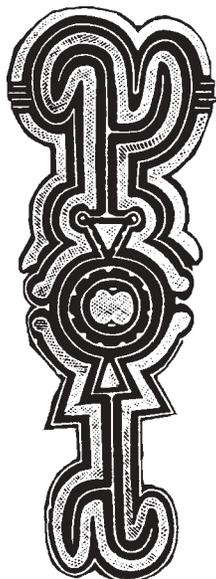


**Other side
of the divide** Latin-American
and Caribbean
Perspectives on the WSIS





agence intergouvernementale
de la francophonie

Agence Intergouvernementale de la Francophonie

This brochure has been produced thanks to the financial support of the "Agence Intergouvernementale de la Francophonie" (the AIF - <http://agence.francophonie.org>), an organization who works for peace, democracy and human rights and that focus the sustainable development and the access to the information within a frame of respect of the linguistic and cultural diversity. The support, managed through its "Institut francophone des nouvelles technologies de l'information et de la formation" (INTIF) (<http://intif.francophonie.org/>), covers the translations of articles, the edition, the press and the diffusion of the brochure as well as the creation of the Web site associate (<http://www.redistic.org/folieto-cmsi>).

The Francophonie has been the promoter of a effort of collaboration of several organizations of the french speaking, spanish speaking and portugues speaking worlds establishing an alliance to accept the challenges raised by the information society in relation to the cultural diversity. The project Three Linguistic Spaces (<http://www.3el.org/>) is an innovating environment of reinforcement for the design of new strategies of international cooperation to reinforce, through the dialogue between the cultures, the construction of a peace culture, one of whose main values it is the respect by the differences.

Also Francophonie has contributed to the World Summit on the Information Society (<http://smsi.francophonie.org/>) and, in complement to its intergovernmental role (see the contributions for the Summit products of the Inter-ministerial Conference of Rabat in http://www.francophonie.org/documents/pdf/declarations/declaration_rabat_esp.pdf) has supported to the participation of actors and actresses of the civil society to the different stages of the Summit.

Publication of the "Network on the Social Impact of the Information and Communication Technologies" (**RedISTIC**)

<http://redistic.org>

Published September 2003

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Association for Progressive Communications

APC is an international network of civil society organisations dedicated to empowering and supporting groups and individuals working for peace, human rights, development and protection of the environment, through the strategic use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), including the Internet.

<http://www.apc.org>



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<http://acceso.or.cr>



Fundación Redes y Desarrollo

Funredes is a Non-Governmental Organization, dedicated to the dissemination of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in developing countries, especially in Latin America and the Caribbean, with the objective of contributing to regional development and integration. This is done in collaboration with international organizations, NGO's, the States and public or private institutions.

<http://funredes.org>

INFOPOLIS

The Research Program on Information Society (INFOPOLIS), Research Institute Germani, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Buenos Aires, works on several issues related to Information Society: e-government, e-politics, ICT and development, indicators on Information Society for Latin America and the Caribbean, social appropriation of ICTs, telecentres, community networks, etc.

<http://www.fsoc.uba.ar/invest/iigg/index.htm>



ITDG

With our commitment to poverty reduction, environmental conservation and technology choice we think ITDG is uniquely placed to contribute to a world free of poverty.

<http://www.itdg.org.pe/>



Red de Información para el Tercer Sector

RITS is a non-profit organization whose mission is to strengthen civil society organizations through the strategic use of ICT. Its main lines of action include qualified information on the third sector, democratic access to the ICT and knowledge management, promotes and offers support for articulating networks and develops activities of lobbying and advocacy looking for the promotion of policies and projects for the infoinclusion.

<http://www.rits.org.br>

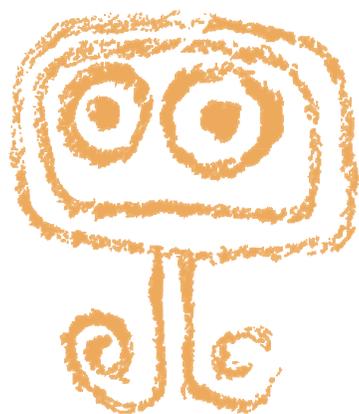


Universidad Bolivariana de Chile

The "Internet and Society" Program of the Bolivarian University of Chile has as objective to contribute to the formulation of public policies to assure the access, use and social appropriation of the Internet by the public sector, the private sector and the civil society. All this in order to maximize the social welfare and the sustainable development. It develops activities oriented to feed the debate on the impact on the Internet in the Society, to develop capacities to make the social appropriation possible of the Internet, and to design and to execute pilot projects to facilitate learning processes and to replicate the successful practices.

<http://www.ubolivariana.cl/>

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Other side of the divide: Latin-American and Caribbean Perspectives on the WSIS Introduction

¹ Elaborated by an association of institutions of defense of the information in Africa. First published January 2003, Windhoek. MISA 2003.

2. <http://redistic.org>

The process generated around the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) is an opportunity to present to the world the contributions that from Latin America and the Caribbean have been made in this respect.

Diverse actors of this region of the planet have worked and work today in how effective and efficiently using products based on the information and communication technologies (ICT) for the construction of a society that promotes the human development, sustained in the fairness and the integration of all the citizens. This work, for many, began long time ago and still go on. In doing so meaningful experiences have been accumulated.

This publication is a contribution of several institutions that work on topics related to the information society and its variants (communication, knowledge, wisdom, etc.) from Latin America and the Caribbean. They have decided to coordinate their efforts to publish a brochure that reflects the Latin American and Caribbean Perspectives on the World Summit on the Information Society.

We know that from Africa a similar project was developed and had good welcome in that continent and globally (“Our side of the Divide – African Perspectives on ICTs”¹). It is, without a doubt, an interesting example that stimulated us to show our side of the process.

The articles of the present publication are only a sample of what is been made in the region. They are a selection of important productions that we believe relevant to disclose as representative of the values shared by diverse actors who work in the field within Latin America and the Caribbean. From such values, we want to emphasize, in the first place, that *we know and we do from our realities by our own development, without prejudices and complexes*. The best experts on the South and its realities are in that same South. We welcome the good will support and solidarity but it has to be understood that we see ourselves like protagonists in the construction of that better future than we yearned for.

The second value is *the cooperation between institutions from the South to fortify to us in our respective fields of action*. This publication is the result of a collective effort made by diverse institutions of the region which have insisted on consolidating projects to conjugate their better capacities next to other institutions that are willing to accompany to them on this way.

The third value is *the importance of the participation of the civil society in the conformation of the Information Society*. For this reason we mainly gather articles generated from the civil society (academy, non-governmental organisms, among others institutions related to the representation of the civil society).

It is worth mentioning that this is the first pilot experience, informally structured as such, in the process of building the “**Network on the Social Impact of the Information and Communication Technologies**” (RedISTIC) (<http://redistic.org>). We are an organization who gathers institutions of the civil society and whose aim is to articulate initiatives of collaboration in order to get a real and effective influence in the public policies on ICT in the region.

We know that some key topics have been left out of this edition but the reason of that feature yields on the budget limitations and time constraints under which this project has been made. Even though we tried to include an wide panorama of the realities that we lived on.

The articles are organized in three sections. The first one gathers position papers on principles and values that govern the regional direction towards the information society. The second one reunites considerations on the process of the WSIS. The third section concentrates contributions on subjects and experiences originated in Latin America and the Caribbean.

In summary, we are facing a double challenge. On one side there is the one of documenting the process lived so far and by the other hand to create a reference to those who wishes to approach this subject and willing to know the particular perspective from this portion of the planet. We hope that the judgment of those who read this production favors us when doing the final balance.

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Working the Internet with a Social Vision

A COLLECTIVE DOCUMENT BY THE MISTICA¹ VIRTUAL COMMUNITY FOR THE OLISTICA PROJECT²

1. Mistica VC directory:
<http://funredes.org/mistica/castellano/emec/participantes/>

2. <http://funredes.org/olistica>

3. <http://funredes.org/mistica>

4. <http://funredes.org>

5. <http://funredes.org/olistica/documentos/doc2/isticometros.html>

6. http://funredes.org/mistica/castellano/ciberoteca/tematica/esp_doc_sam2_1.html

7. http://funredes.org/mistica/castellano/ciberoteca/tematica/esp_doc_cv.html

8. <http://www.acceso.or.cr/PPPP/>

9. <http://www.idrc.ca/pan/ricardo/publications/Ofelia.htm>

10. <http://www.itdg.org.pe>

11. <http://www.idrc.ca/pan/ricardo/publications/tcparaque.pdf>

12. <http://www.telecentros.org/>

Background

This document has been written in a **collective** way (see the chapter entitled “process”) to serve as a point of reference to various activities related to the Mistica³ and Olistica projects, which are both coordinated by Funredes, the Networks and Development Foundation⁴.

More specifically, it is meant to be a medium for an **alternative** way of assessing the social impact of ICT in Latin America and the Caribbean. This assessment will be inspired by the “Isticometrics” principles⁵, which establish that indicators need to be developed through **cooperative** processes. In this way, it is possible to link the priority developments as established by communities, and to elaborate the indicators in agreement with the social relevance of the phenomena to which they are tied. This relevance cannot indeed be left to the preconceptions held by elites or dominant protagonists. The perspective lies in the objective that societies, activists, and especially the people who ought to enjoy their benefits, participate in the formulation process of **public policies**.

Using a kind of vocabulary which can be understood by people who are not experts in the field, this document hence tries to shape the vision of the Internet as a tool for social development. Since 1999, a **group of people** (*scholars as well as grassroots activists*) have been conceptualizing this vision through virtual fora. The completion of this document should go beyond the mentioned projects, and it may represent a contribution from our region to the international, ongoing debate on Information Society.

Antecedents

The Mistica project has already produced two collective documents, on the same topic, although from different approaches:

Doc-SAM: the “*Letter to Emilio or the Oneiric Relation of the Samaná Meeting*”⁶ (5/99) focuses, in both pedagogical and multimedia ways, on the description of participative democracy processes and on the spirit which has resulted from it among the Mistica com-

munity. This document is extensive and easy to read; it is useful to those who wish to join the Mistica VC (virtual community) or to understand the dynamics of the project.

Doc-CV: “*ICT in Latin America and the Caribbean in the Globalization Context*”⁷ (4/99) focuses on the vision the Mistica VC has of the connection between ICT and society. This document is comparatively long and has been written by and for specialists of the field. In a way, the present document updates the Doc-CV, while trying to make it accessible to a larger audience.

We shall add to this list a document that has not been written collectively, and is not part of the achievements of the Mistica project; however, it has resulted from extensive consultations, and to a great extent it reflects the debates within the Mistica VC:

“*Internet, What For? Thinking about ITC for the Development of LAC*”⁸, (3/01) by Ricardo Gómez and Juliana Martínez. It is a large and pedagogical document, intended for a non-specialist as well as specialist audience.

Moreover, there exists other regional documents with a similar perspective, which come directly or indirectly from collective reflection in other frameworks:

“*Letter to Aunt Ofelia: Seven Proposals for Equitable Development with the Use of NICT*”⁹ (4/02) by Ricardo Gómez and Benjamín Casadiego: it stems from a collective creative session that took place during the workshop on Experiences Sharing on Social Appropriation of NICT for Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, organized by ITDG¹⁰, in Cajamarca, Peru (3/02).

“*Telecentres, What For? Lessons on Community Telecentres in Latin America and the Caribbean*”¹¹ (9/02) by Ricardo Gómez, Karin Delgadillo and Klaus Stroll: this stems from the experience of the project Somos@Telecentros¹².

These various documents, including the present one, represent an **original and regional production by Latin America and the Caribbean** on issues related to the Information Society.

Process

The process of elaborating the present document in a collective way was **formalized by Kemly Camacho**, from the Acceso Foundation¹³, as follows:

- she wrote an initial proposal which tried to gather the consensual contents of the debates which had been going on in the last months within the Mistica Virtual Community (VC);
- this initial proposal was submitted to discussion within the coordination group of the Olistica project¹⁴;
- a second version¹⁵ was produced, integrating the comments of the coordination group;
- following this, the document was submitted to discussion¹⁶ within the Mistica VC, with a discussion agenda running on for several weeks;
- finally, the comments which had been gathered were integrated into that document, in order to produce the last but one version;
- this version, then, was reviewed by the coordination group and was finalized by the person in charge of the project, Daniel Pimienta, before being handed in to the VC, in order to enable the members to determinate whether their comments had been properly integrated, and to issue the final document.

