Ethiopian government produced a poverty reduction strategy, known as the Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Plan (SDPRP). In order to make the most of the space available, various NGOs formed a taskforce within the umbrella organisation the Christian Relief and Development Association (CRDA). The taskforce provided a platform for coordinating the views of members, thus ensuring a coherent voice during the writing of the plan, and a means to inform them about the PRSP process.

Many NGO members lacked the experience or skills needed to engage in policy analysis and advocacy work. In 2004 the taskforce decided to expand its membership to include professional associations and research institutes, and relaunched itself as the independent Poverty Action Network Ethiopia (PANE). With their greater research capacity and experience in advocacy, the new members helped to overcome the shortcomings of the original members. PANE now includes more than 70 organisations working on poverty-related issues.

### Extending the debate

Both the taskforce and now the network have continued their engagement with the SDPRP process. PANE has commented on annual progress reports and has provided written and oral inputs for the SDPRP II consultations. As a result, the network is now a recognised actor in the process – PANE has been asked to comment on the draft SDPRP II document, marking an acknowledgement of the role of civil society that was lacking in the first plan.

PANE has also widened the debate on the SDPRP

to include stakeholders beyond Addis Ababa. During 2004 it organised five regional workshops for civil society and local government staff to help them understand the process. For many participants, including government officials, this was the first time they had actually discussed the plan and the issues it raised.

Following the workshops PANE formed five regional chapters to continue the debate, and to conduct a 'citizen report card' survey of views on the delivery of basic services. The survey, a collaborative project that brought together civil society and local governments in the five regions, yielded information that will ensure that the voice of local communities influences the policy process. The capacities of the chapters now need to be developed to ensure that they can utilise the information to advocate on behalf of the poor at the regional level.

### Engaging in the policy process

During its first year PANE had no office or paid staff, but relied on the commitment of members working on a voluntary basis. While this resulted in strong ownership of the work, it placed a considerable burden on already busy people. The growing demand for results from the membership and donors is also placing even more pressure on the members. A small but committed group worked hard to conduct research and generate policy papers, but when this proved unsustainable, PANE opened a secretariat in Addis Ababa in 2005. The challenge now is to sustain the inputs from members. PANE has therefore formed three core groups, each focusing on different aspects of the work, to help support their engagement.

Ethiopia's political environment remains difficult, particularly since the disputed elections in May 2005, so that engaging in advocacy is a challenge. Both the membership and the government are clear about PANE's remit, so that it has not been affected by political arguments. The network is now focusing on strengthening the regional chapters, and on encouraging members to ensure their capacity to engage in the policy process continues to grow. <



Ensuring a coherent voice for civil society.

### Links

Poverty Action Network  
Ethiopia (PANE):  
[www.pane.org.et](http://www.pane.org.et) (under  
construction)

Christian Relief and  
Development Association  
(CRDA): [www.crdaethiopia.org](http://www.crdaethiopia.org)

### Further reading

CIDSE/Caritas Internationalis  
(2004) *PRSP as Theatre:  
Backstage Policy-making  
and the Future of the PRSP  
Approach*.  
[www.trocaire.org](http://www.trocaire.org)

IMF/World Bank (2005)  
*2005 Review of the PRS  
Approach: Balancing  
Accountabilities and Scaling up  
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Development Cooperation  
Ireland (2005) *Assessing  
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Ethiopia*. [www.dci.gov.ie](http://www.dci.gov.ie)

## EVENTS

This section lists upcoming meetings, workshops and conferences. For a more extensive listing, visit [www.capacity.org](http://www.capacity.org).

### Impact Assessment: How do we know we are making the difference?

London, 8–10 February 2006  
Organised by: INTRAC  
[www.intrac.org](http://www.intrac.org)

### Cross-sector Partnership and Innovation

London, 15 February 2006  
Organised by: The Partnering Initiative  
[www.thepartneringinitiative.org](http://www.thepartneringinitiative.org)

### Developmental Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation

Cape Town, South Africa, 13–17 March 2006  
Organised by: Community Development Resource Association (CDRA)  
[www.cdra.org.za](http://www.cdra.org.za)

### Fundamentals of Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs)

Online course, 15 March–26 April 2006  
Organised by: Institute for Public-Private Partnerships, Inc. (IP3)  
[www.ip3.org](http://www.ip3.org)

