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Advancing the policy and practice of  
capacity development in international cooperation

## Developing capacities for ICT enabled development

The *notion of Information and Communication Technology Enabled Development* is gaining more prominence in development cooperation. The notion examines how the potential of ICT can be used to attain national development goals. Capacity development must now be seen as an integral part of this thinking. The impact of ICT has already been felt in sectors such as health, education, and rural development.

Within the changing context of development cooperation, several types of ICT capacities need to be built. These can be broadly defined as follows:

- *Individual capacities*, making sure that traditional ICT skills are developed, but increasingly including other competences to enable individuals to be advocates and stakeholders in ICT development initiatives;
- *Organisational capacities*, ensuring that structures, procedures, processes, goals and visions aligned to discrete business goals relate to using as well as capitalising on ICT and extending the benefits to the intended beneficiaries;
- *Sectoral capacities*, incorporating multi-stakeholder cooperation, the development of transparent policies and the facilitation of supporting structures and resources to assist ICT-enabled development within the sector in question;
- *National capacities*, linking all the above-mentioned capacity levels into a comprehensive and cohesive ICT development framework to meet the broader goals of national development.

No one entity or intervention can tackle all the above issues on its own. We need to define the relevant capacities in their totality and work together in developing them. The theme of this issue of *Capacity.org* highlights approaches which try to take account of this wider view of ICT-enabled development. It draws on three cases and illustrates the roles played by different stakeholders in contributing to a wider strategy on ICT capacity development.

The first article written by Denise Clarke, of the IICD, looks at the capacities needed by local actors and development agencies like the IICD so as to facilitate a dialogue on ICT enabled development. The second and third articles provide complimentary viewpoints from Ghana. Kwami Ahiabenu, II looks at the role played by the private sector in Ghana in contributing to capacity development efforts at a wider national level. Jonnie Akakpo highlights the role of education and training and explains how governments can better steer the development of ICT capacity to meet development objectives. The fourth article, by Valerie Gordon, examines the role of NGOs in developing ICT capacities based on the experiences of the Jamaican Sustainable Development Network. Alongside these papers, there is the usual update on News and Events. Finally, the annotations section contains a list of additional resources for new and practical approaches to building ICT capacities in the South.

### A new face

*After four years, the ECDPM has rejuvenated the design of Capacity.org. The content of the quarterly newsletter and the website remains focussed on providing our audience with updated information and background resources related to policy and practice of capacity development in international development cooperation. Interested parties are encouraged to join in this initiative, to contribute with comments, to share their material and to provide suggestions for contributions via [cb@ecdpm.org](mailto:cb@ecdpm.org)*

# Rethinking external support for ICT-enabled development

Training is not sufficient as a means of developing ICT capacities among individuals and organisations. The experience of the International Institute of Communication and Development (IICD) suggests that any attempt to develop or enhance capacities must start from a wider development context. This is the thinking behind the IICD's new Strategic Framework, in which capacity development is one of six guiding principles. The following article discusses the implications of this rethinking for the organisation's new operational focus and the way the IICD will need to interact with its partners in the South.

The IICD's Strategic Framework for 2002-2007, entitled *'Deepening Local Ownership through Partnerships'*, is based on six guiding principles: ownership, multi-stakeholder involvement, partnerships, demand responsiveness, learning by doing and capacity development. The new strategy stresses the importance of getting local self-governing networks to address national needs and demands, as opposed to the 'micro project level' advocated by the previous strategy document. The IICD feels that, with this new focus, activities initiated and sustained by local owners will have a greater impact on real development.

The importance attached to capacity development follows from the fact that most developing country institutions require new skills and capacities to perform *ICT-enabled development activities*. The ability to develop and adapt capacities may itself be regarded as a competence that is needed to support the implementation of the other guiding principles. This article explores the concept of capacity development as an ingredient for the other guiding principles, and examines the capacities needed by both local and international actors and agencies. Several factors should be considered in this respect:

- Firstly, capacity development relates not only to the development of ICT skills and competences. A wider range of

civil-society, organisational, sectoral and national skills are required to facilitate ICT-enabled development initiatives.

