

BCO Facilitation and Coordination

Multiplying our impact and learning through a joint effort in ICT4D

Introduction

Why the BCO Alliance? It's a tough question to answer when on a day-to-day basis, it is often easier to operate alone and without consultation. This is certainly true for both BCO implementing agencies and donor partners. It would be simple to act unilaterally.

The situation becomes even more complex when you introduce different cultures, political and organisational priorities. The BCO Alliance is complex in this sense. In the donor meeting held on the last day of the Copenhagen meetings in January, it became clear that the various bilateral agency partners are certainly worlds apart in their approaches to development processes. While DMFA and DGIS are keen on general trust agreements with partners, in which they can have a great deal of organisational and programmatic latitude... DFID on the other hand, is more detailed in its definition of expectations, objectives and outputs at as far as the activity level. The dialogue between donors in the BCO can be trying sometimes because of such differences. This holds true for partners as well.

But nevertheless, modern development thinking since early 1990s has pushed processes to become more centralised, streamlined and coordinated. This includes donors working in SWAps or at macro-budgetary levels as well as donors pressing implementing agencies to coordinate. The BCO fits into this thinking – thinking grounded in a belief that by coordinating, we achieve economies of scale and better quality. Scale can mean bigger impact by coordinating resources investment: Quality meaning coordinated and informed thinking. It can mean maximising content work by ensuring that local partners reply to one administrative procedure versus 5 differing ones. All making the development agenda work better.

This is the thinking behind the BCO, but what has it meant in practice? The BDO programme 2003 quarterly meetings have addressed this question in many ways and very thoroughly. It has also been answered by the BDO Learning Study. Experiences by partners also attest to the impact of coordination function of BDO to-date. Reflections on these experiences by both the BDO group and outside consultants, can be found on the following website:

<http://www.dgroups.org/groups/bdo>. Documents that can be found there are: 1) BDO Learning Study

(http://www.dgroups.org/groups/bdo/index.cfm?op=dsp_resource_details&resource_id=10644&cat_id=856); 2) Heather Beaton's review of the BDO Programme

(http://www.dgroups.org/groups/bdo/index.cfm?op=dsp_resource_details&resource_id=10642&cat_id=856); and 3) the report of a BDO learning day focused on the BDO programme as collaborative network

(http://www.dgroups.org/groups/bdo/index.cfm?op=dsp_resource_details&resource_id=10643&cat_id=856). Some coordination achievements are highlighted here:

- Through the regular meetings and on-line communication, the NGO partners have built up a trust and content understanding of one another. This has over time, **led to the member NGOs finding natural points of international collaboration and coordination**. Just a few of realised collaborations include:
 - Louder Voices project between CTO and Panos
 - I-Train Online (ITO) between IICD, OWI, Bellanet, APC and others
 - CCLEC between OWI and IICD
- The influence of collaboration among IC4D units of bilateral organisations has trickled down and had a demonstrated impact for collaboration among donor offices at the local level. Among the BCO donors, many have been coordinating in national environments as part of

SWAp processes. This is often the case between DFID, DGIS and DMFA. IICD among others, as a common partner, has in some national environments helped to strengthen the common ICT4D approach. Simply put, **the national ICT4D coordination among the BCO donors has to some extent been catalysed under the BDO programme**. Often an implementing organisation has brokered donors to come together or donors have exerted peer pressure on one another. Two examples are:

- ICT for Health Care policy in Uganda is being coordinated between DMFA and DFID, together with IICD.
 - ICT for Agriculture policy in Bolivia is being coordinated between SDC, DFID and DMFA and IICD. IICD has also brokered this grouping of donors behind the ICT for Education policy in Bolivia.
- BDO implementing agency local partner networks, when catalysed by the partner head office, began to find one another in the national environments. At the BDO international level, implementing agencies identified some programme areas where local networks could meaningfully combine activities and skills. **Partner networks coming together at the national level has led to the realisation of some fruitful synergies**. One example is:
- In Zambia, E-Brain is a local ICT4D network that seeks to influence policymakers and spread learning on ICT4D. It is a network catalysed by IICD and under the BDO programme, Panos and OWI local partners joined the network. The greater the critical mass of experience, learning and physical persons, the stronger the quality and influence the network can exert.
- The coordination of ICT4D units of donor agencies aspect of BDO has had an impact on other bilateral agencies and their interest in coordinated ICT4D. **By being in itself a coordinated effort in development, the original partners of DFID and DGIS have attracted the interest of other bilateral agencies**. Specifically:
- After seeing a presentation on the BDO Programme at a GKP meeting, both SDC and CIDA interest in joining was sparked. Both bilateral agencies joined the BDO within a year of this event.
 - Similarly, the DMFA and Hivos became interested in the BDO Programme due to the high level of bilateral agency involvement at the time.
 - Other bilateral agencies including Development Cooperation Ireland, SIDA and NORAD, have expressed interest in the BDO and continue to follow developments. In some cases, they have been invited to a meeting as observers in order to secure interest.