### INTRAC 6th International Evaluation Conference

The Hague, the Netherlands, 3–5 April 2006  
Organised by: INTRAC  
[www.intrac.org](http://www.intrac.org)

### Public, Private and Civil Partnerships for Social-Economic Development

The Netherlands, 8–19 May 2006  
Organised by: MDF  
[www.mdf.nl](http://www.mdf.nl)

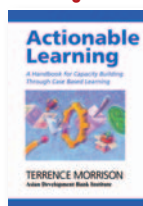
### Evaluation of Development Interventions

The Netherlands, 29–31 May 2006  
Organised by: MDF  
[www.mdf.nl](http://www.mdf.nl)

## PUBLICATIONS

This section offers a selection of publications related to capacity development. A more extensive list can be found at [www.capacity.org](http://www.capacity.org).

### Actionable Learning: A Handbook for Capacity Building through Case-based Learning



Asian Development Bank Institute, Tokyo, 2001, 526 pp.  
This handbook uses cases as learning and teaching vehicles. It presents a series of design frameworks, learning processes and instructional techniques through which an actionable learning and case-based approach to capacity building and training can be understood and creatively applied.  
ISBN 4-89974-1-8  
[www.adbi.org](http://www.adbi.org)

### Capacity Development in Agricultural Water Management

IPTRID/FAO, 2005, 78 pp.  
This IPTRID workshop recognised the need for countries to be in the driving seat of the development process, based on the firm commitment of senior policy makers linked to sector strategies. The assessment of capacity needs, as an important step towards the development of capacity in irrigation and drainage, has become much clearer.  
[ftp://ftp.fao.org](http://ftp.fao.org)

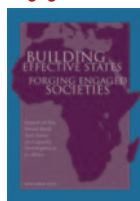
### MDG Monitoring and Reporting: A Review of Good Practices

UNDP, August 2005, 41 pp.  
This booklet presents good practices in MDG monitoring and reporting, highlighting examples from 98 national MDG reports. These reports set a baseline, and focus attention on areas in need of increased effort. They may be used as tools for advocacy and building alliances, and help transform development from a top-down exercise into a participatory process.  
[www.undp.org](http://www.undp.org)

### MDG Toolkit

UN Development Group, 2005  
This collection of training materials is designed to strengthen capacity within UN country teams and provide them with training tools on the MDGs. The emphasis is on explaining and applying the concepts, building skills and encouraging attitudes that support collaboration among partners.  
<http://mdgtoolkit.undg.org>

### Building Effective States, Forging Engaged Societies



World Bank Task Force on CD in Africa, September 2005, 196pp  
This report offers messages that should underpin a renewed effort to develop, use and retain capacity for development. It also presents recommendations on how the Bank should step up its analytical, financial and operational contributions to CD as part of a coordinated effort under the Paris Declaration.  
[www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)

### Measuring Capacities: An Illustrative Guide to Benchmarks and Indicators

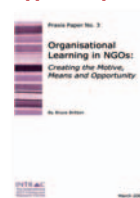
UNDP Capacity Development Group, September 2005, 28 pp.  
This Resource Catalogue is a compilation of indicators for assessing capability and effectiveness of organisations and the environment in which they must operate. Examples of thematic indicators (environment and HIV/AIDS) are included.  
[www.capacity.undp.org](http://www.capacity.undp.org)

### Assessment Study on Harmonisation and Alignment in Rural Development in Four Pilot Countries

R. Anson *et al.*, Global Donor Platform for Rural Development, March 2005, 82 pp.  
This report provides examples of best practices and challenges

of donor harmonisation and alignment in four countries. As the dialogue moves from principles to practice, both governments and donor agencies have to replace 'old habits' with 'authentic' actions.  
[www.aidharmonization.org](http://www.aidharmonization.org)

### Organisational Learning in NGOs: Creating the motive, means and opportunity



B. Britton, INTRAC Praxis Paper 3, 2005, 57 pp.  
This paper examines why NGOs need to provide the motive, means and opportunity for organisational learning, and introduces practical examples of how pioneering NGOs are doing this.  
[www.intrac.org](http://www.intrac.org)

### Unleashing Capacities to Achieve the MDGs: Summary Note

Bergen Seminar Series, UNDP/Chr. Michelsen Institute, 2005  
This report of a seminar held in Bergen, Norway, addresses key issues including the relationship between capacity, governance and aid, the main bottlenecks and strategies to overcome them, and priority areas for focusing capacity development efforts.  
[www.undp.org](http://www.undp.org)

