



## **Evaluation Report**

Access for all: Equal  
Opportunities in  
Cyberspace

**Case study on the use of  
ICT for networking  
activities, Ecuador**

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**Abril, 2004**

## INTRODUCTION

This consultancy report is based on interviews with the technical teams of six organizations in Ecuador. These organizations are very different in nature, target populations and topics of dedication. However, they share the common denominator of using ICT applications to carry out activities for achieving their objectives. Such denominator responds to the interest of HIVOS, and this is the reason for choosing them as the objective organizations for the evaluation of HIVOS policy and program *Access for all: equal opportunities in cyberspace*.

By using an interview guide, all organizations were visited for about half a day. In most cases, a brief presentation of the project initiated the interview and members of the technical team of each organization interacted with the consultant. In some cases, additional written information was made available, but the brief description of each case and the answer to the guide questions are the interpretation of the consultant.

It is important to point out that the material made available on the organizations and HIVOS contribution to them through its program was rather limited. For this reason it was often necessary to talk about the HIVOS involvement in each organization during the interview. This is acknowledged in the description of some of the organizations, but the intention is to provide a better context in which each case can be analyzed.

This report is organized in cases for each organization visited. A synthesis of goals or objectives of each organization and the way it has been structured serves as the introduction of the case. In the second part, all questions suggested in the terms of reference of this consultancy are answered. In a different section, a brief analysis of each case is presented. This analysis focuses on the utilization and potential of the organization to improve the use of ICT applications. The last section of this report is devoted to an overall analysis of the institutions visited looking at their networking activity by the strategic use of ICT and what the impact of this use has been up to now.

## **EQUIDAD**

The Project that was funded by HIVOS to this ONG consists of a grant (USD 24,000) for institutional building. The one-year project aimed two objectives: i) to improve the institution's organic system, which means redefining the internal statutes, to improve the internal control system as well as the programming capacity to provide services to the target population; ii) technical backstopping on strategic programmatic planning and program management.

The relationship of this grant with ICT takes place through the programmatic planning which is closely related to the policy incidence program, which is very active and important in EQUIDAD.

EQUIDAD is focused on providing general and specialized information on issues related to human rights, equity, health and prevention of HIV and a number of topics for homosexuals. These services are complemented with some health and operation guides that are delivered to the target population. At the same time, EQUIDAD plays a role as a political activist organization which works in two ways: as an information channel to the target group and as member of a number of local and regional networks sharing similar objectives. The political activism is a very important activity in the programmatic structure of EQUIDAD. This activity is the main reason for EQUIDAD to interact with local and regional networks, for which it uses ICT applications (e-mail and Internet).

EQUIDAD has a close relationship with and is a formal member of ASICAL (Latin American Association for Citizenship and Integral Health), given that at the present, both organizations have the same director, and both have received a grant from HIVOS. ASICAL, being a thematic network, has incorporated a component on knowledge management that has been, somehow, pursued by EQUIDAD, which has created a documentation center, quite in line with ASICAL knowledge management component.

What follows are the answers to the questions that were used as an interview guide. The interview, in this particular case, took place at EQUIDAD's headquarters with Orlando Montoya, Efrain Soria and Alex Espinoza.

1. Which uses do network partners make of ICT to improve their networking activity? Since EQUIDAD is providing services through ICT applications, partners and users most have access and use the same instruments. All local and regional networks that EQUIDAD is associated with use ICT applications to provide information and knowledge to individuals and institutions associated with them.

2. In which way has HIVOS supported this application of ICT? Although the HIVOS grant to EQUIDAD is mainly directed towards institutional building, the strategic planning and the program management components do relate the grant

to the application of ICT. The reason is that most activities of EQUIDAD are linked to ICT, either as receiver of knowledge and information from all networks it is associated with, or as a provider of information to the target group, which consists of individuals and institutions reached through ICT means.

3. In which way did different ICT applications improve the effectiveness of the network? The technical team is aware that the change from e-mail to the web has represented a major change that has enabled EQUIDAD to provide services and receive information and knowledge they could have not accessed otherwise. The possibility of downloading information and uploading it into their web site has changed the capacity to provide the target group with documents impossible to be handled through e-mail or through conventional information channels. Did they increase the impact of the network?

4. Which ICT applications failed to achieve the expected results (and for which reasons)? The technical team does not perceive any failure with ICT applications. They are aware that they could make a better use of ICT with better training and access to the system.

5. What have been the obstacles for partner organizations to make a full use of ICT applications? Being a small organization EQUIDAD has limitations to fully use the ICT. Those limitations are related to the capacity for establishing a local network in order to get a better advantage of ICT and to feed the documentation center in an easier way. The technical team also believes that training is required in order to take advantage of all www possibilities and to handle in full available platforms for knowledge management operations.

6. What are the criteria that network partners use to evaluate the success of their activity? Up to now no evaluation has taken place. This may be due to the action-oriented nature of most networks in which EQUIDAD is involved. However, ASICAL is scheduled to design an evaluation methodology that would have to be widely discussed among its members. Evaluation criteria should go beyond the statistics of utilization of communication instruments. It is expected that members will be directly involved in evaluating that network by answering and grading the services and benefits they receive from the network.

7. What kind of additional information was made available through the applications of ICT, and how was the additional information used by network partners? EQUIDAD claims that access to the information and a way to disseminate such information is what was made available to them. In this sense, applications of ICT meant for EQUIDAD the capacity to handle all information in a way they had not been able to provide services to the target group.

8. How did the ICT applications increase the influence/effectiveness of the network activities? The efficiency change and the capacity to reach more persons and institutions have been evident to EQUIDAD. The volume of

information and the increase in the flow velocity are remarkable in the opinion of EQUIDAD. Because of these changes, EQUIDAD undertook the construction of the documentation center and is moving towards the implementation of a knowledge system, including the ICT platform needed to operate such system

9. Do network partners use ICT to interact more closely in national, regional (Latin American) or international (global) networks? EQUIDAD interacts with several networks both at national and regional levels. Most activities dealing with political intervention and lobbying are network-related. Although EQUIDAD does not consider itself as a network, the way its team disseminates information and provides knowledge in through networking with individuals and institutions.

In Ecuador, ASICAL and the Pichincha coordinator of NGOs working on HIV are two close networks that EQUIDAD works with. EQUIDAD also interacts very frequently with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other thematic NGOs. It is also associated with a close gay network coordinated from the University of Wisconsin. At a regional level, EQUIDAD works with several networks such as REDLA, ICW, LACASSO, RELARD, MLCM+ o REDTRABSEX. These are all Latin American networks and some of them are made up by more than one hundred of smaller institutions in most countries of the continent.

10. Are the networks and their partners also partners of the OneWorld network? Does that have an impact on their own work? EQUIDAD is not a member of OneWorld. The reason is that they are interested exclusively in homosexual thematic networks. They are not aware that any other of the networks they work with is associated to OneWorld.

11. Do partner organizations prefer to cooperate in smaller, thematically specific networks or in broader, more general networks? Because of the thematic specification of EQUIDAD and the networks to which it is linked, everyone prefers to cooperate with each other. Nevertheless, some of the Latin American thematic networks may not be considered as small ones although they continue to be thematic.

12. In which way could HIVOS have supported the strategic application of ICT even better? The technical team is quite satisfied with the support received from HIVOS. They feel that the institution should be strengthened as a requisite for undertaking more dynamic and ample programs in order to reach more people in with better services. They are presently working on a new project proposal that will be submitted to HIVOS, looking at creating a virtual thematically specialized library.

13. Which ICT applications are planned for the future to support the working of the network? EQUIDAD seems to be moving towards a knowledge management system. Specific platforms to handle this and specialized instruments to upload

and maintain the virtual library on the web side are two challenges that EQUIDAD should deal with in the next two years or so.

14. What are the best practices (of ICT applications) of other effective organizations/networks that could inspire future activities? EQUIDAD is presently working with seven other networks on the requirements for the implementation of the knowledge management system. EQUIDAD technical team feels that they are providing leadership in this sense and the best practices, if any.

15. Any suggestions for a next phase of a policy and action program HIVOS & ICT? The technical team suggests analyzing the needs of more complete training of human resources in order to take full advantage of ICT applications.