The text which has been produced through this process reflects, in a generally consensual way, and in broad outline, the views of the Mistica participants; however, it must be clear that the document has not been formally endorsed by each of the Mistica VC members.

The final comments, which broaden the perspectives of this document, are gathered in the thread of messages that begins with: <http://funredes.org/mistica/castellano/emec/produccion/memoria6/1326.html>

Introduction

The Mistica Virtual Community, composed of men and women from Latin America and the Caribbean, has developed for some time¹⁷ a reflection on topics such as digital divide, the information and knowledge society, and the social impact of the Internet. Under the general heading of “A Social Vision of the Internet”, we have developed a collective reflection, as well as initiated and promoted various actions. These actions aim at improving our understanding of the consequences and impact of this technology when it is part of our societies, and at promoting a social appropriation of the Internet. We, who make these proposals, share principles, the gist of which will now be presented.

1. The Internet¹⁸ is a *social matter*, not only a technical or a commercial one

.We do not see the network of networks *only* as a technological platform. Rather, we consider it as a

new space of interaction between human beings, which we have created for our own benefit.

This place is changing through the very interaction we are developing. Hence we consider that the technology must be seen, analyzed, managed, studied and used from a social point of view, trying to understand the new types of relations that are being created within the place, the new social processes that are being generated, the cultural evolutions that occur, the new worldviews that are being built, the new economic relations that are being established.

The Internet should not be understood only as the network of networks, from a technological point of view, i.e. as interconnected computers. The Internet should rather be seen as the network of human networks that are related to each other, where computers are nothing more than the mediating¹⁹ technological platform.

Clearly, since the network of human networks rests on a technological platform of interrelated computers, it works with novel and particular characteristics. Because the relations are mediated through the technological platform, both form and contents of communication are altered.

On the other hand, we hold that it is important not to consider the Internet only as a tool whose goal would be to implement new forms of commercial exchanges—which is what now defines the priorities of the private sector, what impels and supports it. The Internet should rather be used to boost structures as well as economical, political and social relations which offer alternatives to traditional patterns. Should it be driven only by the market, the Internet would reproduce and increase existing social inequalities.

Civil society is to play a crucial part in the defining the new types of relations and social constructions that ought to be developed from the integration of information and communication technologies. This is not only a stake for governments and private companies.

2. An impulse toward *equal opportunities* of access, *sensible use*, and the *social appropriation* of the ...Internet.

In order to analyze processes, carry on projects and elaborate proposals related to the technology, we use the following categories: equal opportunities of access, sensible use, and social appropriation of the Internet. We believe that it is important to simultaneously consider those three aspects in order to achieve socially positive results as the Internet continues to be incorporated into our countries.

We understand *equal opportunities of access* as the op-

13. <http://acceso.or.cr>

14. <http://www.funredes.org/olistica/socios/>

15. http://funredes.org/mistica/castellano/ciberoteca/tematica/esp_doc_olist.html

16. <http://funredes.org/mistica/castellano/emec/produccion/>

17. Since Feb. 1999, when discussions in the Mistica VC were launched.

18. “Internet” is a communication protocol (TCP-IP), which allows computers to communicate with each other. “The Internet” is a network which allows people to communicate and inform themselves through the use of computers and protocols. For this reason we prefer using the phrase “the Internet,” which refers to human networks, above the technological stratum.

19. And quite often, due to limitations in the interface, “immediating”... (in the sense of making superficial).

portunity for everyone to have access to the benefits of the Internet. Here we include both the access to the very technology and the development of technical and methodological capacities enabling people to make effective use of the whole potential that is thus made available. The obstacles to equal opportunities of access are not merely technical and financial, they are also educational, linguistic and cultural.

In this respect, we are also concerned with the search for alternative connections and free or inexpensive training, as well as for policies, decisionmaking and governance of the Internet. We are interested in getting involved in the definition of the policies related to domains, costs of space in the Internet and legal matters that have to do with technology, in such a way that our visions and interests would be taken into account.

We see a difference between the mere use and the *sensible use* of the technological tool. We prompt actions which promote a type of use that relates the needs of the various social groups to the search for alternative solutions, aiming to fulfil these needs through the use of the Internet.

We emphasize the *social appropriation of the Internet*, so that the tool will acquire meaning in the daily life of social groups and become a tool allowing new knowledge to be generated. This will make it possible for people to transform the concrete framework of their lives.

3. Our ultimate goal is the *transformation of societies*

We, who study, investigate, evaluate and prompt actions related to the Internet with a social vision, **explicitly claim that we mean to use the technology as a tool aiming at the transformation of societies.** We then want to discover and promote ways in order to contribute to building novel societies led by common values, such as fairer relations, resulting in less discrimination and more equal opportunities.

Also, from each of our specificities, we emphasize our commitment to promoting actions that will bring all Internet-related opportunities to the least privileged groups in our societies.

4. We think the Internet offers *opportunities*, but we do not magnify the technological tool

We do not believe that the Internet by itself can produce changes that will transform the social and economic conditions of the less privileged groups in our societies and in the world. We do not contemplate a straightforward process; we do not believe in an automatic relation or in one of cause and effect between the Internet and social development.

In order to take advantage of the Internet as a tool for social development, some processes should exist, that would permit the communities, organizations and countries to make the technology their own, in such a way that it would become a meaningful part of their daily lives. In other words, the Internet does mean something about the opportunity to improve living conditions, that it can be something close and relevant to the transformation of existing social, economic, and political relations.

We insist on changing the meaning of the actions related to the Internet. At present they give priority to the installation of connections and equipment, and then wonder what use they can be put to. We call for a previous cooperative reflection, in order to determine what the main problems and needs are, how the Internet can contribute to solving problems and fulfilling needs, and then determine if, how and where, equipment and connections should be installed.

The Internet is an open frame, which we can still take advantage of —whether we are organizations, communities, individuals or countries, as long as we aim at improving the conditions of living of the less-favored people.

However, we are also aware of the fact that everything depends on the actions which are to be soon undertaken, and that the possibilities to take advantage of the Internet for social transformation, may either shrink or expand.

In this respect, the Internet must respond to a strategy of communication and information that will be adopted by us, who desire an improvement of the societies in which we live.

5. The “digital divide” concept should be approached in a *collective*, not in an individual way.

The so-called digital divide originates in the social divide. First of all, we consider that the digital divide does not exist in itself, but that it is a consequence of social divides. That is to say, the pre-existing social, economic, political, differences, as well as the distribution of power and resources, do create it.

The digital divide is not to be confronted only with interconnected computers. In order to face the digital divide we need not only to make use of computers, but also to develop the necessary capacities among the groups so that they can take advantage of the technological tool in order to strengthen political, social and economic development. This means, besides being able to access connected computers, to improve one's personal self-esteem, one's community organization, one's educational level, one's capacities of interaction

with other people and groups, one's level of empowerment in order to make proposals, among other things. To reduce the digital divide means that the groups we work with have the capacity to take advantage of the technology in order to improve their own living and environmental conditions.

In sum, the digital divide should not be measured only in terms of infrastructure (for instance, the number of on-line computers in a given place). We shall evaluate the capacity that we have built in relation with the information process as well as with the relations that currently exist on the Internet regarding the beneficial knowledge that is likely to improve our living conditions and our mutual support relations.

Confronting the digital divide is not an individual matter, but a collective one. For this reason, we do not agree with those who present the way of facing the digital divide from an individual point of view. The digital divide is generally evaluated in terms of the ratio between a given population and the number of connected computers. We want to promote the idea of a more collective option. In this way we hold that the benefits coming from the Internet do not originate in the very connection, but in the effects generated by the connection. That is to say, we will be able to speak of a reduction of the digital divide if the benefits of the tool reach a whole community, even if this community has a small number of connected computers or even no computer at all. When we talk about facing the digital divide, we speak of communities, organizations or families who benefit from the Internet although they are not directly connected, we do not speak of a one-to-one relation, from the individual to the machine.

For instance, in a given community, a group of youngsters can access the Internet from their school (not from their community) and thus discover, through the tool, a new way of purifying the river water into drinkable water. They discuss it with adults, adapt the information to community conditions, carry out a similar project which is relevant to local needs and to their own worldview, and eventually manage to produce drinkable water from the river. If this serves as an example and is followed by similar actions, then the benefits of the Internet will be brought to the whole community. We will speak of actions that permit to reduce the digital divide in the community, in spite of the very fact that only a group of youngsters have access to the Internet and that there does not exist any computer with Internet access within the community.

We hold that the digital divide should be evaluated in

terms of the benefits of the Internet that reach (or do not reach) the populations; we also hold that this is not merely achieved through a technical connection. The processes are obviously made easier whenever connections are available in the community, but a mere connection definitely does not make a difference.

Consequently, we encourage actions that reduce the digital divide by bringing the benefits of the Internet to the populations from a community point of view, and not only actions that aim at connecting every individual to the Internet. We hold that efforts and resources available to reduce the digital divide should not focus on hardware, but in processes at the community, organization and nation levels; these processes should bring the benefits of the technology to the main part of the population.

6. Social divides in our societies are reflected on the Internet; we are responsible for taking advantage of and defending the existing *open places*

Obviously, differences do exist on the Internet. We do not all have the same opportunities to access what is available on the network, the same opportunities to disseminate what we produce, nor do we have the same technological resources and equipments to take advantage of the tool. These differences are related to technology costs and knowledge.

We are concerned about this trend, even though we believe that many open spaces still exist. We work to prompt actions which reduce the danger that the Internet might become a tool handled mainly by the economic resources of the people who participate in it.

We seek to have those to whom our societies grant fewer opportunities be listened to, find in the tool both a space to speak with their own voices, to interact and to organize with other people, and a place where they will find such information as will help them to find solutions and to fulfil needs.

7. The Internet can boost human development processes that already exist

The Internet is above all a tool which is able to create and to reinforce human networks. Its use makes it possible to create a new social network that we need to understand and to make our own.

The Internet is a tool that can facilitate, improve, and ease the processes that are occurring in the countries, communities, organizations and regions, which aim at improving the living conditions of the bulk of the population.

Consequently, we prompt actions that tend to integrate the Internet into current social practices and or-

ganizational initiatives, improve the living conditions of the less privileged, and promote the development of extensive cooperative processes.

8. The Internet provides *information*, not knowledge

We hold that the Internet is an endless source of information, but that it does not provide us with knowledge. We ourselves do produce knowledge, in individual or collective forms, through assimilating information, reflecting on it, adapting it to our own experiences, needs, contexts, and worldviews, discussing it with other people, either face to face or in a virtual way.

Generating knowledge implies that a “thinking process” should be developed. The essence of this is definitely human. The Internet helps us throughout the process and makes it easier, because it allows us to find similar experiences, lessons learned, new ideas about similar issues, because it brings us contributions, because we thus expand our visions, or because we discuss extensively with individuals and groups from many parts of the world. However, **the process through which knowledge is generated does take place outside the Internet.**

We hold that it is necessary to overcome the myth according to which information is knowledge, and its consequences according to which the very fact of being connected to the Internet allows to have more knowledge.

9. Generating *new knowledge* is an engine for a change the internet can boost, but it must be understood how to switch on the ignition

Generating knowledge through the use of the Internet as an information and communication tool, is not a simple process. It requires discovering new abilities, new capacities, variations in the work processes, as well as new educational profiles that will make it possible for us to better take advantage of the tool in order to generate knowledge. **If we do not carry out these kinds of reflections, and do not implement changes, we face the risk of having a great deal of information at hand, but of being paralyzed by the unmanageable quantity of data.**

Building knowledge that offers new solutions to needs, improves the ways things are done, and presents alternatives, will be the driving force behind the transformation of our societies. However, learning how to do this is not a spontaneous process. We therefore try to initiate research and studies that emphasize both discovering these new ways, and promoting the concept in international agencies, local and national governments, organizations and communities.

Discovering these new ways of doing things, should be done in connection with social activists, so as to allow the building process to take into account various worldviews, and to stimulate the process through which the Internet as a technological tool is appropriated.

The point is that the Internet should become a useful tool so that the socially less privileged can generate new knowledge that will allow them to improve their living conditions and transform the societies in which they live.