### Building Parliamentary Capacity to Participate in ACP-EU cooperation

InfoCotonou 8, ECDPM, 2005.  
The Cotonou Partnership Agreement emphasises the need to strengthen the Joint Parliamentary Assembly as the foundation of ACP-EU partnership, yet it says little about the role of national parliaments. Changing aid modalities, particularly the shift to budget support, provide an incentive for donors to ensure that parliaments exercise effective supervision.  
[www.ecdpm.org](http://www.ecdpm.org)

## ORGANISATIONS, NETWORKS AND INITIATIVES

This section offers a selection of organisations, networks and initiatives concerned with capacity development. A more extensive list can be found on [www.capacity.org](http://www.capacity.org).

### Commonwealth Secretariat, Hubs and Spokes project

A joint initiative of the European Commission, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Agence Intergouvernementale de la Francophonie (AIF) and the ACP Secretariat, this project aims to promote the effective participation of ACP countries in international trade negotiations and reinforce their capacity to formulate trade policy in compliance with their overall development strategy.  
[www.thecommonwealth.org](http://www.thecommonwealth.org)

### DevAid

This UNDP website focuses on aid coordination and management to support the implementation of the Rome Declaration on Harmonisation and follow-up on the findings of the Millennium Project. The website is intended to facilitate knowledge sharing, learning and cross-country fertilisation of experiences, concepts and activities, and thus to develop a community of practice. Discussions on specific issues, like absorptive capacity, will begin soon.

[www.devoid.org](http://www.devoid.org)

### Evaluation Center, Western Michigan University

The Center aims to advance the theory, practice, and utilization of evaluation through research, development, dissemination, services, instruction, and national and international leadership in evaluation. The Center publishes the Journal of Multidisciplinary Evaluation.

[www.wmich.edu](http://www.wmich.edu)

### World Bank Capacity Development Resource Center

The Center provides access to publications, case studies, lessons learned, and good practices, as well as links to international and local capacity development agencies and other knowledge resources.

[www.worldbank.org](http://www.worldbank.org)

### Evaluation.francofonie.org

This website, initiated and sponsored by l'Agence inter-gouvernementale de la Francophonie (AIF), offers access to information about evaluation, and facilitates networking among stakeholders working for the development of evaluation in francophone countries.

<http://evaluation.francofonie.org>

### Global Development Network (GDN)

GDN is a global network of research and policy institutes working to address the problems of national and regional development. GDN activities are designed to build research capacity in those countries where it is most needed. The GDN Africa Window features African social science research, profiles of researchers and research centres, events and funding opportunities.

[www.gdnet.org](http://www.gdnet.org)

### Internationale Weiterbildung und Entwicklung (InWEnt)

InWEnt is concerned with human resources and organisational capacity development in the South, in order to boost efficiency and effectiveness, and encourage reform. InWEnt provides dialogue, training and consultancy services for industry, government and civil society. Initiatives include it@inwent, which supports ICT networks, and it@ab, the Southern African Network on IT in African Business.

[www.inwent.org](http://www.inwent.org)

### IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre

Access to safe and adequate water is one of the most fundamental human needs. The development of capacities to meet these needs is one of the key challenges for the sector as a whole. The IRC facilitates knowledge sharing so that governments, professionals and organisations can help the poor to obtain water and sanitation services. [www.irc.nl](http://www.irc.nl)

### Managing for Development Results (MfDR)

This OECD joint venture, launched after the 2002 Monterrey conference, focuses on issues of aid quality and results, identifying measures to support increased aid effectiveness, and monitoring improvements. Activities focus on strengthening country capacity to manage for results, and fostering global partnerships.

[www.mfdr.org](http://www.mfdr.org)

### Network of Institutions for Sustainable Development (NISD)

UNEP's Economics and Trade Branch (ETB) collaborates with national training and research institutes, regional and international organisations, universities and NGOs to promote capacity building efforts. The network builds on the existing capacities of its members while ensuring that activities respond to national and regional needs and priorities.

[www.unep.ch](http://www.unep.ch)

### Rural Finance Learning Centre (RFLC)

Created by the Capacity Building in Rural Finance (CABFIN) partnership, the Centre assists organisations in developing countries to build their capacity to deliver financial services that meet the needs of rural households. The website offers access to training information and materials, and an extensive library of resources.

