

The Building Communication Opportunities Alliance (BCO) is a partnership of eleven development agencies working on information, communications and development.

BCO Alliance partners believe that information and communications are of crucial importance in poverty reduction – in enabling the poor to have their say and to get better access to knowledge and other resources.

New information and communication technologies (ICTs) build on established information and communication resources of the poor and offer new opportunities to increase their value.

But our knowledge of what works and what does not is weak. We need to know more about the impact of information, communications and ICTs on development and poverty reduction if people are to gain maximum value from them.

Since March 2004, BCO alliance partners have worked together to support new initiatives on information, communications and development around the world.

Now they have pooled resources to undertake a major impact assessment – of their own work and of other information, communication and ICT initiatives around it. The study will look in depth at the impact which is being achieved on all aspects of poverty reduction, focusing on a number of individual countries and key themes. It will ask the views about this of many different stakeholders, including marginalised communities, in particular, the poor.

The study is being carried out by an international team of experts in the field. It will focus in particular on three issues which are crucial to the current ICD debate:

- **mainstreaming** – the incorporation of information, communications and ICTs within mainstream development priorities;
- **voice** – the ability of the poor to express their concerns and make their views heard by decision-makers;
- **and poverty impact** – identifiable impact of information, communications and ICTs on the lives and livelihoods of the poor.

The findings of the impact assessment study will be published in August 2007 and shared by BCO with others working in this crucial field of development.



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# Impact Assessment



building communication opportunities

The BCO Alliance believes in the importance of information and communications in reducing poverty, and the potential of new technologies to increase what information and communications can achieve. Since March 2004, its members have supported imaginative projects, in partnership with local stakeholders, which are intended to unlock that potential. They have gained a great deal of experience at local level in communities around the world. As well as different countries and regions, their experience covers many different types of information and communication resources – from journalism to managing health and education programmes – and many different technologies – from community radio to the Internet.

BCO partners believe we need to learn as much as we can about experience to date if we are to make the most of the opportunities information, communication and ICTs provide for the poor. That is why BCO has commissioned a major impact assessment study – of its partners' own work and of the wider experience of which this forms a part. The study aims to examine some of the most important questions decision-makers in government and donor agencies are asking.

## The impact assessment questions

### The main question

- How do communications for development contribute to poverty reduction through strengthening the voices, capacities, communications and networking of the poor and the marginalised, and enable them to influence decisions that affect their lives?
- and where?
- and when?
- and why?
- and what determines the likelihood that they will do so and the risk that they may not?

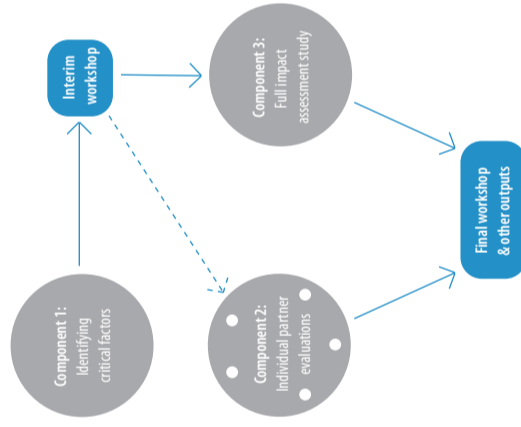
### Subsidiary questions

- How do ICTs at grassroots help achieve pro-poor growth and mitigate inequalities, towards the achievement of the MDGs and PPS (Poverty Reduction Strategy) goals?
- How does "giving voice to the poor" (including through local media) change their lives and support the achievement of development objectives?
- How is ICT influencing processes of governance?
- How does ICT policy improve people's lives?
- What are the connections between local, national and global impact?

### The study will also look at the impact of BCO itself

- What role has BCO had in relation to these potential impacts?
- Where did it add value?
- How lasting is this value?
- What lessons does it offer for scalability, replicability and sustainability?

The BCO impact assessment is being carried out from July 2006 to July 2007 by an experienced team of information, communication and development experts. It has three components:

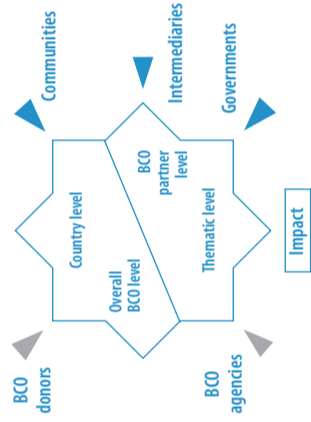


The findings of this first part of the study will be reviewed by BCO partners in December 2006 and guide the remainder of the work.

The second part of the study consists of in-depth evaluations which BCO partners will be making of their own activities, contributing further to the overall evidence base for the study. Some of these evaluations began in mid-2006.

The third part of the study take place from January to July 2007. It looks at the context surrounding the work of BCO partners - seeing how BCO activities fit into the bigger picture of changes taking place in information and communications; looking at how information and communications initiatives interact with the implementation of Poverty Reduction Strategies and plans to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) seeking to identify long-term impacts on the lives and livelihoods of the poor, which will help everyone concerned - governments, donors, civil society organisations, the media and other stakeholders - to increase their impact on poverty reduction.

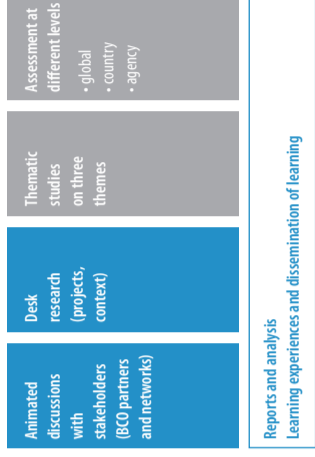
The study will look at the evidence from a variety of different perspectives - including those of poor communities themselves, of governments, and of the information intermediaries and networks on which people depend to meet many of their information and communication needs.



The first part of the study, from July to December 2006, looks in detail at the work which BCO partners have carried out during the BCO programme. Like the study as a whole, it focuses on three key issues which are of great importance to everyone interested in these issues:

- **mainstreaming** - the incorporation of information, communications and ICTs within mainstream development priorities;
- **voice** - the ability of the poor to express their concerns and make their views heard by decision-makers;
- **and poverty impact** - identifiable impact of information, communications and ICTs on the lives and livelihoods of the poor.

As well as looking at selected countries, the study will review experience in three critical thematic areas of activity. These thematic areas will be selected at the end of the first part of the study. The final structure of the study will look like this:



The study will conclude with a review workshop in July 2007 involving BCO partners and other stakeholders.

We are committed to working closely with other stakeholders concerned about information, communications and development throughout this impact assessment – and we look forward to sharing the lessons that we learn with everyone concerned with these important issues.

### To find out more

BCO partners would welcome the views of other stakeholders on the impact assessment.

To find out more about BCO, contact the BCO coordinator, Lauren Fok at [info@bcoalliance.org](mailto:info@bcoalliance.org)

To find out more about the BCO Impact Assessment Study, contact the study team coordinator, David Souter at [david.souter@unbox.com](mailto:david.souter@unbox.com)