10. The impact of the internet is in the *change* that it generates

Similarly, when we talk about the impact of the Internet we try to understand how the Internet has transformed the daily lives of individuals in their personal affairs, their jobs, in their social relationships, at the level of the general organization or of the citizen.

When we talk about valuing the impact we try to understand to what extent the Internet is transforming the realities we live, as components of social entities, both at the group and at the personal levels. We do not emphasize such realities as the number of computers, connection speed, the quantity of messages, etc. These figures may allow us to understand the context in which we live. However we try to go beyond appearance to get to the substance, to what will remain of this transformation.

11. It matters to us that the use of it should lead to social transformations that bring *positive social changes* for our region

We want to make sure that a new information and knowledge is being built. We are careful not to be repeating a slogan. We believe that all societies have had their own ways of generating knowledge and that this has to do with the cultural context.

We carefully observe the ways in which social, political and economic structures are being currently altered, in order to make sure that the existing structures are not strengthened and that the evolution is a substantial one.

Moreover, we do not consider that the Internet is currently the only factor which makes societies evolve. We adopt a critical and integral look, through which we can analyze the numerous factors and dynamics that constantly participate in their evolutions.

12. We can also live *without* the Internet

We hold that the Internet can also have negative effects in social, organizational, and personal life. What circulates through the medium often has more to do with quantity than with quality. The Internet may generate work overload, saturation, limitation in personal contacts, feelings of immediacy, diminished opportunities for reading, thinking and enjoyment.

Also, it is perfectly possible to live without the Internet in spite of all the contextual pressures, that incite individuals, organizations and institutions to be connected. Be that as it may, this decision has to be taken with full knowledge of the facts, that is to say, after having had a chance to know the dynamics implied by the Internet.

13. Reflections on the *social appropriation* of the Internet in our actions and projects

In this framework, we would like to summarize our position, and to propose a series of questions, in order to analyze the various proposals and actions that are developing in relation to the introduction of the Internet into our countries and communities.

1. *On equal opportunity of access*

- a. Is priority given to the least favored groups?
- b. Is technical and methodological training integrated as part of the connectivity?
- c. Is access given to all Internet resources so that people can choose what suits them? Or is access restricted to certain services?
- d. Do the processes through which Internet access is provided (whether already under development or to be developed) promote collective access to the technological tool? In what sense do these proposals and actions promote the reduction of the digital divide in terms of connected communities, organizations, and families?

2. *On sensible use*

- a. In what way do the developing (or to be developed) uses of the Internet make it possible to build less discriminatory relations, that promote equal opportunities?
- b. In what way do the developing (or to be developed) uses of the Internet promote the transformation of existing economic, political and social relations?
- c. To what extent do the uses of the Internet that are promoted take part in existing social practices and do not represent enforced or undesirable changes?
- d. To what extent do the uses of the Internet that are promoted strengthen the participative processes among the groups we work with?

3. *On social appropriation*

- a. In what way do the current (or to be developed) actions encourage the beneficiary populations to give the Internet a proper, autochthonous and genuine meaning, that respond to their daily lives?
- b. To what extent do the current (or to be developed) actions encourage the people among whom projects are carried out to participate in the definition and the managing of what is going to be achieved through the use of the Internet?
- c. To what extent do the actions that are being initiated through the Internet support community, organizational and national processes which promote an evolution toward fairer, more equal and more sustainable societies?
- d. To what extent do the actions that are being initiated promote processes that allow to bring the ben-



efits of the Internet to the less privileged, especially to the ones who do not have access to the tool?

4. *On generating new knowledge*

- a. To what extent do the uses of the Internet that are being initiated solve concrete needs of the people whom we work with?
- b. To what extent do the uses of the Internet that are being initiated contribute to the search for alternatives to the problems identified by the groups we work with?
- c. To what extent do the uses of the actions that are being initiated, contribute to improving the conditions of the less favored?
- d. To what extent do the uses of the Internet that are being initiated allow to expand the available information within communities so that people may take decisions with more appropriate criteria?
- e. To what extent are actions initiated in order to improve the ways relevant information is selected, organized, and interpreted in relation with the daily life of the groups we work with?
- f. In what way do promoted actions prompt structural changes among peoples and organizations, so that they can develop innovating processes which allow to integrate the benefits of the Internet into their daily lives?

5. *On the defense of protected spaces on the Internet and the dissemination*

- a. How do the actions that are promoted boost the production of local contents?
- b. What level of participation do the people with whom we work have in the development of local contents?
- c. To what extent do actions which are promoted allow to disseminate and promote local contents?
- d. In what way is the Internet promoted as a space of expression for the less favored and for popular cultures?

6. *On the social change produced by the Internet*

- a. In what way do the actions which are promoted for the development of the Internet prompt elements such as development of personal and collective self-esteem, community organization, improvement of educational standards, capacities of interaction between people, empowerment, or development of the capacity to make proposals from the people with whom the work is done?
- b. In what way are actions for the development of the Internet transforming the daily lives of the peoples, from an individual, occupational, interpersonal or citizen viewpoint?
- c. What level of probability is there that the transformations produced by the actions that are carried out, have a follow-up in the future?

Knowledge-based international aid: Do we want it, do we need it?¹

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Presentation

This paper approaches “knowledge-based aid” from some specific perspectives: a) a view “from the South”; b) a critical perspective; c) a regional focus on Latin America; d) a focus on education.

There is little hope that the announced “knowledge society” and “lifelong learning” will bring the expected “learning revolution” and a more equitable distribution of knowledge without fundamental changes in North-South relationships and cooperation patterns, as well as in knowledge and learning paradigms. Never before have there been so much information and knowledge available, so varied and powerful means to democratize them, and so much emphasis on the importance of knowledge, education and learning. But never before has the *banking* education model been so alive and widespread at a global scale: *education* understood as a one-way transfer of information and knowledge, and *learning* understood as the passive digestion of such transfer. Many enthusiastic global promoters of “knowledge societies”, “new networking” and “lifelong learning” dream today with a world converted into a giant classroom with a few powerful global teachers, and millions of passive assimilators of information and knowledge packages via telecenters, computers and the Internet. In an era characterized by change, uncertainty and unpredictability, knowledge-disseminators and technology-promoters appear to have just too many certainties about the present and about the future. “What works” and “what doesn’t work” are offered as clear-cut black and white alternatives, without the obvious questions that should follow: where, when, for what, with whom, for whom, under what circumstances? Knowledge-based aid rhetoric insists on avoiding the discussion of issues such as power and vested interests, not only within governments but also within civil society and within and among Agencies themselves.

“Knowledge-based aid” for “developing countries”

What **development**? What **knowledge**? What kind of

aid? Who is “**countries**”? There is nothing new about “knowledge-based aid”. Transferring knowledge to “developing countries” under the form of technical assistance has been the *raison d’être* of Agencies.

“Knowledge-based aid” is fundamentally “North/South asymmetry-based aid”: donor/ recipient, developed/ non-developed, knowledge/ ignorance, teach/ learn, think/ act, recommend/ follow, design/ implement. The North views itself essentially as a knowledge provider, and views the South as a knowledge consumer. The North thinks, knows, disseminates, diagnoses, plans, strategizes, does and validates research, provides advice, models, lessons learned, and even lists of desired profiles. The South does not know, learns, receives, applies, implements. The North produces, synthesizes and disseminates *knowledge*; the South produces data and *information*. The North produces global policy recommendations to be translated, by the South, into National Plans of Action.

For international cooperation purposes, “countries” have typically been thought of as *governments*. Cooperating with governments has been assumed as equivalent to cooperating with *countries* and with the *people* in those countries, thus avoiding critical questions related to the representativeness of concrete governments in terms of public and national interest. Also, Agencies’ widened perception of “countries”, incorporating the notion of “civil society”, has remained narrow, simplistic and NGO-centered, ignoring the various actors interacting in real civil societies: political parties, social movements, the academic community, workers’ unions, grassroots organizations, mass media, private enterprise, the churches, etc.

Are we (the South) striving for and heading towards “development”?

“Development” (in the sense of *progress*) seemed achievable in the 1970s and 1980s. In the 1990s and early 2000s, the very term *development* has virtually disappeared from political and academic discourse, from social debate and from social expectations in the South. Development discourse and goals have been substituted by “poverty alleviation”, “debt relief”, “combating unemployment”, “improving the quality of education”, etc. The overall spirit is that of “reversing decline” rather than that of “ensuring development”. The very meaning of *development*, as well as

1. Shortened version of a paper prepared for the International Seminar on “Development Knowledge, National Research and International Cooperation”, CAS/DSE/NORRAG, Bonn, 3-5 April 2001 which is included in: Gmelin, W.; King, K.; McGrath, S. (editors), Knowledge, Research and International Cooperation, University of Edinburgh, 2001. Go to http://funredes.org/mistica/english/cyberlibrary/participants/docupart/eng_doc_08/ to read the full text with references.



the means and strategies to get there, are by no means consensual and remain an issue of debate and controversy not only in the North and in the South but also among and within Agencies themselves.

Is there is something called “development knowledge”?

How much does “development” depend on knowledge? What is the knowledge required to make “development” happen in “non-developed” contexts? Is there such a thing as “development knowledge” in general? Is it available, waiting to be “disseminated” or transferred through “capacity building”? Who possesses and who should possess such knowledge in order for development to occur? Is it a problem of dissemination and capacity building? Most of these questions are already answers, or unraised questions, within the international cooperation community. Agencies, just as schoolteachers, *must* know -or act as if they knew- because this is their role and their business. And just like bad teachers who have poor expectations of their students and think for them, Agencies have in mind clients that are avid for ready-made diagnoses, recipes, transportable and easily replicable success stories. Conventional internation-

al aid has operated under one central assumption: the South has the problems, and the North has the solutions. If the solution proposed does not work, a new solution will be proposed, and countries will be held accountable for the failure. Just as ineffective teacher training results in teachers incorporating new terms but not necessarily embracing new concepts and changing their practices, Agencies have fully incorporated politically correct jargon such as *participation, consultation, transparency, accountability, empowerment* and *ownership* and haven given them their own meaning and functional use.

Is [“good”] knowledge only to be found in the North?

Knowledge produced in the South is disqualified or ignored altogether. Those reading about education only in publications produced in the North probably come to the conclusion that there is no research, no intellectual life and no debate on education going on outside North America and Europe, and that most of it happens to be written in English. And yet, the South has a vast research and intellectual production, much of it of similar or better quality standards than that produced in the North, but much of it is invisible to the North. Arrogance and prejudice are important ex-

plicative factors as well as linguistic limitations. While researchers and intellectuals in the South are often multilingual or at least bilingual readers, many researchers in the North are monolingual (specially native English-speakers) and thus have limited access to the intellectual production available worldwide. However, this does not prevent them from speaking for the entire world and for “developing world” in particular, even when they access only to North-produced syntheses of South-produced research. Being professional and aiming at serious professional roles at international level today requires not only multidisciplinary but multilingual teams.

Is “good” knowledge expert knowledge?

The perverse consequences of the expert and consultant drive in the South are enormous. The expert culture reinforces technocratic and elitist approaches, social *participation* and *consultation* as mere concessions to democracy rather than as objective needs for effective policy design and action. It cultivates the separation between thinkers and doers, reformers and implementers, both at the national and global scale. It reaffirms the tradition to locate problems on the implementation side, never on the side of those who diagnose, plan and formulate policies. Effective and sustainable policies and reforms require not only (good, relevant) expert knowledge, but also the (explicit and implicit, scientific or not) knowledge and will of all those concerned. Policy in practice shows the perennial insufficiency of expert knowledge and the indispensable need for consultation, participation and ownership - whether it is governments, institutions, groups or individuals- not only for implementation but as a condition for good policy design.

Is “expert” knowledge good knowledge?

“Experts” make - and have made many — expert and costly mistakes. The opaque relationship between knowledge validation and (Agency) power is a critical, un-mentioned, factor. Many of the ideas and trends that become dominant do so not necessarily because of their merit or proven efficacy to explain or transform realities, but because of the (ideological, political, financial) power that is behind them.

Are information, communication, knowledge, education and learning the same?