- Secondly, the term 'competence' refers to abilities that are needed in an ICT-enabled development forum. It covers the knowledge, skills and attitudes that stakeholders need, and which are shaped by their roles and responsibilities.
- Thirdly, the concept of sustainability is central to the definition and scope of capacity development in an ICT-enabled development context. If we agree that sustainable development 'implies finding solutions to problems, at a local level and on a scale that people can grasp',<sup>1</sup> then local actors need to possess the requisite competences for this.
- Fourthly, it is important to assess the IICD's own in-house capacity to fulfil its mandate of 'assisting developing countries to realise locally owned sustainable development by harnessing the potential of information and communication technologies'.<sup>2</sup> As a development agency and a learning organisation, the IICD has to carefully review its own role to see what capacities it needs itself in order to adhere to its guiding principles.

## Ownership

In the countries in which the IICD is active, the concept of *'sustainability'* requires that local actors are ultimately responsible, and willing to be responsible, for the results of activities. This is defined in the IICD's strategy as *'ownership'* or, more specifically, *'local ownership'*. All too often, 'skills' are not assumed to be a problem, or it is assumed that local actors already possess the skills needed to 'own' ICT-enabled development initiatives. The results of monitoring and evaluation, however, have highlighted management, planning and marketing as being crucial skills for ownership. Local actors need to further develop their capacities so as to rationalise, communicate, define, agree on, negotiate, plan, fund, implement, evaluate and subsequently adapt needs and solutions. Real 'ownership' also implies being able to antic-



Photo: François Laureys, IICD  
*Sirandou-net, one of three telecenter projects in Mali supported by IICD. This one is situated in Kita, approximately 200 km from the capital Bamako.*

ipate possible obstacles, based on an intimate knowledge of the context, and being able to assess and negotiate any capacity development activities that local actors or external agencies may need. The emphasis here is on 'knowledge' and 'attitudes', despite the fact that there may also be other skills that stakeholders still need to acquire in order to deal with changing approaches to development cooperation.

## Multi-stakeholder Involvement and Partnerships

Before rethinking its strategy, the IICD always worked with individual local *'champions'* in order to secure multi-stakeholder participation. In the new strategy, this has given way to a 'multi-stakeholder approach', that calls for new institutional and individual skills. The concept of multiple stakeholders and the wider definition of 'actors' means that there will be stakeholders who do not know how to 'act' effectively, and recognised 'champions' who do not know how to purposefully include others. In addition to the competences already mentioned under 'ownership', local partners must also develop and build internal structures and manage the related administrative procedures so as to mobilise the - often scarce - resources they need in order to advance their own missions. Functional and knowledge-based partnerships - and not just financial partnerships - among local multiple actors are a capacity need. To ensure collaboration rather than competition, an ability to harmonise efforts, goals, and processes is also an important competence in this connection.

## Demand responsiveness

'Demand responsiveness' implies that activities must respond to local demands and offer location-specific solutions and strategies. And who better to define these than local actors? Local actors must therefore be demand-responsive. They must know how to assess the needs of a wider group of stakeholders, how to engage in multi-stakeholder approaches, how to define gaps, and how to express identified needs. Key capacities here include the ability to assess, represent, prioritise and follow through on this demand. Where best practices and lessons learnt are shared, local partners must also be able to adapt the examples and technologies to suit their own needs, building on local knowledge bases. This also implies that partners must understand the wider setting, and must themselves build the capacities they need to create processes that are representative and participatory.

## Learning by doing

'Learning by doing' implies a capacity to enhance and build on existing knowledge bases and to contribute to the lessons learned from development efforts. The critical competences here are the ability to learn from best practices, to adapt and apply them to local contexts, as well as to use both internal and external and both

formal and informal mechanisms to continuously learn, apply and move forward to achieve development goals. While local actors have a lot to say, they often dismiss their own views as being unimportant, or simply a routine part of the process. The ability to define, use, share, assess and document experiences that can be mapped back to development indicators is critical in this connection.