### **Case analysis**

EQUIDAD is a small NGO involved in an ambitious program with a very specific thematic goal. The HIVOS grant represents a twofold opportunity: strengthen its institutional scheme and support for accessing and utilizing ICT applications to implement most of its activities.

The technical team does not consider EQUIDAD as a network. However, the target population is made up by individuals and organizations that receive services (information, knowledge and some manuals), but keep independent activities and pursue their own goals. On the other hand, EQUIDAD is linked to several networks from which some of the knowledge and information is derived, and it is through these networks that EQUIDAD mainly plays its role as a political activist.

ICT applications are essential to the program development and future activities of EQUIDAD. This is openly recognized by team members and future plans totally depend on ICT applications. Team members feel that efficiency to provide services has jumped once they were able to switch from e-mail to the www. It also applies to the information flow, the amount of information managed and the interaction with the target population.

It is difficult to have an idea about the overall efficiency attributable to the use of ICT applications. Nevertheless, the team is encouraged by the response of beneficiaries and the progress in the political arena as to planning new services and new activities that require ICT applications.

EQUIDAD seems to have benefited a lot from HIVOS support, even if it is small and short time-designed. It also seems to undergo important institutional changes by getting into ICT not only in relation to the services provided to target population but in relation to its interaction with local and regional networks. Those changes imply a redefinition of the institutional structure that is presently taking

place; a more effective and fast relation with local groups that are now served through Internet and not only through e-mail; a much more information traffic and better quality of information and knowledge that is obtained from international thematic sources that are available in the www.

## **ACCIÓN ECOLÓGICA (AE)**

AE is a 17 year-old organization motivated by the ecological problems in Ecuador. This institution focuses its efforts mainly on two major activities: i) creates and carries out campaigns of different aspects related to ecological problems, and ii) provides training and information directed to strengthening local organizations and positioning environmental themes within these organizations.

Campaigns are usually designed in reaction to programs that have negative ecological implications. They are also designed for making propositions aiming to solve such problems. Some specific research has been undertaken in order to support claims of environmental effects and to propose policy alternatives and changes in legislation, when required.

Training and provision of information imply to perform workshops, in-service training, making visits, exchanging experiences and dialogs among interested pairs. Documents with information and proposals are produced to supplement direct interaction. These documents may be directed to local governments, the parliament, the national government or the constituency, among others.

HIVOS has supported AE with three projects of three years each. The present project runs from 2002 to 2004 and implies a grant of 315.000 Euros. This project has been designed to strengthen the AE's institutional structure. It supports a central technical team in charge of developing the different campaigns. Through this project, publications, political lobby and legal counseling are also supported. AE works very close to two other organizations: OILWATCH, which is a network that includes some South petroleum producer countries, and the Instituto de Estudios Ecologistas del Tercer Mundo (Institute of Ecologist Studies for the Third World). These projects are also financially supported by HIVOS.

AE's technical team has about 20 members, including administrative staff. In addition, there are about the same number of voluntaries. The majority of team members are women.

AE has defined all Ecuadorians as its target populations, due to the general interest of the campaigns AE develops. AE has created a local network of institutions and individuals (Red de la defensa de la naturaleza de la vida). However, each campaign identifies its own interest groups that become the immediate constituency. Once a campaign is initiated, workshops with community leaders and specialized publications are completed. Campaign messages are prepared and sent through radio, newspapers insertions and some videos. Most campaign material is distributed through local institutions, but sometimes it directly goes to community members. AE has a web site and some e-server lists are constructed to reach other organizations for any particular campaign.

Through HIVOS support, the administrative structure and a small fund for campaigns are covered. The creation and maintenance of the web site as well as the access to Internet are also paid with the grant. However, AE team maintains a good proportion of its communication strategy through written and audio means.

The guide questions for this evaluation are derived from an interview with David Reyes and Esperanza Martinez. The answers can be summarized as follows:

1. Which uses do network partners make of ICT to improve their networking activity? AE has created a network (Red de defensa de la naturaleza de la vida) and is associated with several regional and global networks. They all communicate and interact through ICT applications. For all networks, it would be impossible to develop their activities if they were not connected to ICT applications.

2. In which way has HIVOS supported these applications of ICT? AE does not receive direct support for ICT applications from HIVOS. All three projects HIVOS has granted to AE have been institutional building-oriented. The present project does cover the access and use of ICT means, but it also covers publications and communications through traditional means (paper publications, newspaper insertions, radio programs, videos, etc.).

3. In which way did different ICT applications improve the effectiveness of the network? Did they increase the impact of the network? AE has been utilizing e-mail and Internet for quite some time. However, it has been only recently (2002-2003) that AE has developed particular interest on ICT applications, with the participation in the campaign on the impact of free trade on agriculture. This campaign originated a project proposal on the impact of free trade agreements on agriculture has been submitted and approved by IICD. This new project is directed to producers, rural organizations, NGO, etc. and will follow up information on agriculture in relation with FTA. Nevertheless, AE technical team recognizes that access to and utilization of Internet has substantially improved its capacity to obtain and process data and information. It has provided the means to participate with a number of networks at local and international levels. They claim that efficiency gain due to the use of these ICT applications is incommensurable, as compared to old mechanisms to retrieve, process, and divulge information.

4. Which ICT applications did fail to achieve the expected results (and for which reasons)? They do not register any failure of ICT applications. Though, they claim that not very many incursions have been intended to try new or advance ICT applications to their work.

5. What have been the obstacles for partner organizations to make a full use of ICT applications? AE team has no information about factors that may be

obstacles for its partners to make use of ICT. The team members feel that the major obstacle AE has faced to make use of ICT applications is the personal resistance to technical change. They declare that electronic publications and communications are helpful but do not replace either paper pressed documents or interpersonal communication.

6. What are the criteria that network partners use to evaluate the success of their activity? Have evaluations taken place? AE does not make a follow-up of evaluation criteria network partners may utilize. They are not aware if associated networks have completed any evaluation. AE has hired a service to monitor access to its web site and the origin of hits received. They expect to be able to know if they are reaching its target population.

7. What kind of additional information was made available through the applications of ICT, and which use did network partners make of the additional information? AE team recognizes that ICT could have led them to information they may not have obtained otherwise. It is difficult for them to specify what kind of information it may be, because once in the web, differentiation becomes impossible. What they argue is that discrimination is crucial in order to take advantage of the great amount of information available.

8. How did the ICT applications increase the influence/effectiveness of activities of the network? The volume of information that can be accessed and return to target groups by using ICT applications is not comparable with the amount of information accessible through traditional systems, or even through e-mail. Gains in efficiency and effectiveness to accomplish their objectives are impossible to measure but are enormous. Influence is difficult to measure but based on results and progress made in campaigns, it is possible to say that the information flow and the capacity to reach people and organizations to ask for support may have been of great help.

9. Do network partners use ICT to interact more closely in national, regional (Latin American), or international (global) networks? Network partners are also associated to a number of networks working at different levels. The networks AE is associated with do certainly use ICT to interact with other networks. These organizations are mainly working at regional and global levels, such as RAPAL (Red de acción a los plaguicidas), RLLT (Red Latinoamericana libre de transgénicos), Red de minería Latinoamericana, OILWATCH, WRM (Movimiento mundial por los bosques). AE team strongly states that they interact with these networks because of the themes they work with and not because of their use of ICT.

10. Are the networks and their partners also partners of the OneWorld network? Does that have an impact on their own work? AE is not associated with OneWorld. They do not know if associated networks do.

11. Do partner organizations prefer to cooperate in smaller, thematically specific networks or in broader, more general networks? AE target population is composed of the network AE created and several groups of individuals who are interested in the campaigns that AE promotes. The network has developed interactions with similar organizations at local and regional levels. Likewise, AE interacts with networks that work at continental and global levels. These networks are associated with a large number of other networks working at different levels. Their interest to get associates lays in the coverage and thematic development rather than in the size of the network.

12. In which way could HIVOS have supported the strategic application of ICT even better? EA team thinks that the relation between HIVOS projects and the use of ICT applications is not direct. The common element is communications, which has been present in all HIVOS projects. Due to this support, AE has experienced a process of shifting from paper publications to electronic publications uploaded to the web site. Training and some technical backstopping could have been very useful for AE technical team in order to have the possibility to make a better use of all ICT applications such as improving their web site, utilizing multimedia applications, etc.

