

BUILDING COMMUNICATIONS OPPORTUNITIES (BCO) IMPACT ASSESSMENT

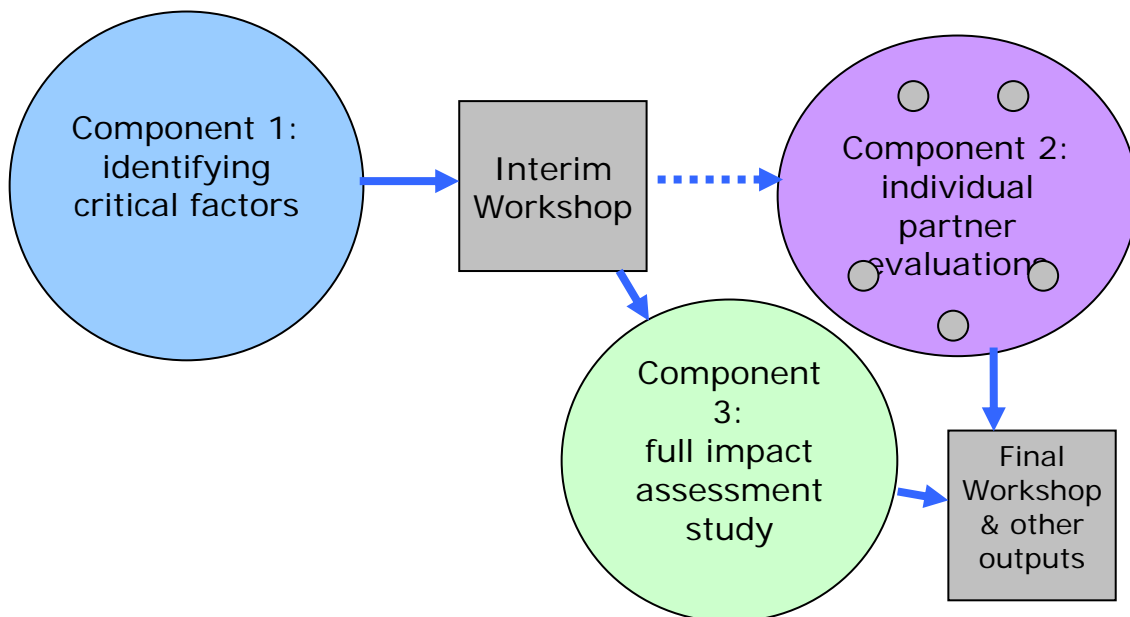
Progress report, 31 December 2006

The Building Communications Opportunities (BCO) Impact Assessment (IA) study is being undertaken by *ict* Development Associates *ltd* (*ictDA*), through a contractual arrangement between *ictDA* and the Association for Progressive Communications (APC), which is acting on behalf of the BCO Alliance.

This document is the second bi-monthly progress report on implementation of the IA study, covering the period from 1 November to 31 December 2006. It is presented by the *ictDA* consultant team for the IA study, which is made up of three experts, David Souter, Tina James and Kate Wild.

Background

The BCO Impact Assessment programme consists of three interconnected Components as illustrated below.



Components 1 and 3 are the responsibility of the independent IA study team. In addition to the three core consultants, James Deane of the Communication for Social Change Consortium joined the study team for Component 1 specifically to consider issues relating to a proposed communication strategy. Component 2 of the IA programme is made up of activities undertaken by BCO partner organisations, either individually or in small groups, and does not form part of the IA study team's remit.

Component 1, identifying factors critical to the Impact Assessment as a whole, was undertaken by the IA study team in the period between the BCO meeting held in The Hague at the end of August 2006 and an interim workshop to review Component 1 findings and initiate work on Component 3, which was held in Johannesburg at the beginning of December 2006.

Component 1

Component 1 of the IA study project was initiated on 19 September 2006, following agreement on contractual issues between APC, acting on behalf of BCO, and *ictDA*.