Information, knowledge, education, learning are easily confused and often used indistinctively. Ignoring current scientific knowledge available on these issues, and in the best tradition of the banking school education model, *knowledge* and *learning* continue to be trivialized as a matter of *access* (to school before, to

the computer and the Internet today) and/or *dissemination* (of information, of knowledge, of lessons learned, of models to be replicated). There are reasons to believe such trivialization and confusion are not just the result of ignorance but of deliberate blurring. Unless North and South engage in serious analysis, research and debate on all these issues and their implications for a *global* “knowledge and learning society”, the “learning revolution” may be a new false alarm, an illusion created by the technological revolution, or a revolution only for a few, with many victims and wider gaps, controlled by central powers and benefiting strong economic interests.

Is there a positive relationship between (expert) knowledge and (effective) decision-making?

The experience with the Latin American Statement on Education for All² represents an innovative and promising development, that contradicts conventional North/South aid patterns: it is an endogenous initiative, born in Latin America, out of Latin American concerns, and conducted in Spanish and Portuguese (*ownership* is here a fact, not a concession). It is not an NGO but a social movement, involving a wide spectrum of sectors and groups, including civil society, government and Agencies; information disseminated regularly to the list of signers is both local, regional and global; and it operates on a voluntary basis, with no international funding and thus with total intellectual and financial autonomy.

Do we want and need “knowledge-based aid”?

Why would we want such aid? It has been ineffective and costly, it has increased our dependency and our foreign debt, it has not allowed us to develop our own human resources (while we have paid external consultants to learn and become experts while working in our countries); it has not allowed us to identify and develop our own ideas, research, thinking, alternatives, models. And it has not allowed us not learn along the way about both our achievements and mistakes.

Do we really *need* such aid? In most, if not all, countries in the South we have the knowledgeable and competent professionals we need to put in place sound education policies and reforms. Moreover, if qualified and committed nationals (and non-nationals who end up sharing these characteristics and ideals as their own) have two important advantages over non-nationals: they know the national/ local language(s) and share local history and culture, and they love their country. Motivation, empathy, ownership, sense of identity and of pride, sense of being part of a collective- building project, are key ingredients

2. <http://www.fronesis.org/prolat.htm>

of effective and sustainable policy making and social action. There is an important difference between living in a country, and visiting it on technical missions. External consultants may leave ideas, documents and recommendations, but it is those living in the country, zone, or community who will finally do the job. Separating and differentiating the roles of those who think and recommend, and those who implement and try to follow recommendations, remains the key formula for non-ownership (or for fake ownership) and thus for failure.

A few final conclusions and recommendations

If Agencies really want to assist the South, they must be ready to accept the need for major shifts in their thinking and doing. It is not just a matter of more of the same, or of improving cooperation mechanisms and relationships. What is needed is a *different kind*

of cooperation, operating under different assumptions and rules, to be discussed and devised together with the South, in professional dialogue. *Partnership*, but not for business as usual.

What can Agencies do to assist the South?

- Work not only addressed to the South but, most importantly, to the North.
- Acknowledge diversity and act accordingly.
- Revise international cooperation assumptions based on asymmetry and unidirectionality.
- Support social watch and enhance professional dialogue with the South.
- Sound understandings and critical approaches to information, knowledge, education and learning.
- More questions and more learning together .
- Assist countries identify and develop their own human resources and capacities.

A methodological proposal for measuring the transition to Knowledge Society in Latin American countries

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1. Introduction¹

Recent evolution on information and communications technologies (ICTs) field has triggered a process of deep political, cultural and economical changes off. The course of this process, which leads to the so called "Information Society" (IS) or "Knowledge Society", has raised great interest in politicians, journalists, businessmen and academicians. In regard of this, it has become an imperative need to have reliable information. In order to meet this demand, it is essential to have a system of indicators specially focused on key aspects of this social and technological phenomenon. The aim of such system is not only to understand and monitor the development of the process, but also to become a useful tool for directing both public and private actions making a good use of the opportunities and mitigating the risks involved in such social change.

2. The requirements for a Information Society Indicators System

The construction of this IS related system of indicators requires overcoming a series of obstacles and restrictions. One of the first difficulties is set up by the nature of the phenomenon to be measured. The subject matter is new and extensive, and this turns the IS into a highly complex issue. So far, knowledge on IS is rudimentary, and knowledge on how the IS appears in different local contexts is even poorer. Therefore, the lack of a theoretical framework which might allow dealing more effectively with IS matters, represents one of the prior issues to be solved.

Another difficulty lies in the fact that we are facing a process that is, although global, not homogeneous. Indicators to be adopted should be internationally comparable but at the same time be able of picking up the diversity of local situations.

There are also restrictions related to data collection methodologies. The increasing demand for statistics referring to the transition process towards the IS has imposed new requirements to national statistics systems. In Latin American countries this increases the

existent technical and budget restrictions on the production of reliable information, especially when this information refers to extremely dynamic and new issues. Some consultancy firms, academic institutions and enterprise chambers have tried to meet this demand, not always with equal success. In most cases they have produced low reliability information while in others all they offer is a compilation of figures.

Therefore, in the Latin American context, the development of an indicators system requires special attention on both methodological matters (design of indicators, data collection guidelines, information processing, etc.) and issues related to the coordinated participation of the agents in charge of generating the information.

In regard to the system's institutional architecture it is convenient to point out that nature of the phenomenon itself implies a great dispersion of data sources. Usually, the data and records used to feed the IS indicators system are spread among national statistics institutes; public institutions related to telecommunications, S&T, and education sectors; enterprise chambers; large companies; multilateral agencies, private academic groups and consultancy firms; etc. Considering this dispersion, it doesn't seem convenient to impose a single valid source of information—which probably won't be able to cover all the issues involved in the matter— but to design a network strategy based on the cooperation between the different sources. In this way, it is necessary to designate a network coordinator, who should be in charge of assuring a harmonic participation of the different agents, and generating the conditions for consensus on common methodological guidelines. It is very important to agree on *what* should be measured and *how* it should be measured, and so it is that the coordinator takes care of the task of compiling and homogenizing the information coming from the different agents, in order to assure its coherence and quality.

3. The Information Society Indicators Matrix

Regarding this comments and guidelines, we have formulated a proposal that intends to become a frame of reference for the agents involved, with the aim of channelling the efforts and achieving a real synergy between the actions that are taking place. This proposal has been structured in line with the so called

1. At the Second Workshop on Indicators for the Information Society –February, 27th and 28th 2003, Lisbon—organized by the Red Iberoamericana de Indicadores de Ciencia y Tecnología (RICYT-CYTED Programme) and the Unidade de Missão Inovação e Conhecimento (Presidência do Conselho de Ministros-Portugal), was presented a methodological proposal for the construction of indicators for assessing the level of advance and the characteristics taken by the transition process towards Information Society in Latin America. This paper presents a summary of this proposal. The complete version can be downloaded from www.centroredes.org.ar.

“Information Society Indicators Matrix” and is intended to contribute with the task of setting basis for a feasible indicators system, pertinent for the Latin American context and capable of describing the central aspects of the transition process towards IS.

Given the complexity and the extent of the issues that the IS involves, we chose not to treat the object of study as a whole, but to deal with in blocks, although without resigning the multidisciplinary perspective, and then, at the time of the analysis, achieving an integrating glance. Therefore, considering the restrictions and guidelines, we have built an instrument (which is still on development) that could be described as modular, flexible, gradual and cooperative.

The modular nature of the proposal

As it has been mentioned, this methodological proposal is summarized and represented by a matrix scheme. We believe that representation through this matrix allows emphasizing, setting in a context and transmitting data and concepts involved. On figure Nr.1 we can see that the scheme has two major areas. First, we can mention four sectors constituting the base for a dynamic and fully extended IS: Education, S&T, Computing and High Added Value Services, and Telecommunications.

These four sectors or activities frame the “Use and Diffusion of Information and Knowledge Sub-Matrix” which constitutes the second area and so, it has been placed over the previous one in figure No1. This Sub-Matrix is made out of four main thematic topics –infrastructure, abilities, accumulative efforts, applications– intersected by four rows referred to the actors –companies, households, government, other institutions–.

Figura 1. Knowledge Society indicators

TELECOMMUNICATIONS		IT AND HIGH ADDED VALUE SERVICES		
	Infra-structure	Skills	Investments & Effors	Applications
Businesses				
Homes				
Government				
Other Institutions				

EDUCATION SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Basic Sectors or Activities

The levels reached by a society in terms of education, S&T, in addition to software and telecommunications industry developments, coincide with and have a bearing, be it favourable or negative, on KS development. It is precisely these sectors that form the framework within which the remaining social agents and actors try, as simply as possible and to the best of their abilities, to make use of the tools available for creating and managing information, in addition to the growing supply of knowledge-intensive goods and services. The inclusion of these sectors seeks to highlight the situation and principal trends of certain activities considered necessary but insufficient in the structure and consolidation of the KS. The underlying idea is simple: the lower the degree of development in these sectors, the more difficulties and obstacles for the economic and social agents in assimilating differing practices and tools in the KS

With regards to possibilities of measuring, it is possible to undertake a quantitative approach to these activities through a selection of sectoral indicators currently available. However, the selection might also be complemented by a reinterpretation of information arising from “traditional” indicators, bearing in mind all of the processes in action.

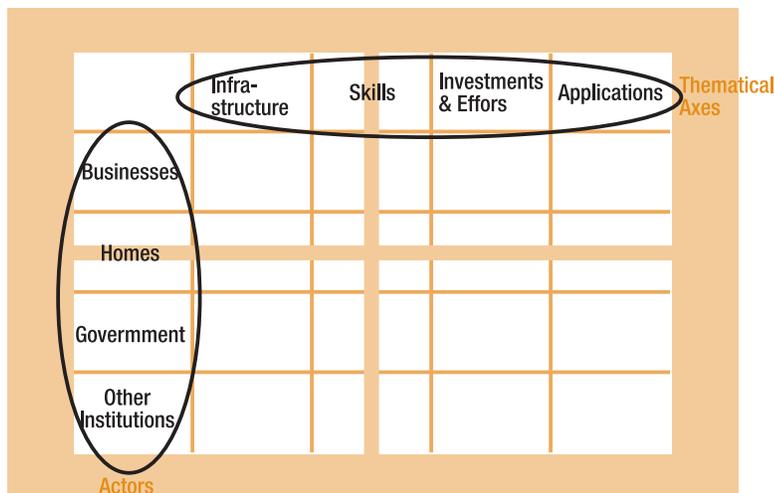
The Use and Diffusion of Information and Knowledge Sub-Matrix

The Sub-matrix of Analysis of the Expansion and Use of Information and Knowledge (SAEU) is made up of four columns and four rows. The columns show the principal theoretical variables or thematic axes to evaluate, and the rows show the social and economic actors. The approach based on these four actors is only one option for tackling the wide and complex set of situations that the emergence of the KS brings with it. This method is preferred because it is the best we have found to combine explanatory capacity with application viability. Furthermore, this formula facilitates “dialogue” with other methodologies given that the proposed categories (rows) can be easily associated with the concepts of e–business, e–government, e–entertainment, e–learning, e–health, etc.

The flexible nature of the proposal

At the start of this document we stated that this methodology proposal has tried from the beginning to consider the difficulties and restrictions of statistical data generation and collection systems in Latin America. In this respect, it seems important to underline the possibility and advisability of developing methodologies that are both “appreciative” and “quantitative”.

Figura 2. Analysis of profit and difusion of knowledge and information



Unlike with other methodologies, the modular approach in this proposal allows us to satisfy the demand for information in a combined manner. As our proposal is organised into modules, each aspect can be tackled through the most suitable or applicable data collection technique. For some modules, it is possible to offer statistical data while in others information is available from qualified consultations and sources. In either case, it is important to remember that the principal objective is to supply useful elements for whoever is faced with the task of analysing the subject. On the other hand, if an inflexible method is adopted it runs the risk of losing application viability.

The emphasis on the possibility of combining approaches for each aspect or module of data collection is entirely justified given the importance of generating data that allows us to appreciate the scope and complexity of the “digital divide”. The existing differences in this area between countries or continents can be verified fairly easily. But perhaps deeper and more concerning contrasts are emerging within social groups or regions that until recently were considered homogenous in terms of skills and development possibilities.

In this regard, it seems highly recommendable that the proposed methodology should be applied to analyse smaller regions, rather than entire countries. This clearly puts new demands on statistical systems, as information is required on certain issues but data collection concerning these issues has only recently begun and research is not carried out at regional or local level. As a result, a module or aspect can contain indicators from quantitative data when referring to a city,

province, or important district and information from consultation with experts for those areas where the statistical system does not generate uneven figures.