13. Which ICT applications are planned for the future to support the working of the network? AE expects to get involved more heavily with ICT applications in the near future through the project already approved by IICD. This project was designed to provide rural organizations, NGOs, producer organizations and other groups by means of ICT mechanisms. The idea is to have the opportunity to become acquainted with the technological application, particularly with the utilization of interactive web sites and multimedia applications to campaigns and political activism.

14. What are best practices (of ICT applications) of other effective organizations/networks that could inspire future activities? AE considers that their own best practices should be considered to continue ICT applications in the future. They believe that the efficiency gained in providing messages and asking organizations support for the campaigns and movements they promote should inspire new efforts to do better use of the technology. They do not know better practices that other organizations may be able to contribute with.

15. Any suggestions for a next phase of a policy and action program HIVOS & ICT? AE does not have specific recommendations for HIVOS programs on ICT. They do have suggestions about the use of progress report and financial formats HIVOS ask them to use, because they do not offer the possibility to fully explain the context and externalities in which activities are developed. They also think that the direct involvement and political support to campaigns and social movements would be an asset and a way to go beyond the financial relationship.

## **Case analysis**

AE is a very active organization that develops a congested working program dealing with several themes, some of which problem-solving in nature and some others are transversal to the former one. AE develops a heavy political activism in Ecuador and in Latin America, depending on the problems and propositions that are undertaken by the organization. In doing so, AE interacts with a large number of organizations and individuals at local and global levels, for which AE makes use of some ICT applications such as e-mail, a web site, and the www to download information. Nevertheless, AE heavily relies on traditional communication means such as printed publications, and only in recent years has initiated a process to using more ICT applications, but at a slow rate.

AE is associated with several networks through Internet connection (which takes place through telephone). This is also the means to access information and technical support for assembling the campaigns and producing alternative propositions, as strategies to oppose to programs that originate negative environmental externalities. They also provide information, motivational messages and propaganda mainly through e-mail, although most of that material is uploaded to the web site.

The AE technical team does not understand HIVOS grants as a direct instrument to make use of ICT applications, since they have an ample understanding of communications in which ICT is just one of the possibilities to communicate. ICT applications are sound to them and they have developed collective interest to know more about such applications. They are particularly interested in learning how to fully use ICT applications, thinking that it would help them to gain in efficiency to communicate with associated networks and with their target groups.

Nonetheless, certain resistance to adopt ICT applications in all AE activities can be detected. They have prepared a new project based on ICT applications and are waiting to implement it and learn about ICT and how they can make better use of applications.

## **FEDAEPS**

FEADEPS is a non-profit health NGO working against social exclusion, discrimination and for citizens' participation. In addition, they have defined gender and diversity as transversal themes. During its 15 years of existence, FEDAEPS has created policy and political proposals as alternative collective response to the exclusion and discrimination problems in Ecuador and Latin America. FEDAEPS is presently organized in two critical working areas: i) discrimination by orientation: sexual, racial, religion, etc., and ii) social equity, in which globalization national political development, social justice and economic development are included.

FEDAEPS organizes its work in the following programs:

- The resource center (information retrieval and dissemination)
- Education and training (sensitization, information sharing and policy proposal initiatives to respond to HIV/AIDS)
- Sexual and gender rights (knowledge creation through research and proposals for citizens' rights recognition)
- Holistic health
- Sexual diversity (defending rights and monitoring State's actions and leadership development)
- Sex workers rights (research, services, support, training, etc.)
- Networking and communication (constructing solidarity, exchange of experiences and ideals among social movements, and policy propositions for decision-makers)
- Institutional development (strengthening institutional capacity)

All the above programs have been implemented through three transversal strategies: a) the social movement's dynamics for social change, b) political activism and policy proposals for structural change and modifying interactions with social movements and c) use of communication means to influence public opinion at national and international levels. In addition, FEDAEPS operates a hotline about sexuality.

Each of the former programs is self-managed by the groups of interest and each program establishes its own communication schemes, looking at creating a communication network for the program. Some of these networks like GLBT (gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transsexuals) have coverage of 20 provinces in Ecuador or the AIDS network kinks about 20 organizations working against AIDS. These networks receive information, policy propositions, collective positioning, collective criteria, etc. Policy proposals are elaborated by the groups responsible for each program, after a discussion period in which actors express their needs. These propositions are discussed with authorities and could serve as the basis for specific campaigns.

FEDAEPS has a technical team of 30 people with different academic education. Most of them are less than 30 years old. In an interview with two of them, the reference to the guide questions can be synthesized as follows:

1. Which uses do network partners make of ICT to improve their networking activity? E-mail is of common use among individuals and groups associated to the different programs. Organizations use Internet more frequently. Several organizations also use traditional communication networks to reach associated individuals with no access to ICT applications. Most FEDAEPS communications with regional and global network operate through a combination of Internet and e-mail.

2. In which way has HIVOS supported these applications of ICT? The HIVOS participation in the use of ICT is isolated as it pertains to one of the projects FEDAEPS implements. The HIVOS supported project (*Promoting a Holistic Health Response to HIV/AIDS and Human Rights through Education, Advocacy and Training in Ecuador 2003-2005*) offers an accessible and quality information service to individuals and organizations on issues related to HIV/AIDS, gender, sexual and human rights, in one of its specific objectives. The project also seeks to producing quality research and providing information on sexuality, gender, HIV/AIDS and human rights to key sectors and players for the development of best practices; sharing information and research result with other parties; and developing applicable and non-discriminatory policies. To accomplish these specific objectives, FEDAEPS needs to maintain communication channels, at least in two ways: to the project's beneficiaries and the general public, and to the international networks and technical information sources.

3. In which way did different ICT applications improve the effectiveness of the network? Did they increase the impact of the network? ICT applications are essential for information search, data updating, accessing knowledge and contacting other social movements. The volume of material handled the speed at which material is obtained and distributed, and the number of people and organizations that can be reached are all indicators of the effectiveness gained by using ICT applications. Effects on the network impact are evident as it is the cost-efficiency associated with the coverage, the volume and quality of the services and the velocity of information delivery.

4. Which ICT applications failed to achieve the expected results (and for which reasons)? No failures have been observed in relation to expected results of ICT applications. The major difficulty is related to the financial capacity to update software and to buy additional telephone lines to improve and speed-up communications and access to Internet.

5. What have been the obstacles for partner organizations to make a full use of ICT applications? Some of the organizations linked to FEDAEPS have a commercial vision of Internet rather than a strategic vision and the potential use

of it to strengthen the social movements they intend to develop. This is an obstacle to make full use of the instruments.

Some organizations have experienced serious difficulties to deal with viruses due to the misuse of preventive software. This also applies to spam messages. FEDAEPS has a central incoming box but no one is dedicated to filter messages, which generates difficulties to users.

6. What are the criteria that network partners use to evaluate the success of their activity? Have evaluations taken place? FEDAEPS perform an annual evaluation comparing the working plan against actual achievements on those activities applying ICT. It also performs a qualitative self-evaluation of annual results. Although no benefit/cost is evaluated or any cost-efficiency indicators are developed, they try to relate budget allocation and obtained results.

7. What kind of additional information was made available through the applications of ICT, and which use did network partners make of the additional information? FEDAEPS has been able to find edge information in some of the themes they try to promote through searches in Internet. They feel that this would not have been possible without the use of the www. They have been able to get in touch with networks and organizations they did not know about. New information has been distributed to target groups, when applicable.

8. How did the ICT applications increase the influence/effectiveness of activities of the network? The real working capacity of FEDAEPS has experienced great changes with the applications of ICT. Both information capture and delivery had increased in volumes, quality, coverage, and spread velocity. All this has translated into effectiveness to complete activities and accomplish objectives. Such effectiveness, in turn, has contributed to increase FEDAEPS influence among target groups and national and international partners that value FEDAEPS as an active and fast responding organization.

9. Do network partners use ICT to interact more closely in national, regional (Latin American), or international (global) networks? Most local and international networks that FEDAEPS is associated with, maintain intense interactions with other networks and organizations through ICT tools.