International organisations also need new capacities in order to operate in such a fluid environment. To a growing degree, country programme ownership is being achieved primarily through local information networks. These networks have become 'meeting points' for individuals and organisations with shared interests and expertise in sectoral ICT applications. The networks also act as platforms for:

- identifying the needs and demands of local partners for information and communication services;
- developing and exchanging relevant South-South content via local and cross-border networks;
- enabling local organisations to tap into international sources of expertise; and
- integrating the knowledge generated by the IICD and its local partners into global knowledge and policy-making networks.<sup>3</sup>

The IICD has also had to develop its own capabilities as a knowledge partner, given that the new way of working now requires different skills in order to 'co-own' rather than 'own' activities. The organisation has had to become a broker, sharer and disseminator of knowledge on issues related to ICT-enabled development. It has sought to support the development of local knowledge networks, promote the creation and sharing of local content, foster (along with other partners) discussion platforms and e-dialogues,<sup>4</sup> provide research and advisory services to a wide cross-section of local actors, and also to work with other development organisations. It has also had to change its working methods, honestly assess its own ability to provide services and added value to local partners, and build partnerships to address gaps and facilitate institutional linkages.

Enhancing and using local expertise to define and facilitate ICT-enabled development interventions; acting as an enabling partner in relation to monitoring and evaluation; and ICT capacity development by means of training have been three of the approaches used in the past to enhance local capacities. The International Advisory Board workshops that have been staged during the past two years and which have allowed partners from the South to define and suggest roles, responsibilities, interventions and issues to Northern development partners have also made actors increasingly aware of changing roles and heightened their readiness to critically evaluate the nature of development cooperation activities.

## Conclusion

Training is not sufficient as a means of developing ICT capacities among individuals and organisations. Experiences thus far suggest that any attempt to build or enhance capacities must start from a wider development perspective. Capacity development must continue to be a holistic approach consisting of several components all of which must be identified and addressed. The concept of sustainability, and the process of facilitating sustainable development without being the 'sustaining' factor, is a new competence that development organisations have had to develop. The capacity to make worthwhile contributions while 'relinquishing ownership', and to trust local partners to 'get things right' are skills that in some cases have yet to be learned. Local actors, too, have a role to play as their future capacities either as individuals or as representatives of their organisations, sectors and nations lie in their own hands. The ability to develop and adapt capacities is itself a competence that is needed to support the implementation of the other guiding principles.

1 WSIS (World Summit of Information Society). For more information, see: <http://www.itu.int/ws/is/>

2 IICD's Strategic Framework for 2002-2007, entitled 'Deepening Local Ownership through Partnerships'.

3 IICD, Strategic Framework for 2002-2007.

4 See, for example, D-Groups at [www.dgroups.org](http://www.dgroups.org)

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## The notion of ICT-enabled development

*ICT cannot act as a panacea for all development problems, but by dramatically improving communication and the exchange of information, it can create powerful social and economic networks, which in turn provide the basis for major advances in development. By enabling these new networks to collect and share local knowledge and information, ICT can provide new and more efficient methods of production, bring previously unattainable markets within the reach of local producers, improve the delivery of government services, and increase access to basic social goods and services.*

IICD Strategic Framework 2002-2007 'Deepening Local Ownership through Partnerships', January 2002

# Public-private partnerships for ICT development: the Ghanaian experience

The debate on information and communication technology (ICT) capacity development can be viewed from all sorts of different perspectives. The focus varies depending on the position one occupies, be it that of a donor or development agency, a private-sector or public-sector organisation, an NGO, or even that of an individual involved in an ICT project. The one consistent feature, however, is the need to build human capacities to make use of the technologies in question. In the context of this article, ICT capacity development is taken to refer to the acquisition and use of core skills and capabilities by individuals and organisations so as to make maximum use of ICT for sustainable national development.