Once again, given the growing demand for information, importance should be placed on prioritizing the generation of solutions based on common criteria by means of a methodology that can be applied to geographical or thematic units that have not been the object of attention in the past. This solution, which may prove to be partial or even superficial, also helps to raise awareness about the need to improve and extend studies and statistical sources.

The cooperative nature of the proposal

Instrument’s modular structure has another interesting implication. The fact that each SAEU row-column intersection’-together with the sectors enclosing the intersection- refers to a IS phenomenon specific aspect makes possible the fact that, once the general scheme has reached consensus and the methodological basic criteria have been agreed, each agent can focus on the module they feel more competent and capable. This means the network could receive the beneficial participation of other users besides those responsible for generating the information, for example: academic groups, highly qualified users, etc. This diversity can be very beneficial for the information system.

The gradual nature of the proposal

As a result, it is highly probable that from each group’s work and recommendations new sub-rows and sub-columns will emerge, enhancing the general scheme. Likewise, each development group will work with the expectation that their contributions are added to and combined with those of the other teams.

In other words, thanks to networking or collaborative work the scope of the scheme, and especially the SAEU, will become more extensive. Each module from any cross-section of rows and columns can become a new sub-matrix with its own actors and thematic axes. The experience accumulated so far indicates that the approach of each module will certainly have to resolve considerable theoretical and practical issues. The construction of indicators is a challenge that is not restricted to data collection techniques.

It also requires a sound theoretical framework, more so than is usually apparent. Before beginning to propose indicators for each module and proceeding with the estimate, it will be necessary to understand and conceptualize the phenomenon to be quantified. Without a sound theoretical framework, the possibility of correctly identifying key elements in the phe-

nomenon is at risk, and as a result measuring efforts can be distracted by questions that ignore the processes' principal bases and dynamic. In short, it seems reasonable to believe that each group or thematic module should include and form a conceptual framework in line with its specific subject (which should in turn be in line with the general scheme, if the aim is

to compare results with those obtained by other groups or teams), establish theoretical variables and indicators that give an idea of the relevant aspects of the issue being studied, and develop the instruments that allow the requisite statistical information to be obtained.



The Digital Divide: the same division of resources?

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The human network Mistica (<http://funredes.org/mistica>) is constituted of researchers and grassroots actors of Latin America and the Caribbean. They have thought collectively, for the past few years, on the subject of the now famous “digital divide”. The group too often get irritated of an over-simplifying and superficial dominant rhetoric which has the tendency to erase the **real societal challenges** (*the social appropriation of technologies and the empowerment of people and communities*) and to polarize the discussion on the **access**, within the limited meaning of the word (*is it finally about creating consumers in the South for electronic commerce and its products coming from the North?*).

- The essence of the problem is the **social divide** and not the digital divide. The statistical differences between the countries of the South and those of the North concerning the access of users to ICTs are nothing else than the reflect of this socioeconomic division (which indeed exists also inside the industrialized countries).
- Certainly, the collective Mistica (where gather many field players some of them having struggled for ICT dissemination for more than 15 years) considers that, in certain conditions, ICT can represent an **extraordinary chance** to fight against the social fracture. But there is no evidence that the **generalized connection** of people to the Internet is the condition for that chance to happen.
- The **obstacles** to overcome so that people can **change** their social and economic environment using ICT are not limited to the existence of a telecommunication infrastructure which is accessible at affordable cost, although this condition is of course necessary. There are other obstacles, as the one of the language and of the education in general and, more specifically, the education for the culture of information.
- This **culture of information** (or culture of networks) and, beyond, the know-how in the use of ICT with a full conscience of the social, economic, linguistic, cultural, policies, ecological (to the sense of the ecology of information) **challenges** can only be ac-

quired by a **complete training and community practices**. It is about facilitating the drive to the users into a **content producer** and a **development player** within his/her community... and not only a more or less aware consumer.

If it is merely about giving some inexpensive (or even free) access and a training to the proprietary software on a PC, consequences will be to

enhance the sales of one software company and to **create clients** for products of the electronic commerce coming from the industrialized countries...

Between two persons of the South having in appearance **similar practices** in front of a PC, very **strong differences** in terms of development impact may exist; it's take two extreme cases so to schematize the message:

- “A” (most often a Yuppie of a PVD) surfs the Web, creates friendship thanks to the chat and buys products on the Internet which will be delivered via Miami;
- “B” creates a page that reflects his/her culture and his/her language, participate to professional electronic conferences where he/she creates remote collaboration actions to contribute to the development of his/her country, searches the Web in an efficient way for information required to reach the previous objectives, facilitates a virtual community and contributes, with the help of Open Source software, the global sales of handicraft products from his/her region.

Actually, “A” is behind the screen and “B” is in front of the keyboard, and this makes the whole difference...

What is the respective influence of “A” and “B” on the development of his/her country? Probably negative in the case of “A” (certainly negative in terms of balance in US dollars!). Certainly positive in the case of “B” (probably positive in economic terms!).

What difference between a **community telecenter** “X” and a **cybercafé** “Y”? Both offer, in an apparently similar way, the sharing of ICT access resources between several people who do not have thus the need to own individually access infrastructures (PC, modem, lines...). But some differences do appear after a careful analysis. The first is **integrated to the community fabric** and articulates, by way of the ICT, solutions to dif-



ferent community needs (such as the legal advice or the receipt of transfers offunds from the family abroad). It offers a form of training to participants that aims at **appropriation and empowerment**. The second is not linked to the community; it is a **business of service** that forms customers to the use of software and who aims especially at the **entertainment** market.

Of course, in reality, there is a continuum of practices between “A” and “B” and between “X” and “Y”, and it may be simplistic to schematize... But let's be clear: what is at stake? To form users of type “A” and to cause the development of type “Y” telecenters? This is certainly not what the **organized civil society** wishes in developing countries! And this is the danger of a simplifying rhetoric on the digital divide...

Field actors in the South get worried of a **mobilization of attention and resources** in the industrialized

countries and international organizations which claims to bring an answer to break the digital divide with solutions where **they are not really represented** and within the framework of a financial management where contributions, once again, will remain, in their enormous majority, in the hand of the North (*an example among others is the project of the World Bank named «Global Development Gateway which costs alone as much as thousand of regional development projects such as Mistica...»*).

Perhaps time has come to think that the **present model of international cooperation** calls for a **change of paradigm** which would enable the support of genuine solutions emerging from the field instead of continue the practice of imposed solutions which are designed far from the realities and for which the economic equation is absurd...

ICT, development, and poverty reduction in Latin America and the Caribbean¹

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Do information and communication technologies (ICT) have any incidence on local development and poverty reduction? Do ICT improve local development through their application to social programs, or do they require a comprehensive e-economy policy to become development factors? Which are the conditions under which ICT can effectively contribute to social development?

This paper shows the results of a research on the effects of ICT in poverty reduction in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), from 1995 onwards. The work identifies the national-wide strategies and policies used by LAC governments –particularly in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela - to implement ICT applications for economic and social development purposes, mainly in the areas of connectivity, e-government, education, and science and technology. Finally, the paper proposes strategies in order to use ICT for social and economic development in developing countries.

Employment generation

Employment - addressed plans and projects implemented in most LAC countries do not consider ICT use to train low-income social groups for the labor market's new demands. Often, the only existing link among these programs and ICT is the Programs websites. In Argentina, the Family Heads Plan (Plan Jefas y Jefes de Hogar) only implies the distribution of a \$150 pesos (\$50 US Dollars) among poor families. This sum does not engage family heads to any kind of training; even if it could be used to train the unemployed in the use of IS tools. However, ICTs have helped considerably to the Plan's organization and relative transparency: the names of the beneficiary families are listed in the Program's website. Brazil offers help to the unemployed, based mostly in help to organize cooperatives, but these plans scarcely use training on ICT. In Chile, the Ministry of Work and Social Welfare has implemented the Pro-Employment Program², among others, but they still do not provide training on ICT tools. The same can be said of the other analyzed countries.

These findings suggest that LAC countries have not implemented public policies using ICT to empower communities nor to prepare them for the digital economy needs. ICT are neither used to simulate the population's association capabilities, nor to encourage micro enterprises using new technologies.

LAC countries are more productive in relation to SMES development, linked to employment generation. But only a few experiences articulate SMES and ICT use, even if many plans and programs boast about it. In Argentina, the Federal Investment Council³, CFI, has implemented Internet access Centers in all the provinces, providing seminars, video conferences, and training courses. CFI's goals are contributing to build cooperation links among entrepreneurs, and providing economic and financial information to SMES, using the Access Centers portals.

The Companies Website, in Chile's Ministry of Economy and Government⁴ has launched in May 2000 the Enterprise Window (Ventanilla Única para la Empresa⁵), coordinating the services of different State institutions in order to provide companies all the information they need about taxes systems, exports, administrative tasks, etc., through the Internet. The Enterprise Window provides information about micro enterprises, as well as tools to strengthen SMES, with the intention of turning them into job-generating places, increasing exports.

Colombia also privileges SMES development. The Prymeros Project for SMES in the e-commerce network⁶ is a top item in the Connectivity Agenda. The Project encourages massive Internet use for entrepreneurs. It supports SMES directly through training, diagnosis, and consulting services, in order to ensure the implementation of E-commerce solutions for SMES. The Incentives to Technological Innovation for SMES Project⁷ is linked to the Ministry of Economic Development through the Columbian Fund for Modernization and Technologic Development of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (FOMIPYME). In Uruguay, the SMES Department of the Montevideo's City Hall has created the Course on Costs and Prices for SMES entrepreneurs, through the Internet. The SMES Department⁸, assisted by **Dednet** (Distance Educational Network), **IATE** (Argentine Institute of Entrepreneurial Techniques), and **IEVI** (Ibero-American

1. This paper is based on the research Project "ICT and poverty reduction in Latin America and the Caribbean, sponsored by IDRC. It was coordinated by Susana Finquelievich. The researchers Silvia Lago Martínez and Néstor Correa, and the assistants Alejandra Jara and Ariel Vercelli have participated in it.

2. http://www.mintrab.gob.cl/interiores/pro_empleo.html

3. http://www.cfired.org.ar/esp2/indices/f_1.htm

4. <http://www.sitioempresa.cl/>

5. www.sitioempresa.cl

6. <http://www.agenda.gov.co/online/articulos/26/>

7. <http://www.agenda.gov.co/online/articulos/28/>

8. <http://www.montevideo.gub.uy/pymes/capacita.htm>



Institute of Virtual Studies) has implemented the course's first edition in 2002.

Community Development, and Food Plans

Community Development, and food plans and programs are numerous in LAC countries, since poverty and unemployment have risen dramatically. However, these plans only use ICT to manage social assistance. In Brazil, The Extraordinary Ministry for Food Security and Fight to Hunger has implemented the Zero Hungry Program⁹ (Hambre Cero): a policy for food security created by more than 100 specialists, academics y representatives of civil society. The Ministry of Education has implemented el School grant Program (Programa Beca Escuela¹⁰) in order to stop school desertion in basic education, providing funds to incentive families to send their children to school. The Program provides subsidies to poor families with young children, through a magnetic card, also used by the Zero Hungry Program. This card is the only electronic device ever known by the Program's beneficiaries. ICT are not used otherwise that for administrative purposes.

However, Brazil has implemented an outstanding initiative: The Ministry of Social Welfare has created the Articulated Network for Social Assistance Information¹¹, an Internet-supported tool oriented to strengthen a new social decentralized and participative assistance system. For the first time ever it is possible to gather in the same place all the data about social assistance in the country. All the social and demographic indicators in Brazil's status, cities and regions can be consulted there. Besides providing information about the social actions funded by the National Social Assistance Fund, the Portal features the initiatives implemented by other governmental institutions, and civil society organizations. This Portal is meant to become the central spine of the fight against Brazil's poverty and social exclusion. All the organizations and individuals who are interested in participating of the Articulated Network for Social Assistance Information can participate, in order to facilitate access to data, and to encourage support tools for social assistance. At present, the Portal is accessible only for the Ministry's internal users, trough an Intranet.

In Chile, the Fund for Solidarity and Social Investment (FOSIS)¹², is a public decentralized service, which funds plans, programs, projects and special activities related to social development. These initiatives must solve income problems, and/or help individuals to develop actions and abilities allowing them to overcome their poverty. The community has access to this

information though FOSIS portal, which also displays examples of best practices.