These types of synergies and collaborations have a positive impact on the overall ICT4D agenda. Certainly in the local environments, they help bring the impact of ICT4D to a higher level. One significant shortcoming of the BDO programme is that such synergies have not been systematically realised across for example, all countries.

The primary reason that brought this particular group of partners together in an Alliance is a sense of “like-mindedness” in development approaches and priorities. What is that “like-mindedness?” In the context of the BCO Alliance, it is the:

- Understanding that consultation and learning adds value to ICT4D strategy and effectiveness on the ground.
- Realisation that finding synergies and avoiding duplication increase the levels of success of the work.
- Awareness that as a group, there is a critical mass of civil society and public sector experience and voice that enriches the quality of ICT4D debate and action.

Recognition that a common framework – with joint goals, mechanisms and meetings – stimulate consultation and thus, collaboration and learning.

The, BCO facilitation and coordination – as being proposed here – will work to furnish an environment that catalyses such opportunities more effectively.

Redirecting the focus of facilitation and coordination

Looking back at the coordination function of IICD under the BDO programme, a lot was learned and adapted along the way. In short, two learning points in particular evolved:

- 1) **Reporting versus learning** – It can be said that the BDO programme meetings went through an evolution of 3 phases. 1) At the programme's inception, a great deal of emphasis was placed on structured reporting. Much time was spent on devising individual organisational log frames and the need to report within these frameworks. As such, initial meetings had a strong formal reporting focus. 2) Accountability by each organisation for the impact of its activities on the poor became the next point of emphasis. Organisations began to receive more questions and comments pressing them to think more in terms of their ultimate impact on the ground. This change evolved with the thinking on how to approach a BDO programme OPR and Learning Study and with a change in DFID staff members present at the BCO meetings. During this phase, organisations became increasingly aware of the need to have solid M&E programmes. 3) Lastly, the final phase moved to one of learning. During the final year of the BDO, all meetings became 2-day events, with the first day focusing on reporting and the second on learning. Learning was organised around various action lines and many sessions were devoted to the review of the BDO itself.

IICD feels that one contributing factor to the later introduction of a learning focus was that BDO member organisations were not ready to report in a learning format at the programme's start-up. Rather, there was a need for many members to built-up an understanding and trust of other NGOs. The structured and predictable reporting format did create a non threatening atmosphere. Given this, over time, the openness towards one another grew in an organic manner. For example, resistance from the group to 2-day meetings gradually changed to an interest in attending the 2nd day learning sessions. Certainly, the lack of familiarity with one another changed and as the understanding for one another emerged, so did the identification of synergies and collaborations.

The 2nd BDO, or BCO Alliance, will have a stronger learning focus, and learning will be both input and output of our work.

The areas of learning are not defined in advance, and will be agreed upon by the Alliance members during the programme. However, learning will always build on core areas of work of BCO members, in order to pull all the expertise and experience from the group. Although specific learning topic are still to be defined, the Alliance will focus on "in-depth" learning (as opposed to tackling various issues on ad-hoc basis).

The beneficiaries of our learning process are BCO Alliance members, ICT4D practitioners and policy-makers, as well as broader development community. This will depend on the topic: mainstreaming policies will appeal to decisionmakers, while discussions on ICT4D applications might be more interesting to practitioners.

In the same time, IICD will continue to invest in facilitating the group dynamics and to work to realise the "familial" sense that was identified as a unique strength under the BDO programme.

- 2) **Fragmented versus coordinated "marketing"** – The BDO programme can be characterised as having loosely brought together a number of strong actors in the ICT4D field. There was no consistent effort, or support for such an effort, to profile the BDO programme as an integrated collaboration; though it did have some natural complementarities. Two primary reasons are

behind the BDO Programme having had a fragmented marketing profile. 1) The lack of familiarity and trustworthy basis between the NGO members at the start of the BDO programme. This became clear in this context as well. For example, at the first presentation of BDO to the DFID staff, NGO members were very keen to ensure that their individual organisations were represented and that there be no BCO logo or attempt to fuse our identities and activities. 2) A budget for marketing or coordinated profile was never part of the BDO programme. As the programme progressed, it became clear that some united profiling of the BDO could possibly have strengthened the reach and influence of the group's results and impact. This is particular in the context of national environments. Results from the BDO Learning Study highlighted this point as well.