There is still a great demand for ICT capacity development, especially in developing countries. Consequently, the role of the private sector as a key stakeholder in this process should be recognised and protected. Compared with the public sector, the private sector in Africa has traditionally been more exposed to the use of ICT - in terms of business and organisational support, processes and business activities. Due to these and

other factors, the private sector has had to actively pursue capacity development programmes in order to benefit from the opportunities offered by ICT. So, why not use these experiences to further capacity development among other stakeholders at a wider level?

Using the experience of ATIEC Ghana in teaming up with other stakeholders to develop ICT capacity, the following points highlight some of the lessons learned by a private-sector organisation from its work with public and non-governmental organisations.

## Partnerships with other stakeholders create win-win situations

The development of ICT capacity requires carefully planned and specifically mapped approaches that support national development goals. This requires close partnership with public-sector institutions premised on the assumption that two (or more) partners can work together to produce a higher national base of ICT skills and knowledge, and generate a better educated labour force from which both sectors can benefit. Given the low levels of technology assimilation in the public sector, the private sector is in an excellent position to stimulate interest in the effective use of ICT. New (and changing) attitudes, good examples of how the technology can be effectively used, and free and consultative advice in guiding processes and choices are all aspects that the private sector can bring to such partnerships. An example of this kind of public-private exchange is the joint development by the Ghanaian Government and AITEC Ghana of a communications policy incorporating the use of ICT.

Such partnerships are not restricted to public-sector entities, however. The experience in Ghana extends to:

- partnering with national NGOs to host technology-awareness seminars in towns outside the capital, to raise awareness of and to extend the debate on ICT for sustainable development;
- partnering with other private-sector entities to raise awareness of ICT via free workshops and seminars;

- partnering with other private and public organisations, including an international development organisation, to publish a quarterly on-line and off-line newsletter highlighting national and regional initiatives and projects, and sharing the lessons learned from these with a wider local and international community (iConnect Ghana - [www.iconnectghana.org](http://www.iconnectghana.org));
- partnering with a variety of stakeholders to form a national network and consultative group of ICT4D advocates and practitioners to 'create, identify, synthesise and disseminate information and knowledge on ICT for development', including acting as a 'conduit for capacity-building and skills development and upgrading'. (<http://www.ginks.org/>).

While all partnerships rest on the premise of shared visions or goals, the need for definition and consensus has been a recurring problem. Although motivations may of course differ, pursuing a constant dialogue by which objectives are carefully and continuously matched so as to guarantee that all parties benefit, is an important part of the process.

## Focus on people, not the technology

As with any capacity development activity, human resources are a critical success factor. Unfortunately, most capacity development initiatives as they relate to the use of ICT in Ghana are still technology-centred. If ICT is indeed a tool, i.e. a means to an end, then people must be equipped to handle it. A lesson learnt by the private sector has been that the development of ICT capacity must not be confused, but must proceed in parallel with the development of technology. The private sector has had plenty of experience in investing heavily in technology-centred approaches, only to realise that, if people skills are not taken into account, there is still a high risk that the technology will fail to deliver the goods. The need to balance the two elements, and to ensure that one maps on to the other, is also a lesson learnt from past experience, and is an aspect that private-sector organisations can bring to such partnerships.

### The Potential for Public - Private Partnerships

*Overall if done right, PPPs can stretch limited government budgets by delivering better value for each dollar spent. This is critically important for cash-strapped governments - in developed and developing countries. PPPs can also result in higher-quality services delivered in a more timely and efficient manner. These too are critical given the rapid advance of technology, the importance of good infrastructure (physical and human) to economic growth, and increased globalisation.*

*The Promise of E-Learning in Africa: The Potential for Public -Private Partnerships*  
Normal LaRocque and Michael Latham  
January 2003  
Full Report can be downloaded from:  
<http://www.businessofgovernment.org>

### Capacity development interventions must be based on valid needs

Most capacity development processes in Ghana are not informed by any valid needs assessment. This often results in a mismatch of programme objectives and skills requirements. From a private-sector point of view, it makes good business sense to start by assessing needs and then work out how to fill any gaps that have been identified. The key questions here are: what skills do people have? What do they need to learn? When do they need to learn? Translating business requirements into the individual skills that are needed to meet these requirements, while at the same time constantly evaluating and validating needs, also forms an important part of the process. Acquiring the knowledge and experience to make informed decisions about capacity development solutions and options is a skill that private-sector entities can bring to such partnerships.