In México, the programs oriented to fight poverty and encourage social development depend from the Social Development Secretariat (SEDESOL)¹³, though it's National Development Plan. The Plan's mission is to conceive and coordinate national solidarity policies. SEDESOL coordinates ten Programs. Neither of them is directly ICT-based, with the exception of the Institutional Training and Strengthening Program¹⁴. It uses ICTs for training and distance education; it also provides economic support for initiatives on training and social organization coming from civil society organizations. SEDESOL provides information, consulting, and management of productive and social projects, free access to the Documentary Center, and to the INDESOL information System for Social Organizations.

Health and ICT

The **health** sector has produced interesting albeit not quite developed initiatives. In Brazil, the Ministry of Health has created the National Health Card¹⁵, which links the procedures that have taken place in the frame of the Health System (SUS). User, health professionals, and medicine unit's registries and data banks have been built. SUS users and professionals receive a National Identification Number. The National Health Card system includes a telecommunications and informatics infrastructure, which captures, stocks and distributes the data about the provided services. Specific softwares allow collecting the necessary information about the provided health services, allowing the system to enlarge and improve the user's access to them. The Project Intend. To build data bases with clinic histories; immediate identification of the user, to make services faster; enlargement and improvement of the populations access to medication; control over medication purchases; integration of information systems; revision of costs financing and rationalization criteria; monitoring and control of health services systems; and human resources management.

In Cuba, most social services using UICT are concentrated in the health area. Infomed¹⁶ is an integrated telematic network off access and management of information. It is ICT supported, and it is oriented to improve medical attention, training, research, and health management. It was created in 1992 to develop ICT supported academia networks to have access to all the information related to medical sciences. Infomed receives strong support from the Cuban Government, PNUD, and the Pan American Health Organization. The Cuban National Health System has an

9. <http://www.fomezero.gov.br/>

10. <http://www.mec.gov.br/bolsaescola/default.asp>

11. <http://www.assistenciasocial.gov.br/optimalview/optimalview.urd/portal.show>

12. <http://www.fosis.cl/Portal.asp>

13. <http://www.sedesol.gob.mx/index/main.htm>

14. <http://www.sedesol.gob.mx/programas/capacitacion.htm>

15. <http://www.saude.gov.br/cartao/>

information and communication infrastructure which links all the health institutions, professionals, and technicians, among themselves, and with the community. In its pilot phase, the Programa introduced the use of WebTV to facilitate access to the network to family physicians, using televisions to connect to the network through Websites services.

ICT sub utilization

The identified national policies oriented to sustainable development and poverty decrease are far from encouraging the communities' empowerment. On the contrary, they work only on conjuncture problems: famines, floods, and natural disasters. These policies are piecemeal, disperse, and fragmented. Most of the initiatives are still far from evolving towards structural, permanent, and efficient policies. Community development policies - marked by an assistance viewpoint - , as well as, employment policies - which do not train labor force on IS tools - contribute to deepen the fragmentation of policies and programs addressed to poverty decrease. Even if most LAC countries have or obtain financial resources for their social assistance plans, as well as infrastructure networks to facilitate the populations access to the Internet (e.g. Community Technological Centers in Argentina), these resources are generally not used to train the population in ICT use and appropriation.

This tendency is also to be observed in the lack of articulation, both in employment policies, and in community development policies, with policies and strategies regarding SMES development, as basic sources of employment, technological modernization, and production reorganization. In LAC countries there is an acute disarticulation between job generation, community development and food programs, and SMES development and promotion.

In order to implement this articulation, the use of ICT and IS tools becomes necessary. However, in general, only a few of the identified strategies, policies, plans, and programs considers the ICT potentials to reach these goal. They use ICT for administrative tasks, but they have not planned to use technologies to articulate the instances mentioned above. The design of policies which incorporate IS tools as effective weapons to fight poverty are evidently the next phase to be reached. This is more visible in the health sector. Promising initiatives regarding the use of UICT I public health are found in LAC, mainly in Brazil and Cuba, but in general, national policies do not consider ICT as valuable tools to improve public health.

Most of the initiatives using IS tools for community development in LAC countries come, not from National State programs, but from civil society organizations.

16. www.infomed.cu
<http://www.infomed.sld.cu/>

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Ideas to rethink connectivity in rural areas

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1. Letter to Aunt Ofelia / Ricardo Gomez and Benjamin Casariego. Bogota: IDRC, RAICES MAGICAS and ITDG, 2002. pg. 12. <http://www.idrc.ca/pan/ricardo/publications/ofelia.htm>

2. <http://www.itu.int/itu-news/issue/2002/05/rationale.html>

3. <http://www.lincos.net/>

4. <http://www.sdhp.undp.org/it4dev/stories/malaysia.html>

5. <http://www.digitalopportunity.org/cgi-bin/index.cgi?root=282&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww%2Eepropo%2Ecom%2Fnews%2Ffar0206%2Easp%235>

6. <http://www.idrc.ca/lacro/docs/conferencias/pan9.html>

7. <http://www.infocentro.gov.ve/index.php>

8. http://www.compartel.gov.co/contenido/afu_basptape=147&afdb=138

9. <http://www.mwebafrica.com/hub/ict/> y <http://www.siemens.co.za/index.jsp>

10. <http://www.huascarán.gob.pe/>

“Markets, wars and products globalize, as well as the impacts on the environment and the circulation of ideas. Nevertheless, for the great majority of people the sense of their life continues to be what they have around, it’s local reality. ICT’s make more easy to be in contact with the rest of the world, but this only has sense for human development if it turns in concrete results in people’s immediate surroundings.”¹

ITDG, established by Schumacher in the United Kingdom, has the mission to investigate and to scatter technologies that directly respond to the necessities of the most isolated and impoverished populations of the world, under the motto. *“To learn what people do and to help them to do it better”*.

Applying the previous statement to our work in information and communication technologies –ICT– and specifically to the subject of rural connectivity, would take us to affirm: *learn how people communicate to help them do it better*. ICT and particularly Internet have opened us a new scene of work, where local and global are combined and where we must learn of what has already been done to do it better.

With preoccupation we notice that in universal access national programs there is a proclivity to prioritize the connection **towards the global thing** and not as much **the local one**. In words of Emilio, the character of “Letter to Aunt Ofelia, we would say, *“We know many people and organizations that are greatly connected to the virtual world, but they do not know their neighbors or they do not make any activity with other similar organizations in their same city.”*

This article will focus in proposing ideas to rethink the universal access scheme that is being implemented in Peru and several countries of Latin America; and it is also an invitation to work together on a new paradigm of development of rural telecommunications that prioritize collective interests and local communication needs, and that, fortifying local economies, connects to the world through quality telecommunications services, at reasonable costs in tune with us-

er’s communicational needs, and what is more audacious but liberating, managed by themselves.

Nowadays connectivity

The interest of Governments to provide *Universal Access* to rural areas and marginal populations has given rise to the appearance of *Universal Access* national plans that look forward to put within the reach of citizens, a telecommunications service to a reasonable distance from its place of residence, even in its own residence.

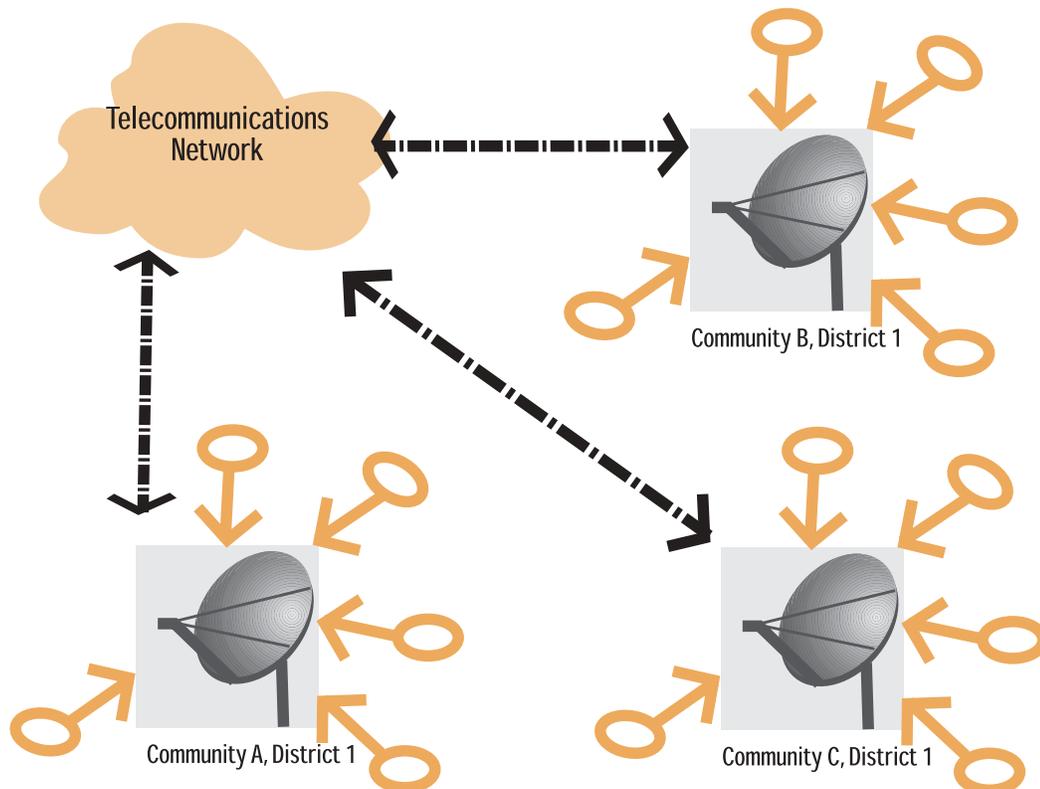
The materialization of this concept has progressed in time, so we have that from the simple installation of public telephones in remote areas we have passed to the promotion of Telecentres or Communitarian Multipurposes Centres, as the ITU and UNESCO have agreed to call them².

Different connectivity models with different financing mechanisms of connectivity and with different participation of the private and public sector have been developed. Along with technological evolution we have also advanced on the models to manage infrastructure at local level with different level participation of local actors: “containers”, LINCOS³, *Mobile Internet Units* promoted by the PNUD in Malaysia⁴, improved telephone cabins in India⁵, or the Communitarian Multipurpose Centers extended everywhere⁶.

Different models are formed according to how extensive is understood the concept of “universal access” and according to the financial capacity of the programs that support it. The Venezuelan Infocentres give free access to the Internet⁷; COMPARTEL Centers operate with commercial rates from an initial subsidy for the installation of the infrastructure⁸.

Associated to these models of connectivity we find all the business models that we can imagine. From the commercial ones promoted by SIEMENS in Africa⁹, mixed initiatives like the one proposed in its origins by the Huascarán Plan in Peru¹⁰ where the State provides the infrastructure and users pay for the use of the service, till the already mentioned Venezuelan case of connectivity subsidy through a tax that will also allow investment in science and technology in that country.

All these initiatives understand universal access in



half of its conception: they focus on how to connect the global thing to the local one, but it forgets how important it is to promote the connection of the local... it is in this way where we began to imagine the new scheme of connectivity for rural areas.

The paradigm which supports the present models of connectivity and universal access deduces that each new point connected to the network has a scope of influence that can make use of the facilities installed there. Due to the cost of the infrastructure, parameters are settled down to determine where the infrastructure will be installed: towns with more than 500 inhabitants or only district capitals, etc.

Each point of the network serves a surrounding target population and that must approach the Communitarian Center to use the services that the network offers. In most of cases, in Peru the user will find a satellite telephone with which he will be able to communicate outside his community. Thus, no matter how near the communication is, this one always will first leave to the satellite and will come down to look for its destiny in - very probably - a neighboring town.

On the base of our experience we can affirm that most of people make local calls, this means, inside its own district, province and department. Next are the national calls to near destinies, that is to neighboring departments or with which the rural population has direct contact, and very behind are the more distant

11. <http://www.uib.colnodo.apc.org/>

12. http://www.infodes.org.pe/A_Chilala/pag_principal.htm and <http://www.comunica.org>

national and international communications.