[www.ruralfinance.org](http://www.ruralfinance.org)

### UNEP/Global Environment Facility (GEF) Capacity Development Initiative

The UNEP/GEF Initiative is assisting 35 countries to carry out their own national self-assessments and to identify priorities and needs for capacity building to address global environmental issues, in the areas of biodiversity, climate change and land degradation.

<http://dgef.unep.org>

### World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD)

The WBCSD is a coalition of 175 international companies committed to sustainable development via economic growth, ecological balance and social progress. The Council's capacity building programme helps members implement sustainable development policies and practices, thus increasing the value of their human capital.

[www.wbcd.org](http://www.wbcd.org)

### CD in the South

#### African Institute for Capacity Development (AICAD)

AICAD supports human capacity building for poverty reduction and socioeconomic development, and promotes South-South cooperation, both within Africa and through Asia-Africa cooperation programmes. Activities include R&D, training and extension, and information networking.

[www.aicad.or.ke](http://www.aicad.or.ke)

#### AfricaRecruit

Launched by the Commonwealth Business Council and NEPAD, AfricaRecruit is at the forefront of skills and human resource capacity building in and outside of Africa. It also encourages the African diaspora to contribute to capacity building in Africa through skills, investment or remittances.

[www.africarecruit.com](http://www.africarecruit.com)

#### CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation

CIVICUS, based in Johannesburg, is an international alliance that is working to strengthen citizen action and civil society, especially in areas where participatory democracy and citizens' freedom of association are threatened. CIVICUS provides a focal point for knowledge-sharing, common interest representation, global institution-building and engagement. [www.civicus.org](http://www.civicus.org)

The BCO Alliance

# No formats, please



Ivan Kulis  
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IICD and ECDPM.

We all agree that harmonisation is necessary. But it is often far from easy to achieve in practice. This article argues that it can be helpful to co-design flexible frameworks in order to ensure cooperation among partners with very different interests.

From a traditional project management perspective, the prospects for the Building Communications Opportunities (BCO) Alliance did not look good. The parameters seemed far too loose. Evaluation and management models were not included in the original design, for example, and logical frameworks were also lacking. But in reality these apparent shortcomings turned out to have a positive effect on learning and collaboration.

Launched in 2004, the BCO Alliance is a partnership among five donor agencies and six implementing NGOs to investigate, mobilise and support ICT4D opportunities that will help reduce poverty. In order to build confidence among the partners, responsibility for coordinating the Alliance's activities was assigned to one of the NGO partners, rather than bringing in an outside management consultant. All the partners have collaborated in both the management of the Alliance and the programme content, which over time has encouraged respect and mutual learning.

In the early days, the Alliance invested considerable effort in making sure that all the partners understood their various missions, strategies and values. This was done through formal presentations, as well as in social events that provided effective opportunities for networking. The result has been organic, open and flexible relationships among the non-profit and public sector stakeholders.

Practical matters such as the format of reports and the frequency of meetings had not been discussed before the launch, and so had to be addressed by the partners in a collective decision-making process. This actually increased the sense of ownership, making the partners creators of their own programmes.

## Assessing impacts

The work of the Alliance in the area of impact assessment is an outcome of collaborative brainstorming. After drafting logical frameworks for the projects, the partners chose to go one step further, and developed an innovative impact assessment tool that provides evidence of the role and contribution of ICTs in areas such as providing a voice for the poor, enhancing good governance and stimulating policy dialogue.

The project framework is very flexible, allowing project elements and parameters to be changed as and when necessary. While this flexibility may have made it difficult to fit some projects into the

framework(s), it has meant that the partners can respond rapidly to changing circumstances on the ground. They have also been able to experiment with different technologies and to choose solutions that would eventually lead to greater impacts.

## A platform for learning

As a result of all these factors, the BCO Alliance has become a fertile platform for learning and collaboration. The partners have already developed and implemented various joint projects, including the study *Louder Voices* (CTO/Panos, commissioned by DFID) and ItrainOnline (an initiative of seven organisations with expertise in computer training).