### Make use of local expertise

Challenging though this is at times, better attempts must be made to find and use local expertise to support capacity development initiatives. The private sector often has a wealth of knowledge and skills that

are already adapted to the local context and culture. A greater effort should be made to transfer this expertise to the public and NGO sectors, encourage the acquisition of the necessary skills and knowledge, and thus foster local development cooperation and synergies.

### Capacity development initiatives must link back to (national) development

A cursory review of ICT capacity development in Ghana shows that most organisations (both public and private) still have no clear-cut policy or strategy. Common mistakes include failing to link the technology to development (business or otherwise) and selecting technologies that cannot be used due to inappropriate or inadequate local infrastructures. In scenarios such as these, the outputs from capacity development processes have little practical relevance. Traditionally motivated as it is by profit, the private sector has always had to ensure that there is a real linkage between profit margins and technology selection to aid the business process. The same must apply to ICT and national development, with the private sector again playing a meaningful role in the partnership.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, ICT capacity development using public-private partnerships is still on the increase in Ghana and has yielded some positive results to date. More and more private-sector entities are offering to share their experiences and participate in dialogues on national development, especially in relation to the use of ICT. At the same time, public-sector entities, NGOs and even international organisations have seen the benefits of working together with private-sector entities to achieve development goals. While there is still a need to work together more closely in defining clear-cut ICT capacity development policies and strategies within a wider national development framework, the principle of partnership has now been embraced and the opportunities for further collaboration are limitless.

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# National competences for ICT: the role of education and training

Education and training - whether formal or informal - have long been mechanisms for equipping individuals and organisations with the knowledge and skills they need for achieving certain standards of efficiency or behaviour. Both are ongoing processes that are revisited whenever new tools, products or aspirations emerge. While information and communication technology (ICT) can no longer be described as 'new', the dynamic nature of the industry, tools and supportive processes makes the acquisition of new capacities even more pressing when ICT is used in a development context. Whether referred to as 'capacity building', 'capacity enhancement' (the phrase used in the more recent literature) or 'capacity development', the process by which individuals, institutions and societies develop abilities (both individually and collectively) to perform functions, solve problems and set and achieve goals is

an important one. Education and training is therefore inextricably linked with capacity development, and the ties become even closer when national capacities need to be developed for making effective use of ICT. According to a report published by Ghana's National ICT Policy and Plan Development Committee<sup>1</sup>, the IT-related problems faced by organisations include human capacities, with poor computer skills and low acceptance levels being cited as key examples. While the Ghanaian government has admittedly embarked on several initiatives aimed at improving human capacities, this paper seeks to identify gaps that have yet to be effectively addressed.

### Assessing the current environment

In order to make a link between education and training on the one hand and capacity development on the other, a proper assess-

ment needs to be made of the educational environment within which both providers and recipients of training operate. This means looking at the available technology, instructional needs, vendors, educational goals, community needs, financial constraints, information needs, the role of government, and industry standards. Several initiatives are currently in operation, including ones taken by stakeholders from non-profit organisations<sup>2</sup>, development agencies<sup>3</sup>, the private sector and various combinations of stakeholders. While information is available on various initiatives, this information first needs to be found and then linked to a comprehensive planning framework.

### Curriculum development and building base capacities

There is still a need for curriculum development-based initiatives to meet ICT demands.