Several projects have tried to move forward in the provision of local content from the infrastructure implanted by the projects that follow the connectivity scheme described before. We have communitarian web projects, services for the creation of Web pages, electronic commerce, etc. The evaluation on the impact of those initiatives is still pending, but we can anticipate that the consumption of those contents/services is made by people from outside of the community.

We do not know examples of farmers accessing to their Web pages to find out the price of the potato in its market, because they already have walked to the town and have found out it directly. Those applications have more relevance for the urban popular or peri-urban scope than for the rural scope, as it is demonstrated in the experience of the Suburban Informative Units at Colombia¹¹.

We have found success in the rural scope when these initiatives are combined with traditional media like radio, which is intracommunitarian. We are not going to extend in this point; you can visit the Web page of Chilala project or the work of COMMUNICA for greater details¹².

Although it is an improvement to connect rural communities that before were not connected, is insufficient if we evaluate it from the perspective of how

much it really contributes to social development.

From our experience in rural telephones¹³ the main limitations of this way to design connectivity are:

- High costs force to limit the connection points and to establish a scope of influence by connected point that in some cases arrives after the 8 hours of distance on foot. Another thing is the limitation of the bandwidth per point.
- High cost of local communication for the operator: a call from point A to point B will have to use the satellite even though they are located in the same district.
- Little use of the telephone: because of the established schedule and the required distances of displacement.
- High cost of the access to the Internet and limited additional use of this infrastructure by the few inhabitants with permanent access. For most of the settlers the only day of access to the telephone and to the Internet is the market day.
- Irrelevance of the contents published in Internet for the inhabitants of the community.
- Lack of motivation for the development of contents and its local update.
- Specialized technical service external to the community and therefore expensive and slow.
- Absence of qualification adapted to local level.

13. <http://www.infodes.org.pe/>

14. <http://wire.less.dk/?1.0>

15. <http://www.benton.org/Library/broadband/broadband-world.pdf>

16. <http://www.wired.com/news/wireless/0,1382,56663,00.html>

17. <http://www.alin.or.ke/data/technologies.htm>

18. A regional communication strategy between investigators, policy-makers and community. Lessons and bets of REDUC / Patricia Cariola. Santiago de Chile, 1994. Draft.

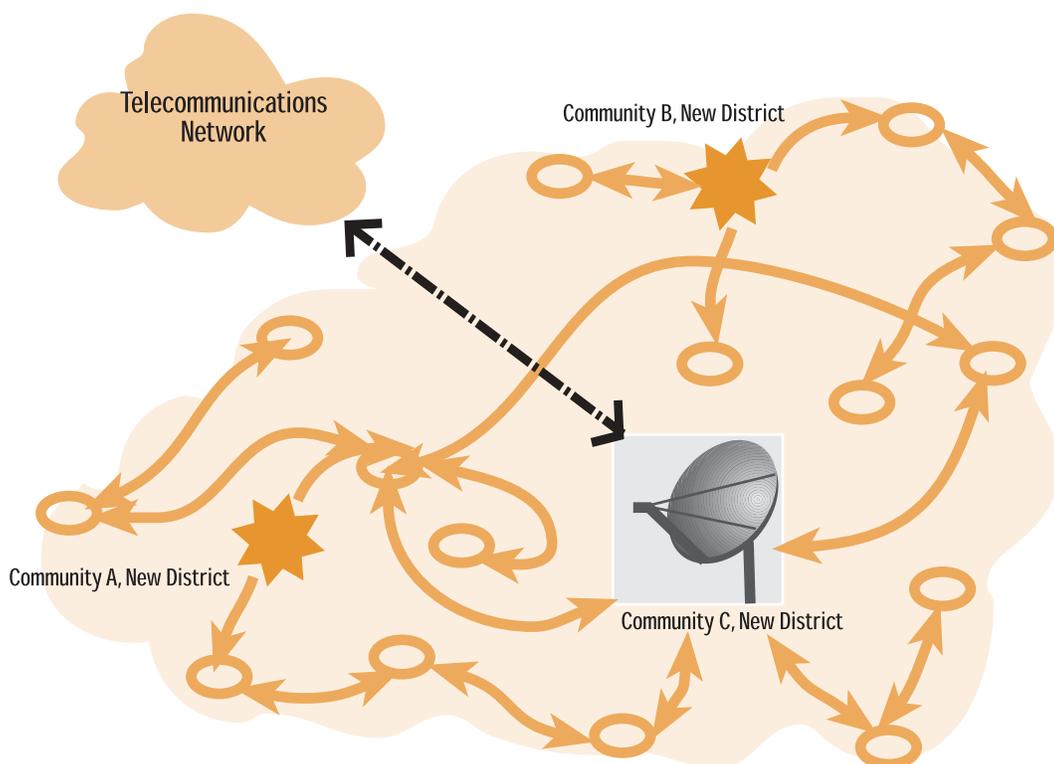
The connectivity that we want

It is necessary a new approach that emphasis in local connectivity, intracommunitarian, this is: a paradigm that answers to the way how people communicates today and to adapt the technological options to that reality.

We refer to the possibility of creating communitarian networks with broadband, in the spirit of the created by Wire.Less in Denmark¹⁴ or what the Benton Foundation¹⁵ has just published in respect to the potential of the broadband to offer better services to everyone, or the model of CDMA Local Wireless Loop that is being developed in India¹⁶.

Would it be possible to combine this with rural radio? Our bet is YES, and as an example is the investigation that ITDG is doing about the work of ALIN and World-Space Foundation in Africa for the use of satellite radios to access radial and multimedia information¹⁷.

The communication and conversation logic that a telecommunication and information system must cause and because its nature ICTs has to turn automatically any “connected” into an emitter and receiver, is lost. Also it is necessary to go on the rescue of the human dimension of those who receive and transmit information¹⁸. Our idea is that telecommunication helps to reinforce the bonds of the community; in addition, that connects it with other communities.



The characteristics of the new approach that we imagine are:

- Emphasis in local dialogue.
- Facilitates Intracommunitarian communications.
- Broadband.
- Accessible to all, at any moment.
- Technically trustworthy and of low maintenance.
- Low cost.
- It shares the connectivity with the outside.

What we propose sustains in experiences that are being implemented nowadays in the world: to create communitarian networks of broadband that connect more than one town and that, with a suitable management system, are maintained in time and are interconnected to national networks.

The communitarian network would allow settlers of the same network to communicate between them at very low rates, because it would be a local private network. As it is a broadband it would also allow them to obtain added value services, to go through local Internet or to make immediate queries to the nearer health center sending images or interacting on line with the specialist, without moving the patient.

Nevertheless, it is said that if Governments can only carry out the traditional scheme of connectivity, how they are going to commit themselves to take the next

19. <http://www.fecoteldatos.com.ar/>

20. <http://www.ntca.org>

21. <http://caj.itdg.org.pe/telefonía>

step? The answer is that the new scheme requires of the participation of the community, requires its commitment and its capacity of organization. The community must participate in unfolding the infrastructure and in the management model that assures the viability of the system.

This is not easy and this is perhaps where the greater problem of our proposal is. Without necessarily saying that that is the solution, we think that is important that the experiences of the telecommunications cooperatives in Argentina¹⁹ are studied, and also the experience of National Telecommunications Cooperative Association (NTCA)²⁰ of the United States that groups more than 500 cooperatives and small telecommunication rural companies. We need to learn of these experiences and, added to the experience of the pilot project that FITEC and ITDG in Cajamarca - Peru²¹ execute, develop a suitable management model.

If the objection is financial, we must say that the cost of the infrastructure to create the wireless communitarian networks is marginal if we compare with how much each connection point of the traditional system costs. A single LINCOS container can cost up to 150 thousand dollars, and even so it does not provide any network system for the community. Below, we list some advantages of the new proposed model.

Prevailing scheme

- High cost per point and limited bandwidth.
- High cost of local communication and little use of the telephone.
- High cost of Internet access and limited use of that service.
- Irrelevance of the contents for the inhabitants of the community published in Internet.
- Lack of motivation to develop contents and their local updating.
- Specialized technical service from outside the community and for that reason, expensive and slow.
- Absence of adequate Training at local level.

Communitarian network

- A single point per Network could allow increase the bandwidth per point and make a better use of it.
- Local communication at flat rate established by the administrator according to technical study about costs.
- Multiple communication points facilitate the bigger use of the service.
- To communicate off-net all the network shares the connection and can pay under standing rural telephone rate in the prepaid system.
- Permanent access to Internet using several devices and from different places of the network would low the costs and allow establish rate plans of Internet connection depending on particular needs.
- Variety of services would improve the possibility of economic sustainability.
- Possibilities of developing an Intranet to which the settlers can access through different devices.
- The cost of the update of the Communitarian Intranet can be included in the flat rate for accessing to the Communitarian Network.
- As the level of users and subscribers to the Network becomes massive, the service administrator is motivated to maintain the information up to date.
- Demand on local technical services for the maintenance of the Network and its access devices is generated.
- Permanently the administrator trains to increase the use of the local network.

The challenges

In order to make real this new conception of connectivity, several things still must be proven with the community but also with the State and companies from the telecommunications sector.

Technological Challenges

Geography puts obstacles to the development of wireless infrastructure and is necessary to adapt technology to this reality. Also it is necessary to advance towards the development of connectivity devices that can be reached by the families in the countryside and that these devices can be repaired in the localities through technicians trained for it. For this reason it is required for joint operations between the private sector and investigation institutes, Universities, in addition to NGO's like as ITDG are interested in supporting these technological developments. Another important subject is the development of special devices so that disabled can make effective use of communitarian networks.

Regulatory Challenges

The regulatory frame must adjust according to the new lineaments established by the Ministry of Transports and Communications and forms these communitarian networks. Policies for the promotion of ICT like signing the Agreement on Information Technology, promoted by the WTO since 1996²². Also it is necessary to adjust the quality standards of the required services for rural areas and to promote asymmetric interconnection rates.

22. http://www.wto.org/spanish/tratop_s/inftec_s/inftec_s.htm

23. http://www.usda.gov/rus/telecom/rtb/index_rt.htm

Financial Challenges

Financing of basic infrastructure will have to continue coming from FITEL, because for that was FITEL conceived, nevertheless, the development of communitarian networks or its expansion will require of greater capital. Part of that financing could directly come from the communities, but when the network requires expanding, perhaps, the administrator will need financing and some scheme of flexible credit would have to be designed, as it was created at its moment and still exists: the Rural Telephone Bank in the USA²³.

Social Challenges

This it is the most difficult challenge due to the existing institutional weakness in Peru and several countries of the Region. A connectivity scheme like that one thought requires, in the base, a solid social organization who, with a private administration, will manage to maintain the service. The building of that social weave is a long term task and is necessary to begin to take the first steps. We are now doing that...

Civil Society Access to Direct Management of Communication Media

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On May 6, 2003 and in Santiago de Chile, UNESCO and United Nations celebrated a “Seminar for the Fostering of Independent and Pluralist Communication Media” participating government, private entrepreneurs, faculty and communal media.

In its Final Declaration are concepts that are to promote the work about legislation being developed by AMARC within LAC:

“In view of the increasing importance of the commentary communication media for the democratic process in the region, to ask UNESCO that, with the collaboration of professional organizations and research institutes, study the current situation of commentary communication media in relation to legislation, frequencies, limitations of power and advertisement restrictions, in order to formulate recommendations to be considered by the governments involved”.

Likewise, it is asked to the International Program for Communication Development (IPCD) of UNESCO and donating agencies that:

“support projects for the creation of new communitarian communication media, both printed and electronics, as well as projects aimed at strengthen the current communitarian communication media, subjected to international regulations, specially those communication media addressed to women, youth, indigenous groups and the minorities”.

These resolutions were included in the Agenda unanimously approved by the presents, having as fundament the “vigorous”disapproval” to the “political and economics pressures, such as censorship, restriction for buying paper by newspapers and other professional equipment and material; licensing systems and abusive controls that limit the ability to publish or transmission...”

To many legal frameworks, obsolete and discriminatory, as current administrative practices in many of our countries, hinder the creation of new communitarian radios (frequency blocking) or prevent the per-

formance of the already installed ones (closure threat, confiscation of equipments, ban to increase power, advertisement, etc).

Facing this, AMARC-LAC poses the need to contribute to the transformation of these legal frameworks and discriminatory practices, and to defend our simple right and of Civil Society as a whole, to express and communicate through every possible media, especially through the radio frequencies.

