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***One of many tools...***

## **New Strategies considering ICT for Organisations in the field of Development Cooperation**

Von Urs Karl Egger

*Enthusiasts often regard ICT as an end in itself. However, a more pragmatic view would be advisable, one that takes these new technologies for what they actually are, namely a powerful tool for the exchange of information and communication. Organisations in development co-operation are therefore well advised to review their strategies.*

ICT have a lot of potentials such as communicating over long distances independently of time, or accessing information like for instance market prices, weather forecast, etc. Minorities are enabled to organise themselves better and make their voices heard. ICT have also a prominent role to play in the field of distance learning, which is often the only way to benefit from higher education to a great number of individuals in developing countries.

New strategies of development organisations should nonetheless be aware of the problems that ICT may create. For instance, there is a growing concern that the Digital Divide between the North and the South, between the rich and the poor, women and men, old and young people, urban and rural areas, is increasing. Other critical points such as the flood of information, or lacking information about the quality and reliability of the contents of websites, must also be taken into account. In addition, ICT have of course their limits of application. In many developing countries there is no adequate infrastructure available. People do often not know how to use ICT. Lack of money is a further crucial point. Despite the fact that ICT offer a number of undeniable advantages and possibilities, the transfer of implicit knowledge, which is often a precondition to achieve efficient and effective solutions, remains a demanding task.

What strategy should development organisations pursue in this difficult context?

Unfortunately, there exists no magic formula. Each organisation has to find the strategy that fits best its goals and philosophy. However, there are a few points that should be taken into account in any case. Firstly, the objectives must be clear (a trivial yet all too often neglected point!). Secondly, there must be a concrete demand for the use of ICT, and its benefits must be

obvious and clear. Thirdly, it is recommended to go for a multichannel strategy since the simultaneous use of different tools has proven to be of advantage in the field of communication and information. People communicate and access information in many different ways. Some prefer the telephone, others the electronic mail or personal contacts. And finally, in order to benefit to a maximum from the advantages that ICT offer it is vital to pay attention to an adequate training of their future users.

Many organisations and initiatives in the field of development co-operation have already adapted their strategies to the modern times and are focussing on ICT. Examples are multilateral initiatives like "The Global Knowledge Partnership", or non-profit organisations like "Bellanet", or websites such as "www.itrainonline.org" that supports users in utilising the new ICT. Other organisations and institutions are integrating ICT into their activities. SDC, for instance, states in their Strategy 2010: "New information technologies are - wherever appropriate and effective - integral components of development programmes".

The Skat Foundation pursues an integrated approach for the promotion of experience and knowledge exchange in development co-operation. ICT are considered as being one of many powerful tools. In addition to the advantages that the "old-fashioned" information and communication tools offer, users will benefit from the enormous possibilities of ICT. Just think of the publication of information as pdf-files on the website, or on CD ROMs. These new technology-based tools are however combined with people-oriented approaches such as training, workshops, and communities of practice.

*\*Input by Urs Karl Egger, Skat Foundation, at the MMS workshop "Ins Netz gegangen", 5 June 2002.  
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