Photo: IICD 2002  
Capacity development workshop in Accra, Ghana

If national capacities are to reflect the competences of graduates of the formal education system, greater emphasis must be placed on enhancing or building those capacities within the structured formal curriculum. This revamping needs to take place at all levels - primary, secondary and tertiary - and must also include the technical and vocational training system. Additionally, the variance between university education and industry requirements must be addressed, an aspect which all too often results in a need to 're-train the trained'. To address this, tertiary and other institutions could work with groups from industry (and not just the IT industry) to define the ICT skills and knowledge that are needed to support the various sectors, with the relevant government agency playing a facilitating role in this. This would give a clearer indication of the gaps, as well as the competences that are required at a national level to make use of ICT for development purposes. The process must be an ongoing one, taking account of new ICT developments and changing national priorities based on sector needs and demands. Curriculum development should also address new modalities of learning and appropriate content delivery. Professional development for teachers is also crucial in this connection.

Linked to curriculum development is the need to build base capacities at various levels. Initially, ICT education and training was focused mainly on the tertiary level. Recognising the need to change this, the government introduced IT education at Junior Secondary School level. An adapted International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGSCE) syllabus, administered by the University of Cambridge, is currently being pursued at

this level. It is important, however, to link both curriculum development and the building of these base capacities back to needs that have been validated at a national level. There is still a yawning gap between programme content, examination papers and the real-life situation in Ghana. This

highlights the importance of adequately linking ICT education and training to individual, sectoral and national capacities and contexts.

### **Pedagogy: training the trainers**

A lack of appropriate pedagogical skills is still a problem. It is not simply a question of poor skills, but also of the unavailability of qualified trainers, lecturers, tutors and facilitators. While both pre- and in-service ICT professional development is needed, such training must reflect the physical environment in which teachers have to operate. During a recent survey at selected teacher training colleges, a tutor asked why computers should be introduced in teacher training colleges, if the schools where the trainee teachers would eventually teach were not equipped with computers anyway.

Introducing ICT into any educational context is an expansive and expensive undertaking. The government has an important role to play in facilitating this process, by recognising that the introduction of ICT is not a one-off exercise, but is a gradual and systematic process requiring time (and money) to plan, train and re-train and maintain. One notable initiative in this respect has been the collaboration between Ghana Education Services (a public-sector agency) and its development partner, DfID (Imfundo),<sup>4</sup> in exploring ways in which ICT could be used to improve the quality and impact of teacher training in addressing this need.

### **Quantity vs. quality of intermediary organisations**

ICT education is a major industry, and there has been a mushrooming of private institutions (and individuals) setting up training

schools and offering courses. These private intermediary institutions produce 'graduates' with 'internally' accepted IT certification in a range of computer (i.e. ICT-related) technical disciplines. This can lead to the advertising of computer training institutes for 'courses in MS Windows and Doors', as I observed during one of my recent visits. Better regulatory mechanisms are needed to safeguard the quality of courses and the validity of certification. While no concrete steps have been taken to resolve this problem, one idea could be for the Registrar General's Department (i.e. the registrar of companies) to work together with the National Accreditation Body (i.e. the body that inspects and grants certificates to educational and training institutions) in inspecting training facilities, validating training programmes, and checking the professional competence of instructors, training centre managers and owners.

### **Conclusion**

Whilst both funding and competent personnel are in scarce supply, the problems are not insurmountable, and the Ghanaian government has begun to address the challenges that many governments have yet to confront. An honest assessment of a country's educational system and an ability to translate the findings into existing and planned capacity development initiatives are needed if the solutions are to be realistic rather than superficial. Such an assessment needs to be comprehensive and to take account of already existing projects, as well as the wider institutional contexts.

- 1 See website at: [www.ict.gov.gh/](http://www.ict.gov.gh/)
- 2 One example of this type of initiative is that taken by Geekcorps. See the website for additional information: <http://www.geekcorps.org/default.asp?hi=113&li=115>
- 3 Several examples exist within Ghana. These include projects supported by WorldLinks (<http://www.worldbank.org/worldlinks/english/>), the IICD ([www.iicd.org](http://www.iicd.org)) and Schools OnLine ([www.schoolsonline.org](http://www.schoolsonline.org)).
- 4 For further information, see [www.imfundo.org](http://www.imfundo.org)

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# The role of civil-society organisations in ICT capacity-building

Civil-society organisations (CSOs) have become increasingly important over the past two decades as stakeholders in development activities. CSOs amplify the voices of traditionally marginalised groups, facilitate the broader participation of the public at large in the decision-making process, improve development effectiveness and sustainability, and hold governments and policy-makers publicly accountable. It is in this context that I wish to examine the role played by the Jamaica Sustainable Development Network Ltd. (JSDN) in building ICT capacities.

