

# The TICBolivia network

## Contributing to a national ICT strategy

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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 communities, school students and teachers, community-based organisations and government officials. Through the Internet, publications (online and offline) 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 several members, together with other key players from civil society, to revise and 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.

## Boosting self-esteem

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 among development actors at all levels;
- developing the capacities of technical staff responsible for project implementation, 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 to ensure the success of ICT projects.

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.

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## Further reading and links

IICD (2005)

[The TICBolivia Country Programme: The impact of IICD support for poverty reduction and development using ICTs, 2000?2004.](#)

[Red TICBolivia](#)

[IICD Country Programme Bolivia](#)