

Regional Office India: Hivos annual plan 2005

3.7 Information, Media & Knowledge Sharing (IMK)

In April 2005, the Supervisory Board of Hivos approved 'Making Civil Voices Heard; Media, Information and Communication for Development Programme 2005-2008' and after the re-structuring of Hivos in July 2005, ICT, Media and Knowledge Sharing became a full-fledged policy priority area. The overall goal of this policy area is 'to empower citizens in developing countries - especially the poor and marginalised and their organisations - to express their voices and make them heard.' 'Making Civil Voices Heard' is the successor of Hivos' first ICT policy and action programme 2000-2004, which was called 'Access for All, Equal Opportunities in Cyberspace'. This programme was evaluated in 2004, and one of the key 32 recommendations that emerged was that Hivos should emphasise capacity building for the strategic use of ICTs, strengthening networking and knowledge sharing to achieve organisational goals. As ICT usage has matured, it has become clear that ICTs are first and foremost a communication tool and rather than an end. If wielded strategically, these tools can build capacity, amplify voices, share knowledge and empower people. The evaluators advised Hivos to integrate its ICT efforts with its knowledge sharing strategy, increase different forms of south-south exchange.

This new programme of Hivos recognises these shifts and has five main components:

- Strategic use of ICTs among Hivos partners.
- Knowledge sharing opportunities among Hivos partners.
- New Media (civil media and communication platforms)
- Lobby for inclusive and human rights based ICT and media policies, and
- Research and innovation.

ITforChange became Hivos' first partner in India under the new policy. ITfC's 'Information Society for the South' programme will engage in research, capacity building and advocacy, and its online component will be called Information Society Watch. ITfC's research will investigate issues such as possibilities of providing connectivity as a public provision / regulated utility and other pro-poor alternatives, content sharing practices of those who produce development content, and use of Open Source software for development initiatives. ITfC expects that as a result of its work, understanding of Information Society issues will improve among development actors, leading to a more purposeful use of ICTs to strengthen development interventions. A survey will be conducted in 2006 to lay the ground for further development of Hivos' IMK programme in India.

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8.2. ICT, Media and Knowledge Sharing

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is an important tool for development. For that reason, Hivos has been promoting the use of ICT by its partner organisations for many years. The exchange of information and knowledge between NGOs in the North and South with donors, funds and scientists can increase their strength considerably. However, the global explosion of ICT does not automatically end any existing inequality, injustice and poverty. Hivos therefore lays down (human) rights in the virtual world by means of international lobbying activities in cooperation with the Dutch government, the business sector, the Open Society Institute and other NGOs.

Due to the increasing public interest for ICT for development, Hivos has considerably extended its activities in this field, and added the field of Media. The number of partner organisations in this area doubled in the course of 2005, with a renewed focus on quality. While access to ICT was the main issue in previous years, the 'strategic use' of this technology is the focus of the new strategy as from 2005. That means that Hivos partners use ICT as a tool to achieve their objectives in a more effective way.

World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)

Which rules apply in the virtual world? Who has access and what about the guarantee of (human) rights such as freedom of speech on the Internet? Delegations from all over the world met in Tunis at the second World Summit on the Information Society in order to discuss these questions. Like during the first conference in Geneva (2003), Hivos was part of the Dutch delegation which was headed by Minister Bronkhorst of Economic Affairs. Under the heading Expression under repression, Hivos itself organised a meeting for NGOs, bloggers, policy makers and other interested parties. This title turned out to be more than apt. In an attempt to prevent too much criticism, Tunisian government officials tried to prevent the session. Thanks to effective actions by, among others, the Dutch ambassador, the meeting could be held as planned. Partly as a result of the incident, this contribution from Hivos received a lot of media attention from NRC Handelsblad, Radio1 and

foreign media such as the BBC. The attempt by the Tunisian authorities to restrict freedom of speech highlighted precisely why it is so important to keep bringing this subject up for discussion.

The business sector and international funds

Hivos has taken steps towards a more intensive cooperation with the business sector and international organisations. A joint venture agreement was concluded with KPN in order to pass on ICT knowledge to Hivos partners in 6 African countries. The past year already saw pilot projects in Namibia and Kenya, where organisations educate youngsters by means of SMS on issues such as HIV/AIDS.

Together with the Open Society Institute (OSI), Hivos entered into an agreement for structural cooperation. One of the joint initiatives is the development of digital tools that enable NGOs to keep their organisation going. By using a special version of this 'NGO-in-the-box' tool (presented for the first time during the workshop for NGOs in Tunis) organisations can respond to attempts by governments to censor or curtail their activities. It contains programmes to guarantee the safety of communication via e-mail and the Internet and to protect the identity of users. Over the next years, Hivos and OSI shall also cooperate in the fields of culture and media.

www.soros.org | www.ngoinabox.org

Content on the Internet

In 2005, the majority of Hivos partners provided Internet content via their own websites. The setup, with active support from Hivos, of separate OneWorld centres in Africa, Asia, Latin America and South-East Europe made a significant contribution to this. Hivos also continued to support other networks aimed at specific themes or countries. In Indonesia, Hivos launched the Satu Dunia network in cooperation with OneWorld. This is an Internet platform for 35 partner organisations in the fields of agriculture, the environment and HIV/AIDS. Following intensive training, a group of 9 partners took the lead to make the Satu Dunia portal operational in the next year. The Kubatana network is a successful initiative in Zimbabwe. Kubatana enables the affiliated NGOs to exchange information about current developments and each other's experiences fast and effectively. Within the current political context this is of great importance to their functioning.

www.kubatana.net

An ongoing activity is increasing the ICT knowledge and skills of partner organisations by means of targeted training and capacity building. This often happens in cooperation with strategic partners such as OneWorld and the International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD).