FEDAEPS team members interact with several local networks, as each program they promote intends to organize the interest groups in local organizations and networks as much as possible. They develop list servers in each case and complement it with radio and written information. Some of the networks they interact with are: REDSIDA (National Network of Organizations Working on AIDS), Ecuadorian national network of women sex workers, Ecuadorian GLBT network, the national network of people living with HIV/AIDS, National Campaign against ALCA, FSM (World Social Forum, Ecuadorian chapter), CCCC (Ecuadorian citizenship network against corruption), MMM (Marcha mundial de

las mujeres en el Ecuador), and a number of social movements that constitute temporary networks to communicate and support particular campaigns.

At regional and international levels, FEDAEPS interacts with LACASSO (Latin American Association of AIDS Service Organizations), ICASO (International Council of AIDS Service Organizations), ILGA (International Lesbian and Gay Association), Buddy Acompañante, WSF (World Social Forum), Web Community of Social Movements, FSA (Americas Social Forum), LGBT South-South Dialog, REDITE (women transforming the economy network), Campaña de derechos seculares y reproductivos.

10. Are the networks and their partners also partners of the OneWorld network? Does that have an impact on their own work? FEDAEPS is not associated with OneWorld. They have no registration of local networks they promote to be associated with OneWorld.

11. Do partner organizations prefer to cooperate in smaller, thematically specific networks or in broader, more general networks? Decision on cooperation with other networks is usually based on thematic interests, on-going campaigns, political lobby, and information sources. The coverage level of networks is not that important to cooperate with other networks. However, international and global networks are usually good information sources and quite often are convergent sites for many networks. It means that international networks very often become sites difficult to miss if the idea is to be part of edge thematic developments.

12. In which way could HIVOS have supported the strategic application of ICT even better? One way of support strategic application of ICT is to develop projects directed to this goal. It is true that ICT has become an essential component of most organizations, but most often it is taken for granted and team members use basic applications the ways they find it better. Programs that include ICT applications as part of strategic planning, try to develop the capacity to buy equipment, and train human resources to make full use of ICT according to institutional need would be a very good contribution for institutional building.

13. Which ICT applications are planned for the future to support the working of the network? FEDAEPS redesigned the web page in 2003 to make it interactive and receive direct feedback from groups, networks and individuals they interact with. They expect to update their strategic policies on institutional communication, with the idea that at least 70% of such communications should be produced to be disseminated through ICT applications. The bimonthly journal is expected to be electronically issued in the near future.

Other near future plans include the development of an electronic hotline, the use of chatting rooms for specific discussions, the creation of a virtual library in a joint effort with UNESCO, and the rationalization of the distribution lists.

14. What are best practices (of ICT applications) of other effective organizations/networks that could inspire future activities? The construction of a more dynamic web site and the switching from traditional communication means to ICT applications that some other networks have implemented, have been taken as best practices to those adapted to FEDAEPS characteristics and needs.

15. Any suggestions for a next phase of a policy and action program HIVOS & ICT? The team members think that HIVOS could establish interactive web sites to socialize results and best practices of supported ICT projects. It could include a space to inform about the progress made by projects, their counterparts and their partners.

They indicated that HIVOS bulletin is usually late and that it could be modified.

### **Case analysis**

FEDAEPS is a recognized organization engaged in many activities including advocacy for human rights and a holistic view of health. It is also engaged in research, lobbying and political activism against social exclusion and discrimination.

It seems to have adopted ICT applications as an integral component of their activities (i. e., e-mail, a web site, www searches) . The organization of local networks, groups of interest and individuals is built to facilitate interaction and information delivery through electronic means. This is consistent with the decision to rely on the use of ICT applications.

The interaction and partnership with other networks at regional and international levels is fully performed though ICT. FEDAEPS is aware that no other technology is as efficient as ICT to participate in debates and information analysis of world wide themes and problems. For these and the former reasons, FEDAEPS is looking forward to continue the adoption of ICT applications and the design of some tools to its communication needs. Given that it is a process, FEDAEPS is evolving quickly and consciously to take advantage of technology.

They face some obstacles (i.e., virus and spam handling) that make it difficult and time consuming to deal with. However, these are problems for which technology exists and becomes a budget allocation decision problem.

This organization has the potential to easily improve ICT applications to its daily work, apparently with a relatively small amount of money and fast training. The idea of designing international supported projects towards this end may be a suggestion to be entertained by international donors.

## ALAI

Created in 1977 in Canada, the Latin American Information Agency (ALAI) is an organization focused on social organization processes, on the capacity of the marginal groups to induce their own development process, and on the possibility to influence political processes in their own countries. ALAI mission is to formulate and develop answers to the communication challenges faced when applied to social action.

ALAI strategy is based on three general components:

- Information, which is handled through communication networks
- Connecting, by which communication is provided to social organizations
- Communication, being this understood as the right to communication and its democratization.

Information is the critical axis of ALAI's activities, for which communication among actors is crucial. ALAI has assigned priority to the following issues: agriculture, indigenous cultural diversity, afro-women, urban-popular sector, human rights, and democratization of communication.

Each of the former themes receives and generates information that is delivered to local organizations through national, regional and international networks. These networks constitute ALAI's empirical target communication subjects. In the absence of thematic networks, ALAI works with national organizations. ALAI captures information mainly from the following sources: a) information produced by the organizations which communicate with each other within their countries and among countries, b) experts, professionals and qualified informants that operate in the context of each theme concerning the organizations, c) the global dynamics developed for global problems in each theme, and d) journalism and other communication means.

All this information is captured, transformed and retransmitted to the target population. Information is disseminated through written publications, e-mail, and the web site. This site is not interactive, but reactions and contributions to the uploaded information are received through e-mail. Local organizations are more frequently users of e-mail rather than the web site. Written messages are needed for specific groups.

ALAI developed its own communication system in response to the request from social movements that demanded a diagnostic of selected themes conditions in their own countries. As a consequence, it was necessary for ALAI to respond to demands for training on communication strategies and policy. This process was initially set up by e-mail (early 90s), but once the digital gap in Ecuador was solved, it jumped to Internet. This process forced ALAI to familiarize with ICT applications and adopt it as the basic working tool.

In parallel, the 500 years of indigenous dependency campaign took place, which forced to establish a communication system involving all participating organizations, authorities and decision makers in the continent. This juncture consolidated to adoption of ICT applications in the ALAI working strategy. This condition allowed ALAI to lead a continental proposition and discussion in preparation to the Beijing summit. As a consequence, a number of workshops took place to promote connectiveness, and training to use ICT. This effort concluded in the creation of Social Movements Community Web (CWMS) that signed the initiation of a collective web site, with the permanent collaboration of several networks. This process originated a common information and communication policy for participating networks. At the present ALAI hosts the Community web and is responsible for one of the permanent sections. The common information space in the Community web is called Minga and all network members are expected to contribute to it.

The interview with Sally Bursh and Oswaldo León of ALAI technical team allows answering the guide questions as follows:

1. Which uses do network partners make of ICT to improve their networking activity? Most ALAI partners make use of ICT applications. In many cases, information captured from the local organizations is received through e-mail, but is transformed and returned mainly through the ALAI web page. In general terms, most ALAI partners use e-mail, web sites and Internet in their daily activities. Since this has been a complex process for a number of organizations, ALAI has provided training and has set the Minga space as a pragmatic laboratory for the organizations to get acquainted with ICT applications.
2. In which way has HIVOS supported these applications of ICT? HIVSO has granted two projects of two years each to the Community (CWMS), in which ALAI was partially included. Since 2003, a three-year project in which both the Community and ALAI participate have been in operation. This project provides technical support through an electronic platform, training, and information generation. It is expected to generate a training scheme, partially virtual and partially face to face. The information component is all managed through ICT applications as well as the Minga collective space in the Community web site.
3. In which way did different ICT applications improve the effectiveness of the network? Did they increase the impact of the network? Both impact and efficiency of ALAI have been transformed by the use of ICT applications. Access to information and the delivery capacity have multiplied in amount, quality and velocity. Although the Community incorporated ICT from the very beginning, it has gained efficiency as much as training and the strategic communication program has been put into effect.

Impact of the use of ICT applications can be observed by the leadership ALAI has played in international forums and continental campaigns. Of course, technical capacity is essential to these activities, but ICT tools provide the means to express such a capacity.

4. Which ICT applications failed to achieve the expected results (and for which reasons)? No failure is reported by ALAI team. They claim that some specific problems such as spam handling are difficult to deal with. However, they emphasize the training and the communication policy as major components of the successful application of ICT.

