

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

MAKING THE FUTURE

IDRC was one of the earliest development agencies to embrace information and communication technologies (ICTs) as powerful tools for reducing poverty, for combating HIV/AIDS, and for fostering good governance. In fact, in some countries — such as Mongolia — the first Internet service providers were established with IDRC support. By way of its pioneering programs, IDRC and its research partners have amassed an abundance of practical knowledge to help realize the promise that these technologies offer to people in the developing world.

IDRC has been promoting ICTs for over a decade, and its efforts have produced real results. And just as the Internet will continue to grow and to introduce innovative applications, IDRC will continue to support the knowledge-seeking needed to ensure that these innovations advance human development. The research partners and the “knowledge networks” that IDRC has nurtured remain at the cutting edge of these discoveries, their efforts driven by the real and urgent needs of their communities.

This brochure describes a small sample of the many ground-breaking ICT projects that IDRC has supported in recent years.



Maureen O'Neil
President, IDRC

BALANCING WORK AND HOME

Chong Sheau Ching is a well-educated ICT consultant based in Malaysia. Despite her years of learning and experience, she found it challenging to be a single mother working from home to support her family. Funding from IDRC and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) contributed to the creation of eHomemakers, a virtual network that supports other Southeast Asian women who wish to balance work and domestic life. This e-community of more than 10 000 members promotes self-help, entrepreneurial development, teleworking, and “small office, home office” businesses based on the use of ICTs, all with the goal of increasing women’s social and economic self-reliance. Says Chong Sheau Ching, “Working@ home for women in any situation is feasible... Canadians, and IDRC, have played a vital role to help the growth of e-homemakers.”

www.ehomemakers.net



IDRC: Y. Beaulieu

HEALTH EDUCATION FOR YOUTH, BY YOUTH

Many young people feel awkward discussing sensitive topics like sexuality and the prevention of HIV/AIDS. In Lima, Peru, an innovative participatory program called Punto J makes it easier for adolescents and youth to share knowledge about such issues.

The Punto J strategy makes creative use of the Internet and of the confidentiality it offers to provide information and guidance to youth. Much of this advice is delivered peer-to-peer, by young volunteer counsellors who have taken leadership and awareness training in HIV/AIDS prevention as well as in ICTs.

Punto J is sponsored by IDRC and Save the Children, among other donors. Says coordinator Alina Anglas Cárpena: “Punto J gives young people a reference point where they can voice their concerns, questions, and doubts in a climate of trust.”

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Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) is one of the world's leading institutions in the generation and application of new knowledge to meet the challenges of international development. For more than 35 years, IDRC has worked in close collaboration with researchers from the developing world in their search for the means to build healthier, more equitable, and more prosperous societies.

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From Peru and elsewhere in Latin America and abroad, thousands of Web users visit the site each month. Supplementing its Internet content, Punto J pursues an inventive communication strategy employing posters, brochures, and leaflets, as well as “edu-entertainment,” games, CDs, and videos, all designed to be attractive, engaging, and accessible. www.puntoj.com.pe

DANGER SIGNALS

On December 26, 2004, as the tsunami advanced across the Indian Ocean, some people were able to monitor the progress of the deadly wave by using modern communication technologies — but tragically they had no means to warn the communities standing in harm’s way. Hundreds of thousands died, and the physical damage was cataclysmic.

In Nallavadu, a village near Pondicherry, India, the story was different. According to the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), a Nallavadu native who was living in distant Singapore heard news reports of the earthquake and tsunami. Worried about the safety of his relatives back home, he telephoned to warn them to flee

BETTER RULES MAKE BETTER CONNECTIONS

One irony of the world’s rapidly changing telecommunications sector is that some of the least-developed regions benefit from advanced ICT systems. In Africa, for instance, where terrestrial communications infrastructure remains inadequate, relatively cheap satellite-based technologies using Very Small Aperture Terminal (VSAT) networks have allowed many people to access low-cost Internet and mobile telephone services. Many people now have cheaper and easier access to markets, business opportunities, credit, medical information, and distance learning. IDRC has encouraged this heartening trend by joining with other donors to fund research and activities to promote the legislative reform and deregulation that enable VSAT.

the shore immediately, and to shout to others to follow.

This alert reached a couple of quick-thinking villagers who broke down the doors of the community centre. Using the centre’s loudspeakers and siren, they warned the entire village. Everyone ran, and in the end — despite the destruction of 150 Nallavadu houses and 200 fishing boats — not a single human life was lost.

That community centre was run by the IDRC-supported MSSRF. The villagers’ incredible escape convinced IDRC and its research partners of the importance of the “last mile” in broadcasting danger signals.

Since the tsunami, IDRC has been funding a large research effort in

Sri Lanka — another country hard-hit by the wave — to learn how national disaster warning systems can be more effective.

IDRC’s partner is LIRNEasia, a non-profit organization that aims to improve the lives of Asia’s people by using ICTs. In collaboration with other local partners, LIRNEasia is evaluating the suitability of different options for last-mile warning media. Early results suggest that the most effective solutions are likely to be, in this order: addressable satellite radio; Java-enabled mobile phones; a specially developed Remote Alarm Device bearing a radio, siren, and light; and CDMA mobile phones.

www.lirneasia.net

NEW LINKS FOR E-DEMOCRACY

E-government (“electronic government”) refers to the use of ICTs by official agencies to communicate with citizens, employees, businesses, and other arms of the state. Among its benefits are more efficient delivery of services, convenience for the public, and enhanced engagement in democratic processes, for example, by exploiting systems that make it easier for people to vote. Some studies suggest as well that the transparency, accountability, and speed of e-government can help discourage corruption.

To foster e-government in developing countries, IDRC and the Organization of American States

have created and supported the Network of e-Government Leaders of Latin America and the Caribbean (known as RedGEALC). This group comprises representatives of some three dozen countries who exchange expertise and knowledge about applying ICT solutions to areas such as immigration, education, procurement, taxation, and social security.

RedGEALC’s emphasis on shared efforts and horizontal cooperation is reflected in the initiative to automate customs services in the Caribbean. When Jamaica’s 2003 modernization of its own services drew the admiration of neighbouring countries, Jamaica donated its software so that these countries could make their own public sectors more efficient. These governments

have used seed funding from IDRC to launch pilot projects to transfer and adapt Jamaica’s e-solution. The experience has been recorded and documented so that lessons learned from the project can be disseminated elsewhere.

www.redgealc.net



Nadia El-Awady

IDRC supports e-government not just in Latin America and the Caribbean. In Fez, Morocco, for example, IDRC has funded a prize-winning project to digitize the issuing of birth certificates and other official documents, thus greatly improving the efficiency of government services to citizens.