Two projects with IICD in Ecuador, aimed at processing cocoa and the protection of mangrove forests, had a successful initial phase and shall be continued into 2006.

The ICT activities of Hivos and IICD in Zambia have run into some delays. Women's organisations were to exchange information and make it accessible to women in the country by means of ICT. Local organisations there often are not strong enough to carry the project. Nevertheless, together with the Organic Producers and Processors of Zambia (OPPAZ), a proposal was drawn up which shall be implemented early 2006.

www.oneworld.net | www.iicd.org

Quality control: do it yourself

Over the past year, Hivos has contributed to the development of software which helps consumers in tracing the origin of products by themselves (track and trace). This is especially useful if you want to find out what the quality marks for biological and fair trade products mean.

So if you enter the packaging code of, for instance, fruit of the Nature and More label into the website of this organisation, you will get an overview of the producer and of how production is rated in terms of sustainability, nutritious quality and social aspects.

www.natureandmore.org

Dgroup web platform

Hivos and its partner organisations use Dgroups (Development through Dialogue) on an increasing basis; this is a platform which facilitates digital workplaces for themed or working groups. Through their own (open or closed) Dgroup, participants can send e-mails, organise debates, exchange documents and pursue a joint agenda. Since 2004, Hivos has been a member of the international group that manages the Dgroups. The other members are Bellanet, DFID, ICA, IICD, OneWorld, UNAIDS and the World Bank. Hivos itself uses 20 Dgroups. Thirty groups were made operational for Hivos partners.

www.dgroups.org

Media

Independent media are indispensable for a properly functioning democracy and for societies on their way to democracy. That is why Hivos paid a lot of attention to this subject in its policy document Making Civil Voices Heard. Within the new organisational setup too, Media is a special area of attention within the sector (ICT, Media and Knowledge Sharing). In 2005, Hivos and Internews submitted a proposal to an invitation to tender from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to support independent media in Iran. This proposal was honoured, which means that both organisations shall work out the project in 2006. In Iran, Hivos has also been actively supporting civilians who have their own Internet page with observations and opinions about politics and society, the so-called weblogs. It is remarkable to see that the most common language in Iran, Farsi, is one of the languages bloggers use most internationally. With a view to the difficult situation for organised activities in today's Iran, this form of communication offers one of the best ways of making civil society's voice heard.

ACCESSIBLE SOFTWARE IN INDIA

Open source software (OSS) is available for free and as such is of interest for development projects of NGOs and authorities in the South. In the Indian state of Kerala, SOMA/SPACE (Society for Promotion of Alternative Computing and Employment) is developing this software in cooperation with local engineering academies. The organisation also helps to start up so-called virtual micro companies. These are companies where software developers work on a certain project from different locations. SOMA/SPACE acts as a catalyst for this type of small-scale businesses and as a middleman to the larger ICT industry.

The initiatives with virtual micro companies led to two successful projects this year. On contract from the state's government, a website was set up to help the unemployed and businesses come into contact with each other. This site (www.keralashree.org) is part of the regional programme for alleviation of poverty. As a result of this approach, the development costs were extremely low. A second project relates to the development of a monitoring model for available budgets in respect of the repair of homes in the state of Tamil Nadu which were destroyed by the tsunami. The executing party of this reconstruction project is the South India Federation of Fishermen Societies (SIFFS), one of the most significant Hivos partners in the field of post-tsunami recovery. In the next year, SOMA/SPACE shall build on these successes in its strategy to promote open source software on a broader basis, to train people and organisations and to launch new initiatives in the field of employment. Cooperation with academic institutions, the government and the business sector has proven to be an important factor in this respect.

In 2005, Hivos supported SOMA/SPACE with 55,000 euros.

www.space-kerala.org

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4.6. ICT AND DEVELOPMENT

Hivos supports partners in the South so that they can make optimal use of the opportunities offered by information and communication technology (ICT). The ICT programme for the period from 2000 to 2004 was aimed at access to ICT, knowledge and skills, internet content from the South, use of network possibilities, e-commerce and the lobby for internet rights. Hivos spent 8% of its funds on ICT in 2004. Two per cent was earmarked for specialised ICT organisations and networks. The other 6% was for ICT activities of partners in the other sectors. The number of partners with internet access rose from 84% to 92%.

Strengthening organisations

Hivos works to increase the ICT knowledge and skills of partner organisations by means of specific training and capacity building. Often this is done in cooperation with strategic partners. Last year, for example, the One-World network trained one hundred participants. One-third of them were women, which was less than the target of 50%. A two-day regional workshop was held in Lusaka (Zambia). There some 25 African Hivos partners exchanged knowledge and experience on the strategic enlistment of ICT.