5. What have been the obstacles for partner organizations to make a full use of ICT applications? The ALAI technical team found a number of obstacles at the time they intended to use ICT applications with local networks and organizations. Computer utilization, connectiveness, and particularly absence of communication policies were the major obstacles found at the beginning. It was solved with training and the construction of a communication strategic policy that set information discrimination criteria. The Minga space has helped substantially as a training laboratory to use ICT applications.

6. What are the criteria that network partners use to evaluate the success of their activity? Have evaluations taken place? Evaluation is based on the analysis of statistics of the web site usage. They have taken advantage of some workshops to get a feedback in relation to the quality and the opportunity of messages and information delivered. It is an informal evaluation and no questioner or other instrument has been used. This 'evaluation' is completed in informal conversation with colleagues and local group representatives that participate in the same workshops. These informal surveys do not have any previous specified criteria or guidelines. They claim that similar types of evaluations are performed by some of the associated networks.

7. What kind of additional information was made available through the applications of ICT, and which use did network partners make of the additional information? It is difficult for the technical team to determine the kind of additional information they have accessed by using ICT applications. WWW navigation has allowed them to reach information sources and subscribe to international forums that they may have not known otherwise. The same is true when the search for information on new topics or need to retrieve information to support particular campaigns they intend to promote. ALAI usually filters and selects this information before delivering it to local networks and organizations.

8. How did the ICT applications increase the influence/effectiveness of activities of the network? The transition from the traditional communication system to ICT applications has transformed the capacity of ALAI to reach target groups, provide knowledge and information and increase participation at the international level. Both ALAI's influence and effectiveness have increased enormously by the

adoption of ICT applications as the mechanism through which they carry out their activities. This applies to the Community performance even that it incorporated ICT from its beginning.

9. Do network partners use ICT to interact more closely in national, regional (Latin American), or international (global) networks? Network partners and associated organizations interact among each other when they share thematic interests. They have the chance to interact with other networks at all levels as well. ALAI itself cooperates with a number of external networks that either have the same thematic interest or participate in particular campaigns or problem analysis in which ALAI may need to participate. With such an objective, ALAI interacts with local networks such as Ecuadorian chapter of the Social Forum (WSF), in addition to all local networks ALAI promotes as a way of organizing its thematic target groups.

At the regional and international levels, ALAI interacts more frequently with WSF, OneWorld, FSA (Americas Social Forum), CRIS (Campaign for the rights of the information society), Alianza social continental (continental social alliance), En defensa de la humanidad (defending humanity), among others.

10. Are the networks and their partners also partners of the OneWorld network? Does that have an impact on their own work? ALAI interacts with OnWorld which often reproduces articles prepared by ALAI team members. They feel that this interaction increases ALAI visibility. Likewise, they find OneWorld an adequate information source in some themes.

11. Do partner organizations prefer to cooperate in smaller, thematically specific networks or in broader, more general networks? Cooperation and interaction with external networks is mainly defined by thematic interest rather than the size or importance of the networks. The interaction with broad networks brings about the possibility to find general information from a number of countries and experiences. They are usually a good source of information. Nevertheless, thematic networks are very reliable in terms of the information they retrieve from their associated organizations.

12. In which way could HIVOS have supported the strategic application of ICT even better? ALAI considers that HIVOS contribution to support strategic application of ICT is critical. The team feels that it would be an extra contribution if HIVOS allocated resources and provided technical support to the area of democratization of communication. In this way, HIVOS could strengthen institutional capacity for doing a better and selective use of information as well as knowledge generation through ICT applications.

13. Which ICT applications are planned for the future to support the working of the network? ALAI allocates a good proportion of time to develop the Community's common agenda, which includes the strategic communication

program and ICT use training. As a response to this demand, ALAI is planning to design a virtual training program that combines both ICT applications and face to face interactions. ALAI will continue to support local associated networks through training, defining communication strategic policies and, developing thematic working agendas with these networks and organizations.

The technical team would like to explore the use of video conferences and multimedia means as a way to instrument discussions, forum participation and decrease face to face meetings, particularly at the international level.

In the immediate future, ALAI team will seek for alternative protocols to administer existing distribution lists.

14. What are best practices (of ICT applications) of other effective organizations/networks that could inspire future activities? Alai has developed an information searching system for the users to handle the virtual library that presently has over 5000 entries. This is considered by ALAI team as a best practice, due to the nature of the system.

The design of the collective web site and the Minga common space are also considered as good practices. This is understood both as an ICT application and as a training instrument for all associated networks.

15. Any suggestions for a next phase of a policy and action program HIVOS & ICT? ALAI technical team considers that HIVOS should maintain a long term program on ICT applications and communication. There are a number of areas in which ICT applications may increase efficiency and there exist a large proportion of people yet to be reached through these means.

The team also suggests that HIVOS could support programs as opposite to projects in order to include the possibilities of collective institutional development and access to the aggregated value that can be derived of the collective participation and experiences sharing<sup>1</sup>.

### **Case analysis**

ALAI is a very experienced and well recognized network with a good level of ICT applications. In fact, ALAI heavily relies on e-mail and Internet as means to reach its target population and to retrieve information to complete its activities and achieve its objectives. ALAI maintains the production of written material for public with specific profile and for general constituency that are called to adhere to particular campaigns.

A very important aspect of ALAI strategy is the emphasis on strategic communication policy and content definition to apply ICT. These are strategic tools to rationalize the use of ICT and to gain efficiency in its application. These elements also more effectively conduct to a learning capacity of the networks and of the individuals who may derive knowledge from the collective learning experiences.

The support ALAI provides to the Community development and the ICT applications of this network are also designed as a learning strategy. The structured setting of a collective web site and the Minga space are a contribution

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<sup>1</sup> By supporting programs as opposite to projects they mean that HIVOS may finance a series of projects that could benefit a number of institutions which could develop collective learning methods and experiences. It may be exemplified as a set of projects on ICT applications to ALAI and some of its partner institutions, design in such a way that specific objectives are shared by all grant recipients and collective activities have to be completed in order to promote collective learning from each other experiences and from collective processes.

to learning on the rationalization of information and communication that is delivered to target population of the collective network and the single organizations belonging to the network.

ALAI is clearly aware about the potential of ICT and seems to have the ability to transmit it to the networks and organizations that have been developed to accomplish its goals and mission. In this sense, ALAI could be a very important element in the development of an ICT application program and in the implementation of learning and knowledge management component for networks and organizations that depend on ICT applications.

## **COORDINADORA NACIONAL PARA LA DEFENSA DEL MANGLAR (CM)**

The national coordination for defending mangroves (CM) is a grass roots organization made up by 23 local organizations, NGOs and individuals who live in Muisne, a small isolated town in the Esmeralda province. CM works on defending and recovering mangroves.

The former programmatic areas translate into specific projects such as mangrove reforestation, small enterprises development, communitarian tourism, and social organization.

CM was created by influence of the International Mangrove Network (RMI), which stands in 10 countries with one national network in each one. CM and RMI have e-mail communication and CM can access RMI web site. RMI was created in 2001 and it is under a reorganization process since it is hosted by FUNDECOL in Ecuador.

FUNDECOL (Foundation for the Mangrove Recuperation) is a 14 year-old organization with headquarters in Muisne. FUNDECOL is a CM member and is currently presiding CM. FUNDECOL is structured in three programmatic areas: Institutional strengthening, the estuary management plan, and the Muisne development and living plan. FUNDECOL operates with two programs: communication and legal advising. The communication area operates from Quito because Muisne has no reliable telephone service, and therefore no e-mail or Internet connection. In Muisne, they communicate through wall board journals and written bulletins. Those communication means have a heavy cultural content and it is within this context that the health and mangrove management campaigns are developed. In Quito, there are seven PCs and one has access to e-mail and Internet. Two months ago FUNDECOL bought a www domain and at the present has a web page under construction.

HIVOS provides financial support to FUNDECOL, CM and RMI. Since 1998, FUNDECOL has received grants through three years projects of which, the third one is in operation. This project supports the three programmatic areas. CM has a grant for institutional building that started this year. RMI received two projects of one year each when the Secretariat was housed in Honduras. A web page was constructed at that time but it was never maintained or updated. At the present, RMI has allocated funds to projects submitted by member organizations and is connected to e-mail and Internet. RMI has created a new web page and facilitates a discussion group. The network is also issuing an electronic bulletin on regular basis and information is uploaded in the web site. RMI uses ICT to divulgate its political positioning and make political lobby and activism.