The exclusion of the access or limiting its use is not unique to the communitarian radios, since it leaves out even non-monopolist businessmen. Therefore, it is not a question of merely to defend the interests of the radios associated to AMARC-LAC, it is mandatory to aim at the Democratization of Communications, it means, to conquer legal guarantees, fair and democratic, that assure equal opportunities in order to allow everybody to benefit from the freedom of speech.

But the task is not easy, even less for a single organization. Together with other communication networks, and human right international organizations, we have proposed the need for the Right to Communicate to be acknowledged and preserved as a fundamental human right. To reach this, the realization of international meetings to discuss these themes and, specially, some strategy to make aware the organisms of the United Nations or the American Estates Organization, would provide for the creation of international standards that protect the rights of the communitarian radios as freedom of speech y as a right to the vast majorities to access radio frequencies in a fair and equitable way.

The choosing of this setting is not casual. For AMARC-LAC the key issue is not technical or economic, but about the violation of one of the basic Human Rights, essential to consolidate our democracies.

Both worldwide and nationwide, it can be and should be advanced towards the democratization of the legal frameworks that regulate radio broadcasting, especially the regulations and its application by governments that make use of these mechanisms in order to prevent or make it difficult for the Civil Society to manage directly its own communication media.

Restrictions for the Civil Society to provide radiobroadcasting services

Reading the national legislations from diverse countries within our region related to radio broadcasting, it comes up that the possibilities of exercising the information right are not only obstructed or limited, but also clearly negated in the majority of them.

There are countries where explicit clauses are present by means of which this right is excluded to entities that were not established as commercial societies, meaning that foundations, mutual funding entities, cooperatives, trade unions, community entities, school associations and others, as it occurs in the Argentinean legislation¹.

In other cases (even having provisions for this undertakings to access the frequencies), the restrictions or obstacles are expressed through limitations to the covering of its radio stations, as it is the case of the Chilean radios of minimal cover² or in Brazil³. Or the imposition of the use of a marginal location within the spectrum thus forcing any possibility of pluralism, such as it also happens in Brazil with the authorization of a single channel in the whole country, out of the 200 potentially available. It is usual to verify that non-commercial radios are not allowed to form transitory or permanent networks, which clearly conspire against the possibility of diffusing events of national or regional transcendence, in frank discrimination with respect to other users.

On top of that there are exclusions to the possibility of obtaining genuine resources out of the reckoning of the intellectual or artistic creation being developed. This discrimination about some other juridical forms are specially established for the radios managed with social ends in almost each country (except Colombia and Venezuela, with some limitations and, recently, in Ecuador) leaving the non-commercial radio stations to the amateurism and limiting its independent capability.

It is also possible to detect the existence of auction regimes, as the only mechanism to provide radioelectric frequencies, as in Guatemala⁴ and Par-

aguay⁵, where the economical factor is not only preponderant but also unique. This procedure was –in both cases– strongly objected by the Commission for the Freedom of Speech and Human Rights Inter-American Commission⁶, assuming that economic wealth should not be the criterion for the official decisions to extend authorizations to use the spectrum in order to practice the right to inform and to be informed.

Even more serious are the legal and regulatory provisions by means of which the radio broadcasters from communitarian radio have content limitations, due to the fact that they are aimed in an exclusive way to cover specific subjects. Typical clauses on this matter are those that force to radiate educative, cultural or social themes exclusively as if they were propagandists and not social communication media. This happens in several countries within the region⁷.

Last, but not least, there are penalties even more severe than for other radiobroadcasters, such as radio-station shutdown, to infractors when for other commercial media it would just imply a warning or some admonition. The clearest evidence of this kind of situations is indicated by the differential approach to the protection against harmful interferences that fully enjoy the commercial stations but not the ones of the civil society, meaning it is a clear violation of the equality facing the law⁸.

Despite de fact that sometimes the laws, and even constitutions, acknowledge the access under equal opportunities, the specific regulations and requirement to grant permissions, include conditions that strongly limit that possibility. Such is the case of de-

1. Art. 45 Law 22.285

2. Only 1 watt, according to Law 18.168 Article 3, which allows covering just a few blocks

3. The Law N° 9612 establishes a maximum of 25 watts, but regulation (Decree 2/98) is even more restrictive: it only allows freedom of speech within a radio of 1 kilometer.

4. Decree 94/96. Arts. 61, 62 and concordant.

5. Law 642, Article 70 by requiring a single payment as access requirement, without adversely affecting the 1% annual royalty.

6. ICHR special report about Guatemala OEA/Ser.L/V/II.111 6/4/2001, issue 30 and about Paraguay OEA/Ser.L/V/II.110 doc. 52 9 March 2001, issue 53

7. For example, in Peru, (D.S. No. 013-93, Article 99), Venezuela:

8. It is the case of Brazil: Dto. Regulatory 2/98. Article 27



manding technical or economical thresholds in order to participate in awarding systems, turning them unreachable for small broadcasters⁹. Also, when it is required to hold some specific social status to be able to postulate, affecting the freedom of association¹⁰.

Together with these explicit statutory provisions of the current legal frameworks, the administrative practices at the time of application provide newer sources of discredibility and discrimination. The lack of fair mechanisms, democratic and, above all, transparent, make it possible for the radioelectric frequencies to be assigned as true gifts favoring political friends or businessmen next to the power¹¹.

Without detriment to it, some positive regulations can be highlighted as far as the access to radioelectric frequencies is concerned¹², in addition to recent legal modifications in order to introduce guidelines for applying best policies in favor to non-commercial radios such as the Ecuadorian legislation that eliminates discrimination to content and access to collect from advertising¹³, or governmental resolutions that start to partially solve this discriminatory situation, as it occurs in Paraguay¹⁴.

The Radio Broadcasting Activity

Usually, radio broadcasting has been considered second place with regard to freedom of the press and right to information, under the erroneous belief that the former is a purely commercial service or that it is concerned only to technical matters.

To AMARC, the thing is assigning to radio broadcasting the importance it deserves, assuming that we are talking about an activity through which it is exercised the right stated at the art. 13 of the American Convention on Human Rights (ACHR) and the art. 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, since the fact that it is accomplished by means of some specific technical medium, should no result in any impediment to acknowledge it as such.

Before that, from the exclusive technical point of view, there will be who refer to it as specie within the gender of radiocommunications, something that will allow reducing that activity to one of the many kinds of “telecommunications”.

This classification would not have major significance, as long as the placing of this description would provide the same status as telephony or mailing.

From the standpoint of international law, however, radiobroadcasting is the exercise of freedom of the press through a technological media other than paper. That, assuming the principles of universality stat-

ed in art. 19 of the Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and in art. 13 inc. 1 of the American Convention of Human Rights of 1969:

“Each person has the right to receive, broadcast or research into information and opinions through any media he or she might choose”.

Within the framework of the Inter-American System for Protecting Human Rights, this tessitura is highlighted by the precautions of art. 13.3 that states:

“It can not be restricted the right to express oneself through ways or indirect media, such as abusive official or private controls over paper for newspapers, radiobroadcasting frequencies, or goods and equipment used to broadcast information or any other mean aimed at preventing the communication and circulation of ideas or opinions”.

By the same token, the Inter-American Human Rights Court states that:

“The freedom of the press does not end at the theoretical acknowledgement of the right to speak or to write, but also includes inseparably, the right to use any appropriate media to broadcast the thinking and to make it available to the greatest number of addressees”¹⁵.

The Radioelectric Frequencies

It is particularly important to point out what is the nature of the valued object in the radiobroadcasting activity, and as far as the easiness or not of its access is concerned, it should be debated in order to consider it as an indicator of effectiveness in regard to human rights. They are the frequencies.

The radioelectric spectrum belongs to the Heritage of Humanity, it means, we all. The estates do not own the waves, they just administer them. For better use of a limited spectrum, the International Union for Telecommunications (IUT) distributes “sets” of frequencies to countries, to be administered by them within their territories, in order to avoid, among other things, interferences between telecommunication services.

International regulations on this subject emerge from the International Union for Telecommunications Agreements, whose specific articles, in Recommendation 2 of Resolution 69 IUT (incorporated to the Agreements of Geneva of December 1992 in Kyoto during 1994) say:

“taking in account the Human Rights Declaration of 1948, the Conference of Plenipotentiaries of the International Union for Telecommunica-

9. That is the case of Mexico due to the need to have available some pieces of equipment hard to get or the need to have technical endorsements hard to get for poor communities.

10. Venezuela Decree Number 1521. November 03, 2001. Article 2nd

11. Uruguay

12. Colombia and Venezuela: Decree 1447/95 and Decree Number 1521

13. Supreme Decree Number 256-A and later changes

14. Resolution 2002/2002, of CONATEL which opens the possibility to standardize more than 100 low potency radio stations

15. Advisory Opinion 5/85

tions, fully aware of the noble principles of free flowing of information and that the right to communicate is a basic right on the community RECOMMENDS: member states the facilitation of the free flowing of information through telecommunication services”.

Article 1 section 11 of Constitution of the IUT establishes that:

“the Union will distribute the radioelectric spectrum frequencies and will keep a record of assigned ones and of orbital positions related to the geostationary satellite orbits, in order to avoid any harmful interference among radiocommunications stations of the different countries”.

Thus, it concerns the Estates (but not necessarily the executives) just its management. Hence, when a frequency is assigned, it does not mean that a citizen's right is being given or granted over a good that is public. It ought to be the mere acknowledgment of a pre-existent right inherent to the people, for which a license or register are required, for keeping in order the access to a limited natural resource. The way that the Estate makes use or abuse of this administrative capability then becomes a key one, to allow or to avoid the access to frequencies, “Heritage of the Humanity”, to be done in a transparent, fair and equitable fashion.

Therefore, we state that, as long as finiteness of the spectrum be the single legitimate limitation related to access, its administration should be subjected from the technical point of view to IUT regulations, but from the legal and political point of views to the Agreements and Declaration of Human Rights and its authentic interpretation to the institutional entities of the established Protecting Systems. In this very matter, they should be the American Agreement, the Principles Declaration of the ICHR and the advisory opinions and sentences of the Inter-American Court.

Thus, we face a particular way of exercising the freedom of speech and it should be first – at the time of classifying- the content and not the container or the mechanisms of transmission of information.

The Inter-American Commission for Human Rights in its Principles Declaration about Freedom of Speech approved during its 108^o deliberating sessions (October 2000) says:

12. Radio and television assignments should consider democratic criteria that guarantee equal opportunities for all to its access.
13. To make use of the power of Government and the resources of the public finance; the granting of custom duties prebends; the arbitrary and discrimina-

tory granting of official advertising and official credits: the assignment of radio and television frequencies, among others, aimed to apply pressure and to punish or to reward and ranting privilege to social communicators and communication media depending of their informative standpoint, attempts against freedom of speech and ought to be expressly forbidden by law.

In similar fashion the three Relators of the Freedom of Speech of the OAE, UN and OSCE, have pronounced themselves in November 19 and 20, 2001, under: “Challenges for Freedom of Speech in the New Century”:

“Diversity promotion must be the main objective of radiobroadcasting regulation; diversity implies gender equality for radiobroadcasting and equal opportunities for all society segments to access radiobroadcasting waves”.

That same month, precisely on April 2, and in the same city of Washington, the Annual Report about the Situation of Freedom of Speech within the Americas (year 2002) that is part of the Report of the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights (ICHR) states that: “it is inadmissible the setting up of discriminatory legal frameworks that hinder the assignment of frequencies to communitarian radios”.

This report includes for the first time a chapter titled: “The exercise of freedom of speech by communitarian communication media” in which it is recommended to the Estates that: “in its role of administrators of the radioelectric spectrum waves they should assign them accordingly to democratic criteria that guarantee equal access opportunities to all”.

The Relatory says, “the so called communitarian, educative, participative, rural, insurgent, interactive, alternative and civic radios are, in many cases, and when they play within the legal framework, the ones that occupy the places left behind by the mass media; they set themselves as media who convey the expression where people belonging to the lower income sector usually have best chances to access and participation as compared to what they could have with traditional media”.

Due to its importance as “channels for exercising the freedom of speech” and due to “the increasing need of expression of the majorities and minorities lacking access to communication media, and their demand for the communication right, free expression of ideas, information flow makes prevailing the need to find out goods and services that provide them some basic conditions of dignity, security, sustenance and development”.