Initiated as a UNDP programme in 1998, the JSDN is an example of a CSO operating at a national level, with several member organisations operating either locally or at a community level. Institutionalised as a not-for-profit NGO in October 2002, the Network receives continued support from the UNDP and the government of Jamaica. Its mandate is to use ICT 'to enhance citizens' capacity to access, understand, distribute and utilise information, to enable them to sustain their livelihoods and socio-cultural values while conserving their natural environment.'<sup>1</sup> It was clear from the start that, in order to effectively fulfil the national development agenda, the JSDN had to harness the new technologies, create the capacities to use them, and simultaneously prove its own effectiveness by using them effectively.

## Building community ICT capacities

One of the JSDN's major achievements to date has been to secure wider access through a network of community telecentres. This network aims to build the capacity to use the technology as well as to develop content that is relevant to national issues. These focal points were established in partnership with NGOs and CSOs already working on community development and environmental management issues. They followed from meetings with community stakeholders at which criteria were formulated for organisational mandates, capacity and constituency. Five of the six rural locations are managed by partnering NGOs, while the sixth is managed by a rural

branch library which is central to several community-based activities in its locale.

In reviewing the Network's achievements to date and in forecasting its potential for contributing to the achievement of national goals, it is important to bear in mind a number of factors that allow it to act as a facilitating mechanism at the interface between public-sector agencies and community-based organisations.

## Public-sector partnerships

Thanks to the establishment of these community focal points, the JSDN can enter into a meaningful dialogue on partnering opportunities with government bodies and private-sector agencies. Several projects have been undertaken that have focused on ICT capacity-building in support of national development goals:

- Linkages with the Social Development Commission (SDC), the government agency responsible for community development, have been forged with a view to establishing community information networks at focal points and other locations. The key skills the Network is seeking to build in this connection are information collection and website development and maintenance.
- A partnership with the community website<sup>2</sup> of the most widely circulated national newspaper has been established to give greater online prominence to community-level activities. With its wide outreach, the website is seen as an excellent means of encouraging participation in community development activities.
- An alliance has been created with the Postal Corporation of Jamaica Ltd., the public-sector agency within the Ministry of Commerce, Science and Technology that is responsible for post and telecommunication services.<sup>3</sup> This strategic partnership has allowed the Network to use facilities owned by the Corporation, in exchange for which the Network provides a range of basic and intermediate-level ICT training for all categories of staff. This is being mapped

onto national plans to further expand the postal offices capacity to offer a range of e-government services.

- A partnership with Local Government (Parish) Development Committees is now being shaped. The initial six rural points will provide a platform through which parish councils can disseminate information, provide services and interact with communities and citizens. The ultimate objective is to have this service available in all parishes.
- Discussions are presently underway with the Forestry Department and the National Environmental Protection Agency about the feasibility of establishing a development information system, using a geographical information system and offering community-level detail, that can provide information on crops, soil suitability and natural resource features, as well as social characteristics and project and planning interventions.