Given this, the BCO Alliance, will have a stronger marketing function. This marketing function will be highly interlinked with the bolder learning focus. As such, it will not be PR in the pure marketing sense, but moreso, PR based on a BCO Alliance added-value. This added value being our joint learning and comparative advantage as a group of ICT4D actors: it will primarily be promotion of specific learning that we gather from the BCO. This learning internal and external stakeholders.

The promotional effort will not be concerted effort of promotion of alliance for its own sake. However, learning products will be packaged to capture also the mechanisms and processes that are at the base of our work.

3) Facilitating networking and information exchange with other global and regional programmes and initiatives – In recent years, a multitude of large-scale ICD initiatives have been kicked-off: PICTA and CATIA are just some examples. However, the BDO programme has been quite “incestuous” when it comes to relationships with such external networks and platforms. For example, relationships with the CATIA programme have never been clear and strong, although 4 of BDO implementing agencies were taking part inside the programme. In the same sense, the BDO group was never in position to give coherent and strong inputs in global forums and initiatives like WSIS. While each partner was providing independent input in these processes, we never had a common position – nor have we ever systematically exchanged information on and with these initiatives. The same applies to some individual actors in development; e.g. FAO in agriculture or Exchange in health.

The BCO Alliance needs to make sure that it has a clear overview of “what others are doing” and actively pursues synergies with such networks and organisations. This will be a key to avoid duplication and to learn in a most efficient way. Also, it will allow the group to provide coherent inputs in ICD debates at the key moments, allowing for stronger impact of our work. These inputs will come in form of “knowledge products” that capture our learning process and lessons learned. It is to strengthen the message of advocacy and impact of ICT4D.

Most often, these will be publications / recommendations that will be produced in relation with learning sessions (see Communication Programme below).

It is important to underline how BCO Alliance is a closed alliance. It is defined by contractual relationship with the same base of donors who have agreed to share joint reporting and learning. Needless to say, the implementing agencies also see joint reporting and learning as an important element, both as a tool for programme management and for programme management.

However, while BCO Alliance is administratively defined by contractual relationships, the learning within the Alliance is a fully open process. Every learning event brings together a broad base of partners.

A more ambitious coordination function

Taking the experiences of the first BDO Programme, and combining it with the evolving needs of a widening network behind the Alliance, IICD is proposing the following programmes as part of the BCO Coordination. The programme is designed to promote involvement by BCO Alliance partners, maximise learning and the ability to identify collaborative opportunities.

1) Learning Programme

Each quarterly BCO meeting will feature one to 1.5 day(s) that is organised around a theme or sector in which ICT4D plays a role¹ AND in which the BCO Alliance has a particular added value. Examples of possible topics were raised in the August Geneva meeting, and are attached here in Annex 1 – We will need to hold an email based consultation on these topics to determine the best options for BCO Alliance added value. Once the selection is made, the learning sessions will be prioritised for a one year period (See Annex 1). Each of these topical learning sessions will be held subsequently to a BCO Alliance reporting session; making the total meeting time up to 2 days.

- *Building on a comparative advantage.* The BCO Alliance will not pick topics that are simply high profile or well-timed relative to international events. Rather, we should focus on topics that maximise our learning needs and our ability to offer something to a wider environment. Quality learning should be rooted in our activities and southern experiences – and as such, build on a form of BCO comparative advantage. We should not wish to reinvent the wheel or to replicate existing learning, but be quite selective in what we as a group have to offer. The target audience of learning sessions might differ, depending on the topic. Sometime it will be geared towards practitioners, and sometimes more towards policy-makers and local desks of bilateral agencies. We need to pick the topics on the base of our niche and knowledge. **Please keep this in mind in the prioritisation and selection of topics as part of the email consultation noted above. Further, each BCO Alliance member is requested to sign-up to coordinate a learning day session, based on a topic that is particularly close to themselves. This can be done as part of the email consultation as noted above.**
- *Participation in a learning session.* For each of these sessions, wider expertise beyond the BCO Alliance membership will be invited to share their expertise (e.g. Exchange and UNAIDS). The core membership group will nonetheless be given the priority focus and will need to share their experience and on-going activities as related to the topic at hand. Where there is a clear added value for direct Southern partner representation, their presence will be stimulated. For this purpose, funds as part of BCO Coordination will be available to subsidise their travel. And in the case where proximity to the Southern partners will mean a great deal to the learning session, it should be held in the South.
- *Organisation and budget.* For each of the learning sessions, the BCO Alliance partner “signed up” to facilitate the content, will be responsible for organising the content agenda and outside speakers. The BCO Coordinator – still to be hired – will need to work closely with the content partner to arrange facilitation and logistics. Please note that there is no separate budget for the BCO Alliance partner to arrange content. The BCO Coordinator has budgetary discretion for logistics, facilitation and reporting. In addition, there is some travel budget. Each session should creatively look at new and old options for facilitation, such as Open Space or even video-conferencing.