The purpose of Component 1 of the study was to establish the scope and scale of the evidence base which is available in the existing work and materials of BCO partners. This was intended to enable the IA team to make a preliminary assessment of issues involved in the impact study; to recommend further work required for Component 2 (to be undertaken by BCO partners themselves) and Component 3 (to be undertaken by the IA team); and to establish a framework for Component 3 itself. BCO partners also asked *ictDA* to include preliminary work towards a communications strategy within Component 1, and James Deane of the Communication for Social Change Consortium was added to the team for this purpose.

The detailed breakdown of Component 1 activities is as follows:

B1	Mapping and other follow-up activities to Hague workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mapping of project and other activities within the agreed scope of the Impact Study ● Preparation of promotional material concerning the Impact Study as the example of joint BCO activity ● Dialogue with DFID Impact Study and other comparable initiatives ● Compilation of all documentary materials for Component 1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Map/matrix of project and other activities ● Brochure concerning BCO Impact Study ● Report on dialogue with DFID Impact Study
B2	Review and analysis of materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Development of analytical framework through which to approach documents ● Interviews with BCO partners ● Development of Component 1 report including recommendations for Components 2 and 3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Analytical framework ● Component 1 report – lessons learned
B3	Support for	a) Development of questions to	d) Questions for

	Development of Communications Strategy	<p>be addressed in a communications strategy which BCO coordination will distribute to partners</p> <p>b) Dialogue with partners to develop a preparatory document towards a communications strategy</p> <p>c) Recommendations for communications strategy (included in Component 1 report)</p>	<p>communications strategy</p> <p>e) Component 1 report – recommendations</p>
B4	Component 1 Workshop	<p>Two-day workshop</p> <p>Purpose: To review conclusions of Component 1 activities and agree on priorities and workplan for C3: themes, regions, levels of intervention, mix of programs etc; proposals for regional experts</p>	<p>f) Agenda for workshop</p> <p>g) Participant lists (BCO and non-BCO)</p> <p>h) Successful workshop with agreement on the broad Component 3 work plan and final outputs</p> <p>i) Completed Terms of Reference for regional/thematic experts</p> <p>j) Completion of communications strategy</p>

The first phase of work on Component 1, covering section B1 and the majority of section B2 in this table, was reported in the first progress report on the IA study which was submitted to BCO at the end of October 2006. In the period currently under review, work focused on the completion of section B2 and on sections B3 and B4.

B2 – Review and analysis of materials

The core study team (David Souter, Tina James and Kate Wild) completed their review and analysis of existing materials during the period under review and prepared the Component 1 report. Work towards this report included detailed review and analysis of several hundred documents and other resources submitted by BCO partners, and interviews with personnel from partner organisations. The evidence base provided by partners was, however, uneven, and this was inevitably reflected in the analysis which could be undertaken. These and other difficulties are discussed in the report.

The study team submitted a 40,000-word report on Component 1 to BCO on schedule on 27 November 2006. This report formed the basis for discussion at the Component 1 workshop which was held in Johannesburg on 4/5 December and is reported under section B4 below.

The report is divided into seven main chapters, and is summarised in the following text, drawn from its Executive Summary:

The purpose of the Component 1 report of the BCO Impact Assessment study is to: identify the extent to which BCO partners have established an evidence base of evaluated experience from BCO-related activities, and to build on this to design options for:

- *undertaking components 2 and 3 of the Impact Assessment; and*
- *communicating results brought to light by the study as a whole.*

Component 1 has been undertaken in collaboration with each of the partners who have provided documentation, advice and information. Since it is the foundation for future work, the IA team hopes that BCO members will take the opportunity to correct any errors and supplement material presented in this report.

The report opens with an attempt to understand the nature of the BCO Alliance and the challenges and imperatives of impact assessment as a tool to make the link between poverty levels and the implementation of ICD policies and applications. This introductory chapter provides the context for the analyses, conclusions and recommendations that follow.