In a conversation with four of the FUNDECOL technical team, the following ideas were expressed, in relation to the guide questions:

1. Which uses do network partners make of ICT to improve their networking activity? Organizations linked to CM make no use of ICT as explained before. They lack connectiveness to electronic technology. CM as such is connected and interacts with other networks, particularly with RMI because of their proximity and the common member: FUNDECOL. Most material CM deliver to member organizations is obtained through ICT applications, even if delivery takes place by using traditional dissemination technology.
2. In which way has HIVOS supported these applications of ICT? As explained before, HIVOS has provided grants to CM, RMI and FUNDECOL. The institutional building projects have allowed all three organizations to become ICT users. Equipment, access and connection are all paid with these funds as well as the person in charge of communications.
3. In which way did different ICT applications improve the effectiveness of the network? Did they increase the impact of the network? CM was not able to interact or be part of RMI without ICT applications. CM has a direct comparison pattern, given that its associate organizations in the field have to be accessed through traditional communication means. Effectiveness of the two technologies is just enormous. In fact, ICT can capture much more information that it is possible to deliver to associate organizations due to the difference in technology. On the other hand, ICT applications are very effective in divulging local experiences elsewhere even with the existing technological gap.
4. Which ICT applications failed to achieve the expected results (and for which reasons)? CM and FUNDECOL have experienced frustration when trying to solve the connectiveness problem with grass root organizations. It has also frustrated the efficiency of ICT applications they experience when interacting with other national and international networks and forums. They have also had unpleasant experiences because of the limited capacity of the server they operate with.
5. What have been the obstacles for partner organizations to make a full use of ICT applications? As mentioned before, connectiveness of partner organizations has become an unsolvable obstacle. Likewise, the size of the equipment they have is an obstacle to manipulate large amount of information.
6. What are the criteria that network partners use to evaluate the success of their activity? Have evaluations taken place? No evaluation has been performed by any of the networks and organizations making ICT applications. They do not even analyze usage statistics. No evaluation criteria have been defined. CM has experienced saturation due to a heavy use of e-mail, in absence of an interactive web page.
7. What kind of additional information was made available through the applications of ICT, and which use did network partners make of the additional

information? CM has had access to more and better information on the topics of interest. At the same time, CM has found additional information on food security that was not able to relate to the mangrove management before. Likewise, CM has accessed additional information about experiences and studies somewhere else that have enable CM to make direct applications of results, surmounting the empirical problem-solving approach they have traditionally applied.

8. How did the ICT applications increase the influence/effectiveness of activities of the network? Both CM and RMI have increased effectiveness in retrieving and delivering information as well as in their participation on campaigns and international forums. This is true for CM even if ICT applications can not be used with its constituency. RMI influence has also changed, particularly since the network secretariat is housed in Ecuador. The country network members are now much more actively participating and developing interational campaigns to defend mangroves.

The participation in national and international forums brings out the possibility of introducing the network political position and gaining visibility which, in turn, increases the network influence.

9. Do network partners use ICT to interact more closely in national, regional (Latin American), or international (global) networks? CM external participation in networks and forums is rather limited. Its major interaction is with RMI although it interacts in some forums.

RMI interacts with local and international networks as far as those networks respond to its thematic interests. Most frequent interactions are with the following networks: MAP (US network that promotes Asian and African networks), EJF (U.K. network promoting environmental justice), Green Peace, FIAN (German network on food security), the Peruvian Fisherman Network, WSF, FSA, FB (the Biodiversity Forum), FAO and UN, among others.

10. Are the networks and their partners also partners of the OneWorld network? Does that have an impact on their own work? Both CM and RMI have interaction with OneWorld (Latin America). Both networks were contacted by OneWorld during the implementation of one project. They receive the monthly bulletin and have had access to other organizations with the potential of establishing new alliances. The team mentions, however, that the interaction with OneWorld does not have a significant meaning in the activities it implements.

11. Do partner organizations prefer to cooperate in smaller, thematically specific networks or in broader, more general networks? RMI partner organizations cooperate with other thematic networks, regardless of their size or level of influence. General networks open up the possibility to retrieve more general information, but specialized forums offer more applied information, references and space for discussions.

CM has more interaction with similar country networks that converge into RMI. CM also participates in international forums, but this is not a major activity.

12. In which way could HIVOS have supported the strategic application of ICT even better? Taking into account the restrictions CM faces to operate as a network, HIVOS could have been more helpful by allocating funds for equipment and maintenance. Simultaneously, HIVOS contribution could cover other communication means such as radio, video, etc. to reach constituency that have no access to ICT.

13. Which ICT applications are planned for the future to support the working of the network? CM, FUNDECOL and RMI technical teams are convinced that ICT applications are indispensable tools that must be fully adopted for networks and organizations to accomplish their goals, regardless of the constraints they are presently facing. On this basis, they have planned to create an information bank, complete the web page construction for the network and construct similar pages for the national organizations. In addition, they expect to start using other communication means such as radio and video with which small organizations lacking connectiveness can be reached. They also look forward to strengthening the communication components of the national networks.

14. What are the best practices (of ICT applications) of other effective organizations/networks that could inspire future activities? The team feels that the best practices of ICT applications they have been exposed to were learned in a workshop where explanations about buying domains and renting servers were offered to participants.

15. Any suggestions for a next phase of a policy and action program HIVOS & ICT? The team suggests that HIVOS should maintain an ICT applications program. In relation to the specific organizations they represent, the suggestion is to increase budget allocation for strengthening the capacity and empirical use of ICT as well as communications with local organizations

### **Case analysis**

CM is a national network designed to reach grass root organizations made up by poor coastal individuals who live in isolated areas where no electronic interconnection is available. This condition necessarily forces CM to develop a communication strategy based on traditional means in order to reach local organizations and individuals. At the same time, CM makes use of ICT (e-mail, a web site, and www searching) applications to interact with similar national networks of other countries, and to relate with regional and global thematic networks from which CM obtains information and political support to advocate mangrove conservation at the national level. CM is closely linked to RMI that

networks other nine national networks similar to CM. The interaction with RMI also requires the application of ICT.

CM is a basic user of ICT applications. The network has a serious budget limitation for replacing equipment and training personnel in the application of ICT. CM also faces a technological gap since no ICT technology can be used to reach its constituency. This condition has forced CM to develop mechanisms to make use of traditional communication technology, but even on this ground there exists a lack of budget and expertise to make use of means such as radio or video with which the local network members could be reached.

Apparently, ICT has not been the priority to either CM or RMI. Actually, communications have been a transversal component, but it has never been faced as a major constraint in need of a solution to better operate the network activities. The new situation that makes FUNDECOL to house RMI in Ecuador has called the attention in relation to the potential and the need to update capacity to use ICT applications.

A substantial effort will be needed to support CM and RMI to become full ICT users. It certainly requires financial support, particularly to update hardware and access means in Quito. However, the most important support could be the human resource training and the use of radio and multimedia technology susceptible of being applied locally.

## **MCCH**

The Fundacion Maquita Cushunchic (MCCH) was created in 1985 like a commercialization and solidarity movement in which organized agricultural producers and consumers participated. The idea from the beginning was to establish a non-profit commercialization channel by eliminating non-essential intermediaries.

MCCH seeks the transformation of social, economic and market structures in favor of individuals and groups with fewer resources in Ecuador, through alternative process for producing, financing, commercializing and training. MCCH practices fair and transparent trade; elaborates alternative commercialization policies; promotes a participatory decision base; endorses gender equity; respects native culture and environment; and encourages family structure as the basis of social development.

MCCH operated during the first five years as an informal commercialization chain, but due to strong political opposition by large producers who saw that cheap labor was not available anymore and dedicated themselves to their own agricultural production, it was necessary to establish a legal status and formally constitute an NGO. Today, MCCH maintains commercial relationships with 120 cocoa producer organizations, 12 handcraft workshops, and 23 food processing and tourism organizations. Some of those groups are still informal and work on confidence relations for commercial purposes. MCCH has a commercial relationship to those organizations based on confidence that need no contract to exist.