¹ BCO quarterly meetings will be held in locations and in a manner that will minimise costs relative to productivity. In this way, the majority of meetings are likely to be held in Northern locations. Each meeting is a combination of reporting and learning.

2) Reporting Programme

In contrast to the first BDO Programme, the BCO Alliance coordination function will place a stronger emphasis on learning versus reporting for accountability. This tendency was already begun in the final year of the BDO Programme and will be strengthened. But nonetheless, some reporting has its advantages. For example,

- *Common reporting framework for all donors and NGO partners.* Many BCO NGO partners have individual bilateral agreements with a number of donor agency members (e.g. DFID and DGIS at the same time). **Given this, we put forth that all member donor agencies accept the BDO accountability reporting as the standard reporting format on content. Donor agencies must agree to this.** In this way, we as singular organisations are filling in one format versus many different ones – saving time and in the end, this is development money. This does not mean that financial reporting will be done together in the BCO Alliance context. Rather, financial reporting is the separate responsibility of each organisation to their donor partner. It is the content reporting only that has a streamlined place here.
- *Transparent environment in which to identify and follow-up on collaboration opportunities.* One of the noted advantages of the predictable reporting framework, was the ability of each partner to 1) learn from the experiences and expertise of others; and 2) to identify possible collaboration opportunities in the context of the planned activities section of reporting. Despite the often mundane quality of accountability reporting, in the BDO programme context, there was a significant amount of possibilities drawn from the reporting spreadsheets themselves and the ensuing discussion.

Given these advantages, and desire by the majority of BCO Alliance partners to pursue a common reporting framework, IICD is proposing a number of possible spreadsheets for each organisation – both NGO and donor – to complete in advance of each Alliance meeting. It will be the responsibility of the BCO Coordinator to chase, aggregate and disseminate the completed spreadsheets. At the same time, it is the responsibility of each partner – NGO and donor – to complete the sheets in a timely manner. For each meeting, a full package of such sheets will be prepared and sent by both email and post to all partners. The BCO reporting will take place every six months. BCO meetings and learning sessions will also take place every six months.

The group has agreed to use the format report that is attached as Annex 1 at the end of this document. This will be “living document” and it might be additionally improved during the programme.

3) Impact Programme

Stemming from the BDO Programme experience and from the individual experiences of a variety of ICT4D actors is the realisation that there are insufficient impact results available in the field of ICT4D. These are not only results based on accountability, but also results based on learning. These results are both to improve our own effectiveness as actors in this field, and also to help improve the position of ICT4D in the broader development environment. In the end, without said results, the ability to gain broader support among the traditional development community will remain limited.

By aggregating the experiences of a broad group of ICT4D actors, the BCO Alliance has the potential to add quite a bit of impact information to the development community. This is an area of comparative advantage as we all have impact experience, both in terms of methodologies, purposes, general approaches and results. Further, by nature of its donor membership, the BCO Alliance has access to some of the key contributors to national decision-making. As such, we are proposing here a coordinated impact programme that includes three elements.

- *Social change hypothesis.* All of us have a view on how ICTs impact social-economic change. Do ICTs affect change from civil society to the enabling environment? Or is it national

government that affects social change when introducing ICTs? Or the private sector? Or a combination of many? The diversity of views on social change within the BCO Alliance is one richness of the grouping, and one that would be interesting to discuss, capture and learn from. As such, the impact programme proposes to hold a learning event (in the context mentioned above) to look at social change theories in ICT for development.

- *Impact methodologies.* The BCO Alliance members also share a variety of experiences in methodologies behind looking at impact and learning from impact. These include, for example, the target markets of impact; the roles of different actors in impact evaluation and learning (e.g. southern based self-learning); types of indicators and tools to apply indicators... It is proposed here that an effort be made through a variety of mechanisms including a learning event, to bring together the BCO learning on this front.

Impact methodology is a part of evaluation methodology, and should not be confused with it: evaluation is much broader, while impact looks at impact on livelihoods.