Chapter 2 describes the activities of BCO Alliance members in terms of resources, expertise, programmes, evaluation approaches and documentation. It attempts to identify the contributions and complementarities that they bring to the BCO Alliance – and to the IA study.

Chapter 3 homes in on evaluation and impact. It attempts to identify the work underway through ‘implementing agency’ BCO Alliance members in order to assess the results of their programmes in the three outcome areas defined by BCO: mainstreaming; voice; and poverty impact,

Chapter 4 presents the IA team’s conclusions with respect to the evidence available. It opens by identifying the two main outputs that BCO members appear to want from the BCO study:

- *Learning: better understanding of what has achieved impact and of the tools that can help replicate it in the future;*
- *Advocacy: extending the evidence base on ICD in order to increase the commitment of policy makers and decision makers in governments and development agencies.*

Some partners appear to want a collective BCO-wide message on the impact of ICD on poverty while others appear to believe that the message would be more credible coming from the individual members. These approaches are not mutually exclusive but need to be addressed differently in Components 2 and 3 with reference to the evidence base and the communications strategy.

As far as the evidence base is concerned, the IA study team believes that it does not reflect outcomes of a BCO partnership per se but rather a quite substantial set of experiences of BCO members acting individually. However, this does not mean that it is not possible to undertake a meaningful impact assessment of work associated with BCO or to build messages that draw on the experiences of the diverse partnership within the BCO Alliance.

Chapter 5 presents outputs and approaches aimed at achieving this meaningful assessment.

Two outputs are proposed:

- *An outreach publication which draws together serious impact assessment concerning a range of diverse BCO activities undertaken by different partners.*
- *A set of tools which BCO Partners, collectively or individually, can use to assess the impact of ICD activities in the future.*

In this chapter, the IA team illustrates the difference between evaluation and impact assessment – short, medium and long term – with reference to BCO partners’ projects and suggests a number of ways in which C3 impact assessment could be structured, taking account of the available resources and the current timeframe for the study:

- *A country perspective would take a limited number of countries and assess the experience and impact to-date of BCO projects (and perhaps BCO partners) in those countries.*
- *An objectives cluster perspective would take as its starting point the three core objectives identified by BCO – mainstreaming, voice and poverty impact – and draw together evidence derived from across the BCO partnership on each theme.*
- *A thematic perspective would look at three themes within the work of BCO partners chosen from those which partners feel are most likely to reveal substantial impact or experience, or where they feel most experience/learning could be gained.*
- *A communications methodology perspective would take three different delivery mechanisms and would look for lessons from these methodologies.*
- *A hypothesis perspective would adopt the social science methodology of starting from hypotheses which are believed to be true, and using the evidence available in BCO and BCO partner activities to test these hypotheses.*
- *An outsiders perspective would be explicitly directed at influencing the perceptions of those in the development community who are currently sceptical of ICD.*

Illustrations are provided for each of these approaches.

This chapter of the report also reflects on the C2 component and suggests ways in which it could be harmonised with the work of the IA team for discussion in the Johannesburg workshop.

In Chapter 6, a revised workplan for C3 is offered which takes account of the accelerated timeframe requested by BCO. The new time frame should be considered in the context of:

- *the need to allow sufficient time for researchers to explore, with appropriate sources, the extent to which at least short-term impacts can be identified;*
- *enabling the research team to devote significant blocks of time to particular areas of work through the timescale available overall;*
- *allowing maximum harmonisation of work between Components 2 and 3; and*
- *maximising the value of potential outputs in relation to other work being done by other agencies.*

Chapter 7 presents a potential Communications Strategy. This strategy seeks to address the promotional, communication and learning aspirations of the BCO partnership, but it aims to root this as much as possible in the IA Study, and where activities are not solely rooted in the findings of the IA study, to be clear about where this is the case.