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*Digital Dividend or Digital Divide: Guidelines for Development Practitioners.* The paper is the result of a research project that examines the role of ICTs as a part of global development strategies. Country case studies in the research included Malaysia and Indonesia (<http://www.fdc.org.au/files/guidelines.pdf>)

**Youth Development Trust, 2003. Youth, Entrepreneurship and ICT Training and Research Project.** The purpose of the 'ICT, Youth Entrepreneurship and Job Creation' project is to develop a research methodology to track the progress of youth trained in ICT skills through a range of different training models. The findings of this report give interesting insights on models and approaches for addressing capacity building issues in ICTs. <http://www.ydt.co.za/Data%20Report.htm>

**OECD, 2003. Seizing the Benefits of ICTs in a Digital Economy.** This recently published report examines the impact of ICTs on economic performance using new and more recent data to assess the degree to which the findings that appeared valid at the end of 2000 remain intact. <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/43/42/2507572.pdf>

## Conclusion

The Network has gained some invaluable insights in working together with public-sector agencies to develop ICT capacities at a community level. These include the following:

- In order to be an effective broker, the JSDN must maintain credibility with the public sector by providing information and knowledge services that will assist in achieving certain development goals, i.e. it must facilitate a top-down mechanism. On the other hand, the Network must also maintain an apolitical stance as it seeks to introduce ICT as a tool for community development and advocacy, i.e. it must use a bottom-up approach. Within this context, the JSDN's capacities must also be continuously assessed as a part of its strategic positioning.
- To develop effective business models that are capable of sustaining ICT capacity-building and other initiatives, partnerships with the public and other sectors provide a potential avenue for real sustainability and for reducing dependency on international sources of funding.
- As an NGO, the JSDN must continue to support ICT capacity-building in support of development. It must make use of its closeness and affinity with community-based organisations to enable citizens to lobby, take decisions and take action on their own behalf.

- Mechanisms need to be established to involve young people in the work of CSOs in general, and in community-based CSOs in particular. Moreover, the natural affinity many young people have for ICT can be an effective lever in engaging their interest and securing their participation in development activities. Public-sector bodies such as the Ministry of Education should explore possible ways of doing this.
- It is important to establish and maintain national networks in order to facilitate information and lesson-sharing among members, and to enable inputs from the field to inform and influence the process of policy-making at national and local levels. The JSDN has a vital role to play in this context.
- Finally, the JSDN must keep abreast of the technology and capitalise on opportunities to raise cost-effectiveness and relevance in its services to its constituencies.

- 1 JSDN. <http://www.jsdn.org.jm/>
- 2 <http://www.go-localjamaica.com>
- 3 Postal Cooperation of Jamaica. See <http://www.jamaicapost.gov.jm/>

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Photo: Julie Ferguson, IICD Entrepreneurship and ICTs: The Art of Making Things Happen. IICD and Balancing Act one-day workshop in Tanzania aimed at existing and potential entrepreneurs in the Internet, telecoms and computing areas.

## NEWS AND EVENTS

- **August 25-29, 2003. Fifth Annual African Computing and Telecommunications Summit, Abuja, Nigeria: Mobilising ICT Applications and Projects for Effective National and Regional Development.** <http://www.aitecafrica.com/act2003/default.php> (<http://www.fdc.org.au/files/guidelines.pdf>)
- **December 10-12, 2003. WSIS (The World Summit on the Information Society Geneva (Switzerland)).** For information, preparatory and related meetings, as well as updates see: <http://www.itu.int>
- **For additional news on upcoming ICT events and activities see:** <http://www.bellanet.org>

The European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) launched Capacity.org as a tool for development researchers, practitioners and decision-makers. As a website and a newsletter, Capacity.org combines information on capacity development policy and practice within international development cooperation with debate on policy issues and practical experiences. It acts as a platform for dialogue by providing a channel for informed review and synthesis of the complex issues faced by development practitioners and policy-makers.

Focusing on both the 'why' and the 'how' of capacity development, Capacity.org seeks to unravel the complexity of ideas and practices underpinning the term 'capacity development'. To achieve this, the editors particularly encourage the exchange of perspectives

and experiences from the South, so as to ensure that discussions are rooted in reality.

Our aim is to make Capacity.org a joint effort, mobilising and sharing a range of capacities and expertise. Interested individuals and organisations can help make Capacity.org an effective communication tool for people seeking to alleviate poverty through capacity development by contributing information, lessons, ideas, opinions and feedback. Any offers of co-finance or for linking up with related initiatives are very welcome.

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

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