MCCH is organized in three major components: the social, commercial, and support components. The two first ones have a similar strategic principle: perform economic sustainable activities to serve target population. In doing so, MCCH plays practices solidarity intermediation between producers and consumers at national and international levels, and provides technical advising to organizations at the different levels of business they may play a part. MCCH selects products with comparative and competitive advantages, particularly when intermediating for external markets.

HIVOS has supported a three-year project to increase cocoa productivity with 26 organizations in Esmeraldas province. This project includes the construction of collection centers, acquisition of dryers, producer's organization, and training. This project ends in 2004 and a second phase is under analysis.

Through HIVOS introduction, IICD has approved a three-year project that will enable MCCH to improve communication among cocoa producer organizations and the export division of MCCH. This project has an ICT component to manage information related to the commercial activity. This means, prices, volumes,

country buyers, importers, other exporters, etc. It also allows a monthly financial analysis of each collection center. Nevertheless, this project is not operating yet.

MCC as institution applies ICT. Has developed a web page and regularly uploads information. Captures information from the www and interacts with some producers and buyers by e-mail and chatting rooms. MCC has also offices in several cities of the country with access to Internet and e-mail. Local offices use video camera to hold monthly internal review meetings. Communication with organizations with no access to ICT is by telephone.

Although the HIVOS contribution is just tangential to the MCCH ICT applications, after the dialog with the Executive Director and the person responsible for the current HIVOS project, answers to the guide questions have been interpreted as follows:

1. Which uses do network partners make of ICT to improve their networking activity? MCCH does not constitute a network, excepting for the intranet that links all offices in Ecuador. Internet connection resides exclusively in Quito headquarters.
2. In which way has HIVOS supported these applications of ICT? The HIVOS funded project has contributed to acquire hardware for some collection centers and to obtain software licences.
3. In which way did different ICT applications improve the effectiveness of the network? Did they increase the impact of the network? The use of ICT applications is very important to MCC. Most communication with buyers, the analysis of external markets and information on markets conditions (volumes, prices, etc.) are possible due to ICT. Effective business and information handling could not be done otherwise. Similarly, communication and orders placement through e-mail are key tools for business making. ICT has undoubtedly improved the MCCH effectiveness
4. Which ICT applications failed to achieve the expected results (and for which reasons)? They have not experienced any ICT application failure.
5. What have been the obstacles for partner organizations to make a full use of ICT applications? A significant proportion of organizations that MCCH deals with have no access to ICT. This is an obstacle to operate by electronic means and make a better use of ICT.
6. What are the criteria that network partners use to evaluate the success of their activity? Have evaluations taken place? No evaluation of ICT usage has taken place so far. The only change MCCH introduced was the www domain from .com to .org.

7. What kind of additional information was made available through the applications of ICT, and which use did network partners make of the additional information? The use of ICT was made available to MCCH additional information on external markets of products they analyze for future business decisions. Consumer tendencies information has become available as additional information. This also applies to national markets although not all available information about those markets can be obtained through ACT applications.

MCCH has also obtained information on new administrative methods and training sources on this topic.

8. How did the ICT applications increase the influence/effectiveness of activities of the network? As mentioned before, MCCH effectiveness increased several times by using ICT applications. Influence has increased as well; particularly due to the fact that MCCH is the host of RELACC, which is a network for fair trade in Latin America in which 13 countries are currently participating. Visibility and MCCH seniority on this type of fair market intermediation have been widely recognized.

9. Do network partners use ICT to interact more closely in national, regional (Latin American), or international (global) networks? MCCH interacts with a number of networks that specialize in some of the topics related to the type of business in which the organization is interested. The following are the most important: IFAT (fair trade), FLO, RELACC, ICCO, SFU (sustainable forest use), IFOAM (certification movement), and OIKO (world financing information). At the local level, MCCH interacts mostly with: Movimiento de actores del cacao del frente Norte (North Cocoa Actors Movement), Red financiera rural (Rural Financing Network), ECOP (Ecumenical Financing Network), and CEDEP (Ecumenical Project Center).

10. Are the networks and their partners also partners of the OneWorld network? Does it have an impact on their own work? MCCH is subscribed to OneWorld and regularly receives information. This is the only relationship between the two organizations.

11. Do partner organizations prefer to cooperate in smaller, thematically specific networks or in broader, more general networks? MCCH interaction with other networks is decided on the basis of information needs, business potential and commercial relationships. In some cases, MCC participates in some networks to maintain presence and visibility.

12. In which way could HIVOS have supported the strategic application of ICT even better? MCCH representatives think that HIVOS participation may have included resource allocation to other components, in addition to cocoa productivity. They feel that other components such as micro-financing have the potential of strong impact among producers engaged in fair trade. They also

think that HIVOS could have helped to make available voluntaries to help with the optimization of present ICT applications.

13. Which ICT applications are planned for the future to support the working of the network? The approved IICD project scheduled to start in the following months has created great expectations about ICT applications in MCCH. They look forward to doing more and new business with cocoa in international markets through ICT. They also expect to be able to maximize on field inventories, and prices paid to producers.

14. What are best practices (of ICT applications) of other effective organizations/networks that could inspire future activities? MCCH representatives claim that they have learned from the way some networks organize and deliver information, and the manner some web pages are presented. However, they keep in mind that ICT is an instrument and not a goal.

15. Any suggestions for a next phase of a policy and action program HIVOS & ICT? MCCH believes that HIVOS program should continue to help organizations to use ICT in order for them to gain efficiency and effectiveness as has been the case of MCCH itself. They think that technical backstopping should be provided to cope with the dynamic technology involved in ICT.

### **Case analysis**

MCCH is a well structured organization that has accumulated enough experience to properly manage a cumbersome business and to create social capital with a rather large number of small agricultural producers. This is an experience that should be disseminated. MCCH has developed materials that may be used for training organizations and individuals.

MCCH works through ICT applications, in particular for participating in external markets which are, by far, the most important source of its economic sustainability. Although the HIVOS project is only tangential to MCCH applications of ICT, progress has been made up to the point that most business information for decision making is captured through ICT means. This state may not be attributable to HIVOS participation, but the NGO has a high potential to improve its ICT applications to reach producers organizations and to assist similar movements in other countries through the Latin American network (RELACC).

Undoubtedly, the forthcoming IICD project will contribute to strengthening MCCH capacity to apply ICT. Perhaps, this effort may be complemented with new and more efficient software and mechanisms to manage collection and selling points that seem to be very important for MCCH activities. ICT applications can be directed to learning and training on these aspects. At the same time, the participation of MCCH in the regional network could be stressed and supported,

given the MCCH capacity to exercise leadership in fair trade business and social capital building.

## OVERALL ANALYSIS

ICT applications are essential to all organizations selected for this evaluation. Most of them are networks that rely on a two way communication need: capture and delivery of information on the themes that comprise the core of their activities. Several organizations operate as information networks that intermediate between regional and international networks and information sources, and the local networks created most times to carry out thematic developments, campaigns, political lobby and positioning of alternative policy propositions to specific problems faced by the society.

All selected organizations have incorporated the use of e-mail and have access to Internet. With the exception of one organization, all of them have constructed web pages that are used to upload information in most cases, although only one is interactive. Some of these organizations have information banks accessible by Internet or are in the process of creating one. Few organizations make use of chatting rooms to promote specific discussions. All of them make use of traditional communication technologies: formal publications, regular bulletins, and journal boards. Some of them also make use of radio broadcasting and newspaper supplements.

HIVOS is supporting projects to all selected institutions. Although no one is an ICT-oriented, these projects have contributed, in different manners, to strengthen the institutional capacity to improve their effectiveness and efficiency by using ICT. These projects share the common factor of sharing information, which makes it essential connectiveness and a rational utilization of ICT applications. Nevertheless, some comments by a few projects' teams point out the convenience of supporting projects aimed at maximizing the use of available technology, particularly in cases where the recipient organizations are functional networks that group a number of local and international similar organizations. This is in line with HIVOS funding policy to promoting networking at all levels. This suggestion may be modified by adding a learning component to projects that can be set like pilot experiences and demonstration sites. These ideas will be explained in the next paragraphs.