A copy of the Component 1 report is attached to this progress report.

B3 – Support for development of communications strategy

BCO partners asked the IA team to include provision for the development of a communications strategy in the Component 1 phase of the IA study. James Deane of CSCC was included in the consultant team in order to meet this request from BCO.

Discussion of the objectives, target audience and modalities for a communications strategy during the earlier BCO meeting in The Hague had been inconclusive. A further questionnaire was therefore undertaken to elicit more substantive input from BCO partners concerning their communications strategy objectives. This dialogue took place during November 2006.

A chapter concerning the proposed communications strategy, prepared by James Deane, was included in the Component 1 report and reported directly to the Johannesburg workshop. It set out a number of options for BCO partners concerning the external and internal publication and promotion of BCO activities and of the future findings of the Impact Assessment, and recommended that any communications strategy should be closely tied into the findings of the IA study as a whole.

The IA study team's contract does not include any provision for follow-up activity concerning the communications strategy after the Component 1 workshop, and such follow-up activity is therefore a matter for the BCO facilitator and partners.

B4 – Component 1 workshop

As part of its initial proposal, the IA study team had recommended that an interim workshop be held between Components 1 and 3 of the IA study, enabling the IA team and BCO partners to reflect together on the outcomes of Component 1 and to design work in Components 2 and 3 on the basis of this reflection. The IA study team had recommended that this workshop should be held in late January 2007, allowing significant time for reflection on the Component 1 report, but the workshop was brought forward at BCO's request to the beginning of December 2006.

The Component 1 workshop was organised by the BCO facilitator in the Johannesburg area on 4 and 5 December 2006. It was attended by all four member of the IA study team (David Souter, Tina James, Kate Wild and James Deane). Five BCO partners were present (AMARC, APC, Hivos, IICD, Panos London), but there was no attendance from the three donor partners (DFID, DGIS and SDC), from Bellanet, from Panos South Asia or from any of the three OneWorld regional organisations participating in BCO. The IA team was disappointed that not all of the BCO partner

organisations attended the meeting, and particularly disappointed by the absence of the perspective of BCO funding organisations.

The agenda for the meeting is set out in the following table.

Day 1 4 December 2006 9:00 – 5:30pm		
<p>Focus: Component 1: Analysis of evaluation activities Moving from evaluation to impact assessment</p> <p>Outcomes: Identification of priority areas for C2 evaluation studies Identification of priority areas for C3 Impact Assessment</p> <p>Assumptions: BCO partners will have read the report prepared by the Impact Assessment team</p>		
TIME	SESSION	PRESENTER/S
9:00 – 9:30	Introduction Overview of workshop approach a. Format b. Anticipated Outcomes	BCO Coordination IA team
9:30 – 11:00	Component 1 (C1) evaluation study: Findings	IA team Group discussion
11:00 – 11:15	Tea	
11:15 – 13:00	C1 evaluation study: discussion on findings	IA team Group discussion
13:00 – 14:00	Lunch	
14:00 – 15:30	Component 2 (C2): - Presentation of BCO partners' proposed evaluation plans (10 minutes per partner) - Discussion (including linkages to Component 3)	BCO partners
15:30 – 16:00	Tea	
16:00 – 17:30	Component 3: Identification of priorities Discussion based on recommendations and options presented in the IA team report <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identifying the priorities ▪ Group feedback ▪ Finalising the priority areas ▪ Methodology options 	IA Team Group discussion

Day 2 5 December 2006 9:00 – 5:30pm		
Focus: Component 3: Refinement of approach Communications strategy		
Outcomes: Agreement on C3 approach and focus areas Agreement on communications strategy		
TIME	SESSION	PRESENTER
9:00 – 9.30	Review of Day 1 outcomes: reflections	BCO team IA team
9.30 – 11:00	Measuring impact: methodological approaches	IA Team Group discussion
11:00 – 11:15	Tea	
11:15 – 13:00	Communications strategy	James Deane
13:00 – 14:00	Lunch	
14:00 – 15:30	Workplan for Component 3	IA Team Group Discussion
15:30 – 15:45	Tea	
15:45 – 16:30	Way forward	IA Team
16:30 – 17:30	BCO management matters (Lauren to complete) Closure	BCO coordination

Outcomes of the meeting are described below.