There is also evidence that the collaborative approach adopted by the BCO partners has trickled down to the field level. One example is the initiative to formulate an ICT strategy for agriculture in Bolivia, coordinated by SDC, DFID and IICD. Another is the e-Brain Forum in Zambia, a local network that is working to influence policy makers and raise awareness of the potential of ICTs.

The experiences of the BCO Alliance demonstrate how learning and sharing are processes that require both space to develop, as well as incentives that will help to build ownership, encourage experimentation and cement trust. <

## Building Communications Opportunities (BCO) Alliance

Launched in 2004 as the successor to the Building Digital Opportunities (BDO) programme, the BCO Alliance is a partnership among five bilateral donor agencies, CIDA (Canada), DFID (UK), DGIS (the Netherlands), Danida (Denmark) and SDC (Switzerland), and six implementing NGOs – the Association for Progressive Communications (APC), Bellanet, Hivos, the International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD), OneWorld International and Panos.

The Alliance supports projects aimed at mainstreaming ICTs in development processes; utilising ICTs to provide a voice for the poor and channels for debate; and demonstrating that ICTs can help to reduce poverty.

For more information, visit [www.iicd.org/articles/IICDnews.import2308/](http://www.iicd.org/articles/IICDnews.import2308/), or contact Lauren Fok, BCO coordinator, at [lauren@womensnet.org.za](mailto:lauren@womensnet.org.za).

## Links

e-Brain Forum Zambia:  
[www.ebrain.org.zm/](http://www.ebrain.org.zm/)

ItrainOnline:  
[www.itrainonline.org](http://www.itrainonline.org)

## Further reading

R. Gerster and S. Zimmermann (2003) *ICTs and Poverty Reduction in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Learning Study*. Gerster Consulting.  
[www.sdc.admin.ch](http://www.sdc.admin.ch)

D. MacLean *et al.* (2002) *Louder Voices: Strengthening Developing Country Participation in International ICT Decision-making*. CTO/Panos.  
[www.panos.org.uk](http://www.panos.org.uk)

World Bank (2005) *E-Development: From Excitement to Effectiveness*.  
[www.worldbank.org/publications](http://www.worldbank.org/publications)

Capacity development and South–South cooperation

# A unified agenda

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The countries of Latin America and the Caribbean have recently embarked on an exciting process of regional cooperation, focusing on capacity development as a means to promote social equity and economic development for all citizens.

Levels of economic development vary greatly throughout the region. Some of the poorest countries, despite their strengths and resources, are unlikely to be able to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. For middle-income countries, it is a matter of moral responsibility for them to do what is needed to help reduce or eliminate social inequalities.

Capacity development, in my view, should help to pave the way for more effective South–South cooperation. It will provide new opportunities for all participating countries to consolidate their development efforts, and to strengthen their ties with external partners. It will also make it easier for them to transform the abstract concept of ‘international cooperation’ into something more tangible.

At a regional seminar on Capacity Development and South–South Cooperation, held in Bogotá in September 2004, the participating countries and international donors affirmed their political commitment to the process. This

commitment has led to a number of new strategies and initiatives, including a Regional Fund for South–South Cooperation, and a database of the capacities and strengths of individual countries.

One of the most significant achievements, however, has been to bring the middle-income countries of the region back into the development arena. As a result, the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean now have a unified agenda for change that international donors need to support if the MDGs are to be achieved. As one of the architects of this initiative, I am satisfied with the progress we have achieved so far. The enormous enthusiasm and the energy of everyone involved have been an invaluable source of inspiration.

Despite the successes so far, we still need to find ways to address the many practical challenges that arise from the inequalities between countries. Even though we have identified each country’s strengths, the issue now is to decide how best we can use them – what mechanisms should be used, and by whom? In a country with poor governance, weak institutions and inadequate financial and human resources, for example, it may be difficult to organise events, and projects can take a long time to complete.

One solution has been to establish a rotating presidency, which is currently held by Colombia. The ‘focal points’ established in each country have also helped to deal with some of the practical difficulties. Nonetheless, I would like to emphasise that all countries have shown great interest in the process, and this has allowed rapid decision making and prompt action.

I am proud that I have been part of this process of cooperation among the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, and to work with people who firmly believe that we will achieve much more if we remain united. It is also a privilege to see Colombia take advantage of its strategic position, and its political and technical leadership, to become a regional centre for South–South cooperation.

For a detailed account of this process, please visit [www.capacity.org](http://www.capacity.org).

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