One limitation of the current projects implemented by the selected institutions is that the use of ICT applications is quite basic and, very often, considered as information handling tools that have no other function. With the exception of one case, no one of the organizations has developed a strategic plan to apply ICT to either a communication or a learning system to strengthen the networks that most of the projects have put in place. Even that most organizations add to the information they capture and transform it into knowledge, the delivery to partners and target groups is mainly informative and problem-solving (campaign or politically) oriented. This delivery function often lacks a long term education and learning purposes.

'Electronic learning' requires that networking be designed in a way that Internet becomes a teaching tool for distance learning. Guijt et al<sup>2</sup> assign some functions to a network in order to facilitate learning. Among them, three are missing in all organizations included in this evaluation: dialog and exchanging interactive information; formalized education and training; and facilitating 'action learning'. The first one refers to sharing experiences, knowledge and ideas on specific themes by using ICT instruments such as electronic conferences, questions and answers, discussion rooms, etc. Dialog and information exchange requires a structured learning scheme that responds to the concept of 'distance learning'. Facilitating action learning deals with knowledge generation, lesson learned derivation, and best practices identification to be used to solve specific problems, making particular propositions and reducing the knowledge gap.

Associated with the former ideas, there are learning practices that are based on elaborated theories (Guijt et al, 2003) that translate into some procedures leading to either individual or collective learning, facilitated by a structured networking. This implies that the network that is designed with a learning objective should facilitate discussion and reflection directed not only to 'how' to solve problems but to 'why' solutions to problems are the proposed ones. The value of the former steps resides on the learning obtained from collective discussions and the analysis of own experiences by the member organizations in dealing with problems, analyzing processes and deriving lessons.

Six steps have been proposed in order to plan and facilitate 'action learning' in a network or a project (Guijt et al, 2003):

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<sup>2</sup> Guijt, I. J. Woodhill, J. A. Berdegué and I. Visser. 2003. **El aprendizaje a través de redes electrónicas y temas relacionados a monitoreo y evaluación**. Mimeo and electronic versions. <http://www.rimisp.org>

- Decide an action learning agenda
- Articulate the action theory underneath the network or project (working and/or formal hypothesis)
- Identify specific questions of the action learning and research methods that will conduct the process to the generation of knowledge
- Facilitate a collective analytical reflection of processes and activities, and derivation of conclusions and lessons learned
- Write and communicate conclusions and lessons to selected audiences
- Use lessons to improve network or project processes and activities through proper decision making

The former concepts and specific steps are then the basic conceptual framework and components of what a learning networking project could be by using ICT. Of course, it could be applied to any thematic interest or to a more complex set of interests, since these principles can be easily used to design each module of a multi-component project. Likewise, there is no reason to prevent the adaptation of this framework to some of the current projects. It is likely to imply changes in budget allocation and some activities, but rewards could pay-off the effort to maximize the potential of ICT applications, and to open the possibility to apply HIVOS policy on promoting networking at different levels.

The translation of the former ideas to any of the organizations included in this report would imply to design a specific long term working plan which would require a detailed analysis of current programs and projects. However, general ideas could be pointed out to illustrate the network learning function. For example, the information on specific themes could be provided in a scheme such that analysis of particular arguments could be subject to structured discussions in order to rise analytical questions directed to both 'how' and 'why' in relation with the information being analyzed. Similarly, knowledge derived from that information could be a collective task in which the organization that provides the information acts as facilitator to promote and direct the collective discussion. In terms of ICT applications, it would involve the implementation of electronic conferences, structured reading assignments, thematic discussions and a wide participation of partner networks and other stakeholders. The collective analyses of delivered information and the experiences developed by the network itself provide the opportunity to derive conclusions, recommendations and learned lessons. This is the material to be used to feedback the network practices and learning approach.

It is important to indicate that the absence of an action learning content of current HIVOS supported projects does not necessarily mean that projects have no impact on participating organizations. Of course projects' impact must be differentiated, but all projects achieve the purpose of promoting principles, support collective actions, and propose alternative mechanisms to remediate identified problems in the society or selected social strata, and all of them do it by

using ICT. Even that this evaluation exercise was not intended to measure projects impact, it is not very difficult to compare better structured networks (like ALAI, FEDAEPS or MCCH) with others that seem to have a weaker structure and less capacity to impact partners with the information they deliver (like CM, EQUIDAD and AC). It is also necessary to distinguish between specific interventions like a particular campaign that are much focused and time-defined from thematic components or even long term campaigns. The former provides room to impact partners and local organizations in many ways, which is not always possible in a short-run political demonstration.

The support by HIVOS to all these organizations has been critical to them and has contributed to strengthening the use of ICT to develop their activities. Taking into consideration networks' impacts, the number of organizations involved, the volume and velocity to respond to problems, the propositions that somehow represent the voice of less endowed and discriminated groups, and the efficiency/effectiveness reached by using ICT, the question to HIVOS is not about ICT applications policy, but rather which is the way to enhance and strengthen the use and applications of ICT. As mentioned before, particular efforts to transform networking into a learning and knowledge generation and management system are required. But other topics in need of additional support are: training of a critical mass to ensure impact; use of other available ICT tools, like multimedia and video conference; rationalization of information banks and easy access to virtual libraries; and connectiveness to all local organizations that get involved in projects that are ICT oriented.

### ***The more relevant answers to specific questions***

There are several relevant points that are shared by most organizations. They are already mentioned in the overall analysis. Nevertheless, the common aspects that were expressed in the dialogs can be summarized in the following points:

- For all interviewed organizations, the use of ICT and the funding they receive to access ICT are crucial, highly appreciated and indispensable to carry out their institutional activities. They all point out positive changes in effectiveness and efficiency by adopting ICT applications, even in cases in which connectiveness is a major limitation. Some have explicitly said that present activities could have not been complete without access to e-mail and the www.
- Most organizations use ICT applications as a working tool. They are not very concern about the uses network partners make of ICT to improve their networking activity. Nor are they keen at following up failures or better practices for the use of these tools. They are aware of the potential of ICT applications to handle data, access information and produce knowledge, but no special effort is made to promote a better use of these applications. This is probably related to the fact that they do not have any

ICT project that would direct their activities to complete specific institutional objectives related to the use and promotion of ICT, or any other ICT-related goal that one could expect from an ICT designed project.

- Consequently, there exists little interest in evaluating the institutional use of ICT either in the selected organizations or in their partner organizations. In most cases, institutions are concerned with the evaluation of the programs and projects they carry out, but basic working tools are not necessarily major components of that evaluation. It is interesting that most organizations are not even curious about the statistics concerning the use of their web sites. Again, these sites are simple communication tools they know partner institutions visit, because it is essential to develop projects components.
- Globalization of communications seems to delete differences in the type of organization/network to be approached and consulted to obtain appropriate information. The fact that all selected organizations involved in this evaluation are thematic-oriented makes it more evident: all of them make wide information searches, regardless the type and size of organization they gather the information from. It is by the nature of the organizations providing information or promoting political campaigns that the selected organizations become associates or frequent users. Of course big international and national networks usually offer more services and often have virtual libraries that facilitate information search to local institutions/networks. It should be mentioned that for some organizations, the contact with thematic-oriented sponsors has conducted the approach to some of the international networks specialized in those themes.
- All interviewed organizations mentioned their interest of learning how to make a better use of ICT applications. Training of persons devoted to communications and use of ICT is another common factor they share as well as renovation of hardware. The major concern is that efficiency in the use of ICT applications can be obtained by training. Mechanical difficulties and massive communications are time consuming and most organizations would like to have these processes minimized (i.e., handling mailing lists, selecting in-coming messages, down-loading technical material).
- All selected organizations plan on continuing the use of ICT applications, even that some do not have a particular plan to improve the use of these applications they presently do. The organizations that do have some innovations in mind (virtual libraries, interactive web sites, implementation of learning schemes, etc.) are very interested in training and in developing either a program or an ICT specific project with HIVOS, in order to be able to improve their use of ICT applications.
- Finally, all organizations agree upon the idea of strengthening HIVOS support to the use of ICT. Most organizations believe that a more proactive policy is needed. Some refer to the convenience of developing a program to which several projects could be associated. Others would like

to see HIVOS supporting ICT specific projects in which the use of ICT applications is part of the project's objectives. The general message is that HIVOS should move from institutional support projects, in which ICT access is included, to ICT promotion projects in order for recipient institutions to develop a better capacity for using ICT applications.