Component 1

During the course of discussion on Component 1, it became clear that some BCO partners had hoped that Component 1 would lead to the development of firmer conclusions about the overall BCO experience than the IA team feels is possible with the limited evidence base currently available. The IA team agreed to undertake a small amount of supplementary explanatory work, for incorporation in a revised Component 1 report text, which would give more detail, at a BCO partner and general level, on:

- a. strengths and weaknesses of the existing evidence base and the limitations this poses for its use in impact assessment and advocacy work;
- b. methodological issues, including the potential for sharing of methodological work;
- c. the relationship between evidence and lessons which can be learnt by BCO partners from their current experience; and
- d. what can be learnt collectively from the current evidence base and the extent to which this can currently be used by partners.

Final details of the work involved were still under discussion between the IA study team and the BCO facilitator at the start of the Christmas/NewYear break, but it is envisaged that this work will add a maximum of ten pages in total (some 7.5%) to the Component 1 report, and will be completed in mid to late January 2007.

Communications strategy

Chapter 7 of the Component 1 report, concerning the communications strategy, was discussed in some detail, and the approach outlined in it was broadly welcomed by BCO partners. The workshop itself did not discuss any follow-up activities arising from this discussion and, as the IA study team's contractual engagement with the communications strategy ceased at the conclusion of the Component 1 workshop, this will presumably be undertaken separately by the BCO facilitator and partners.

Component 3

The IA study team presented a number of different frameworks which could be used by the study team and BCO partners to undertake work in Components 2 and 3. These options represented different ways of examining and interrogating the evidence base, both from BCO itself and the wider development community. They were as follows:

- an approach based on selecting and examining three specific countries;
- an approach based around three core BCO objectives (mainstreaming, voice and poverty reduction);
- an approach based around three development themes or sectors;
- an approach based around three technologies or methodologies of development action;
- an approach based around three hypotheses which are widely held to be true but on which evidence is weak;
- and an approach based around the perspectives of three different stakeholder groups.

Following discussion, BCO partners identified the fifth and sixth of these options as the most interesting and challenging, and asked the IA study team to prepare a proposal for further consideration. The proposal which the IA study team prepared was based on the "hypothesis" approach, and proposed that Component 3 of the IA study should examine three specific hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: "Information and communication resources and capabilities among the poor and marginalised deepen democracy and enhance democratic institutions."

Hypothesis 2: "ICTs help to make markets work for the poor."

Hypothesis 3: "Informed, inclusive and participatory communications reshape policy agendas and improve the delivery of services critical to people's lives." (This hypothesis would be considered with specific reference to the health sector.)

This approach was agreed by BCO partners, and the IA study team was asked to prepare a work programme based upon it.

The IA team also recommended, and BCO partners agreed, that Component 3 should aim at two outputs:

- Output 1: an impact assessment report, which presents the evidence and lessons learnt
- Output 2: learning resources which BCO partners can use to enhance their future impact assessment work,

These two outputs reflect different perceptions within the BCO Alliance of the most important potential value of the IA study.

Component 2

The workshop also included presentation by BCO partners of their current plans for Component 2. The IA team emphasises the importance of integrating Component 2 and Component 3 work for maximising the value which can be derived by BCO partners from the IA study. Further discussions on this are needed at both individual partner and BCO collective level.

Component 3 preparation

The IA study team ended the period under review by beginning the first phase of preparations for Component 3, *i.e.* the development of a work programme proposal which is scheduled for submission to BCO by the end of January 2007.

David Souter, Tina James, Kate Wild
31 December 2006