- *Country-based results.* During the life of the BCO Alliance, at least two country studies will be done in the context of the BCO Alliance. The group will select two countries in which it has a good volume of activities as a whole, versus as individual organisations. Likely candidates are Bolivia, Ecuador, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia and Ghana. These are countries where we have the biggest joint “volume” and quality. The country-based results will be done making use of the learning per the “social change hypothesis” and the “impact methodologies” noted above. We will need additional time to determine how these will be realised. It is suggested here that the primary target market is development policy-makers. The objective is to map the impact of BCO Alliance – making hence an important and systematic contribution to demonstrating the potential of ICTs for development.

In order to start the process, we need to relate to a common vision (baseline exercise), and to undertake a mapping exercise for the selected countries.

4) Communications Programme (internal and external)

In contrast to the BDO Programme, there will be some limited funds set aside in the BCO Alliance to realise a communications programme. Again, this is a marketing function, but one based on analytical materials versus purely PR items. The Communications Programme will be comprised of three relatively low-key components, and these are:

- *Publication of learning products.* The learning and shared experience harvested from the Learning Programme and the Impact Programme, will be published as BCO products, both off-line and on-line. It is noteworthy that should a session NOT produce interesting results, the publication will NOT happen. However, if the session’s results are interesting, the publication will happen as part of a series termed “BCO Findings.” It is expected that 3 to 4 will be produced annually.² Each publication will be short (2-4 pages) and topically focused and be attractive to read. The specific content blocks as part of the BCO Findings, will target development agencies and practitioners. Each Findings issue will be based on an analysis from the learning session and in some cases, complemented by outside persons. On-line, the BCO Findings will be fed into IConnect topical headings. Links to BCO member sites and others, with automatic information feeds (spidering), will be pursued. The country studies as part of the impact programme, will also be published in this manner. The BCO coordinator will look to set-up a volunteer editorial committee to work on such items.
- *Marketing products.* This is the only pure marketing function being proposed and it is a low-grade investment. It is recognised that alongside the learning products, some additional communication work is needed. The need has been defined in part by the lack of awareness among local BCO Alliance donor offices of what exactly the BCO is. This, together with head offices, is an important target group of the Communications Programme. A *BCO brochure* will be designed according to the BCO “house style” and the content written by a sub-contracted

² It is important to note that a consistent design will be produced for BCO dissemination, called a BCO “house style”. The “house style” should emphasize the membership of the Alliance by presenting the logos of participating organisations. There will be no independent BCO Alliance logo.

communications person. The brochures will be a main mechanism for all Alliance members to be able to communicate “officially” what the BCO is and who is participating. It will be written in line with the primary target market. The “house style” would be used for all BCO publications.

- *Media plan.* Annually, a sub-contracted communication person will write two *articles to be released to the media* for possible publication. Both on- and off-line media will be targeted and should vary across the spectrum of ICT4D to development oriented publications.

A General Note on Roles and Responsibilities

One of the shortcomings of the BDO programme was the level of commitment expressed by members to its coordination. Networks are in general difficult to maintain and they require a dynamic by which one party takes responsibility for “chasing” and “consolidating” while at the same time, creating a space for sharing and decentralised ownership. As such, the BCO Alliance will work to better combine these aspects.

There will be a central BCO Coordinator, likely to be working from a developing country. This person will have overall responsibility for the 4 programmes. However, in contrast to the BDO, partners will be asked to sign-on to topics and events in which they would like to play a content/facilitation role. The communications/publications needs of the BCO Alliance will be outsourced as needed. The BCO Coordinator function will likely be a 2-3 day per week job and we are looking into joint appointment possibilities with other organisations. **However, your recommendations on solid candidates is highly welcome!**

Annex 1: approved reporting framework. *BCO Reporting*

Reporting period: E.g. September 2004 to February 2005

Organisation:

Purpose of the BCO Alliance is to investigate, mobilise and support key ICT4D opportunities that impact poverty.

Outcomes	<i>This quarter's activity(ies) – short description</i>	<i>3 Key lessons and implications for the BCO work</i>	<i>3 key successes and implications for the BCO work</i>	<i>Collaborations in support of activity – with both BCO and non-BCO partners</i>	<i>Snapshot next quarter activity(ies)</i>
① ICD has been mainstreamed in development sectors (PRSPs, SWAps)		1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.		
② Stronger voice and debate have been enabled through ICD		1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.		
③ Learning and accountability in ICD have been demonstrated		1. 2. 3.	1. 2. 3.		