One of the results was that the Zimbabwean participants were assigned an important role in developing a national ICT strategy for Zimbabwe. New ICT projects were started in Zambia and Ecuador in collaboration with the International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD). Hivos also financed a study of how women and women's organisations in Southeast Europe and Central Asia can make more effective use of internet. www.oneworld.nl www.iicd.org

Content on internet

Hivos now has 825 partners, and 46% of them offer content on internet via their own website. In the meantime, with the active support of Hivos, OneWorld centres have been set up in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The founding of these regional branches brought the number of network members to 966. Hivos also supported other networks that contribute to information exchange and lobbying in relation to specific themes, such as Baobabconnections (2,200 members from 116 countries) and Behind the Mask, an African network that effectively fights for homosexual rights with a web platform. www.baobabconnections.org www.mask.org.za

E-commerce and transparent production chains

The increase in electronic shopping offers plenty of opportunities to fair trade. Producers in the South can more readily come in contact with buyers in the North via internet. Peoplink, a non-profit web shop and e-marketplace for products from developing countries, last year trained 200 people in the use of software (Catgen) with which they can display their products online. From a commercial point of view, however, this application has not yet brought much success. Hivos will contribute to the development of track-and-trace software in 2005. It allows producers and consumers to gain insight into the social and environmental quality of products. www.peoplink.org

Open source software

Open source software is cheap and easy to adapt to local requirements. It also means a stimulus for the local ICT sector. Knowledge about and use of open source software among Hivos partners has increased thanks to the activities of the Free and Open Source Foundation for Africa (FOSSFA), which acquired 160 new members in 2004. In Belgrade, a workshop allowed activists from women's organisations to become acquainted with the use of open source in practice. Hivos supported the publication of a theme issue on open source by the Indian magazine I4D (Information for Development) which is distributed internationally.

www.fossfa.net www.I4DOnline.net

Internet rights and WSIS

The World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) will take place in Tunis in 2005. In the run-up to the WSIS, Hivos lobbied in 2004 to ensure that digital freedom of opinion and unequal access to information were placed high on the agenda. www.wsis-online.net In the Netherlands, Hivos, IICD and OneWorld Nederland conducted a campaign called Fill the Gap. A conference, Champions of ICT, was organised in November in that context. The object of the open day was to interest young people in the role that ICT can play in international cooperation. At the conference partner organisations from countries such as Kenya and Belize showed how they use ICT to increase awareness about AIDS and to distribute music, an aspect of the preservation of cultural heritage.

Dgroup web platform

Dgroups, or Development through Dialogue, is a platform that facilitates digital workplaces for theme groups or work groups. They can quickly be made and customised for a group, organisation or virtual community. Participants can e-mail, organise discussions, exchange documents and keep a joint agenda via their own open or closed Dgroup. Hivos has been a member of the international group that manages Dgroups since early 2004. The other members are Bellanet, DFID, ICA, IICD, OneWorld, UNAIDS and the World Bank. Hivos has seven of its own Dgroups in use. Thirteen groups have been made operational for Hivos partners. www.dgroups.org

Evaluation of IC T programme

Hivos commissioned an external evaluation in 2004 of the results of its ICT programme. The evaluation, conducted under the guidance of Professor Gerd Junne of the University of Amsterdam, showed that Hivos clearly contributes to helping its partners gain better access to internet, to strengthening organisations in the South and to increasing internet content from the South. The programme has stimulated networking and contributed to awareness of the ways in which ICT can be enlisted to fight poverty. It has been less successful in the area of e-commerce. This was due in part to the fact that many Hivos partners are not commercial in their approach. But also in a more general sense, a breakthrough of e-commerce did not materialise. A new ICT programme will start in 2005, focusing more on the strategic use of ICT, on training and education and on utilising ICT for knowledge sharing.

Women of Uganda Network

Women of Uganda Network (WOUGNET) promotes and supports the use of information and communication technology (ICT) by women and women's organisations. In Uganda, the access of women to ICT is restricted by poverty, illiteracy, traditional role patterns and the limited telecommunications infrastructure, particularly in rural areas. WOUGNET wants to enable women to work together and exchange information on ICT via e-mail and websites. Twenty-one Ugandan women's organisations are affiliated with WOUGNET. The organisation is also involved in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) process, the Council of the Free and Open Source Software Foundation for Africa and the Association for Progressive Communication Women's Networking Support Programme. The WOUGNET website offers an overview of Ugandan women's organisations and their activities, their participation in the Gender Evaluation Monitoring project and two online forum conferences. The website won the Media Award of the African Information Society Initiative (AISII). WOUGNET also provides training in the efficient use of ICT in enterprise for women.

www.uneca.org/aisi In the past two years WOUGNET has started a programme to improve its services: in 2004, a series of workshops was organised for members who

are active in health care or in enterprise. WOUGNET also creates a pool of volunteers to help its members in website design and other technical matters. Hivos supported WOUGNET with 31,000 euros in 2004.

www.wougnet.org