Knowledge Sharing for Development:  
Online networks and the dual dynamics of inclusion and exclusion

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Charlotte Scarf  
M.A. (Virtual Communication), B.Ec (Social Sciences) (Hons)  
School of Global Studies, Social Sciences and Planning  
RMIT University  
February 2010
Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, I am the sole author of this thesis; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; and any editorial work carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Charlotte Scarf

February 12, 2010
Abstract

This dissertation explores the extent to which donor-funded online networks support greater inclusion and fuller participation by Southern stakeholders in aspects of the development project over which they previously had limited influence or control. The potential of new information and communication technologies (ICT) to facilitate a more inclusive model of support for international development is well recognised in the literature. However, many critics argue that most online networks that have been established by donor agencies or rely on their patronage, exclude local knowledge, experience, and ideas from the South. This research contributes practical insight to this debate through an empirical investigation of online networks that support knowledge sharing between individuals and organisations at three different stages of the ‘aid delivery chain’. This is conceptualised as a chain of individuals and organisations extending from Northern donors to Southern beneficiaries, and incorporating macro-level decision-making processes and micro-level program implementation.

The research centres around three case studies of online networks hosted by three very different organisations. They are the United Nations Development Programme, a multilateral donor agency that has embraced online networking to enable frontline development workers to help shape its aid programs as an integral part of its core knowledge management strategy; the Association for Progressive Communications, an international network of predominantly Southern civil society organisations that has embraced online networking as a means to influence public policy in the ICT arena; and the Open Knowledge Network, an ICT for development project that was operational from 2003-2007. The architects of the project explicitly recognised local knowledge as a valuable resource in the fight against world poverty. They embraced online networking to enable poor and marginalised communities across the developing world to create, exchange, and publish local content on the web.

The case studies demonstrate a wide variety of experience and a complex mix of success and failure. They also show that online networks can change significantly over time. Although each case experience is unique, together they shed practical light on the valuable role that online networks can play in putting local knowledge and capacities at the fore of the development project. They have enabled frontline development workers to play a more influential role in shaping development policy and practice; civil society organisations to have greater voice in public policy debates; and poor and marginalised communities to generate much needed income from their innovation, knowledge and creative skills. However these positive outcomes are by no means inevitable.
One of the major findings of this research is the crucial role of incentives in shaping network participation. Although at the highest level, participants may be driven by a shared commitment to improve development performance in some area; in reality, their choices about whether and how to share their knowledge are usually far more self-interested. Thus, aspirations of active participation cannot be taken for granted by local knowledge actors. On the contrary, this research indicates that many view the preoccupation with knowledge sharing as placing new demands on their time which would be better spent on more pressing activities.

While incentives are important, this research also identifies a number of factors that limit the ability of local knowledge actors to contribute to online networks, regardless of their desire to do so. These usually manifested as obstacles to the benefits of participation and were borne out of the power relations in which participants are enmeshed. In each case, the dominance of the English language was a limiting factor, which was compounded by tensions and constraints ranging from managerial opposition to local knowledge, resource dependencies and constraints, and social and cultural norms that limited mobility and social connections.

Beyond internal dialectics, this research also points to notable divergences in the extent to which online networks that have been instigated or promoted by donor-agencies draw on local knowledge, experience and ideas from outside their network borders, which are often quite rigid. A related issue is the tendency for many to broadcast participant contributions to external audiences over the web, rather than leveraging the interactive potential of that technology to support knowledge sharing between insider and outsider groups. To ensure that online networks fulfil their promise to strengthen development performance, Web 2.0 platforms are proposed as a means to promote dialogue between insider and outsider groups with divergent interests and worldviews.

Key Words: knowledge management for development; civil society partnerships and policy dialogues; information and communications technologies for development; online networks; knowledge networks; community networks; Web 2.0 for development; Development 2.0.
Acknowledgments

I have depended upon countless acts of kindness to produce this thesis and take this opportunity to thank those people who made my research possible.

I am extremely grateful to the people from the United Nations Development Programme, Association for Progressive Communications, and the Open Knowledge Network for giving up their time to participate. Special thanks goes to Sarita Sharma, Roselinie Murota, Carlos Saldarriaga, Maicu Alvarado and Alan Morleghem whose help was vital to reach the first mile. I also thank the residents of Seelampur and Boza Aucallama who participated in focus groups and the managers of the networks that I was very privileged to investigate.

It is difficult to overstate my gratitude to my supervisors Associate Professor Christopher Ziguras and Professor Chris Duke. They were always there when I needed them, providing good counsel, thoughtful suggestions, interesting opportunities and lasting friendship. I would have been lost without their guidance. I also thank my honorary supervisor Dr Liz Sommerlad who read several draft chapters with great care and creativity and has been a constant source of support throughout my candidature.

Special thanks to Dr Anne Badenhorst, Dr Shannon Faulkhead, Kelly Hutchinson and Dr Ros Sayers for countless interesting discussions as my work took shape. Thanks also to my fellow postgraduates on the roof in building 15 for listening knowingly and making me laugh. Particular thanks to Marcus Banks, Aiden Warren, Kath Lynch, Angela Dipasquale, Nui Prasara, Ed Yates, Geoff Binder, Sharee Cartwright, Shanthi Robertson, Chloe Patton, Marcus Smith and Jacqui Theobold for putting up with me more than most.

I also wish to acknowledge my late father-in-law who passed away while I was writing this thesis. He showed great interest in my work and I dearly miss his special brand of wisdom. I also acknowledge my mother-in-law CC whose strength has been an inspiration. Thanks also to Ness, James, Sallee, Justine, Mark, MM, Pete, Chris, Michael, Manny and Jo, for reminding me there was more to life.

Most importantly, I thank my family for their unconditional love and support. I am especially grateful to my parents Ana and Chris who each provided valuable editorial assistance. They blessed me from the start and have been showering me with love ever since. I also thank my sister Madi for continually enriching my views. Last but never least, I thank my beloved partner Heiko whose endless patience and unwavering belief in me were everything I needed to complete this thesis and so much more.
# Table of Contents

Declaration .................................................................................................................. ii  
Abstract ....................................................................................................................... iii  
Acknowledgments........................................................................................................ v  
Table of Contents......................................................................................................... vi  
List of Acronyms.......................................................................................................... ix  
1.0 Introduction ........................................................................................................... 1  
  1.1 Research Aims ...................................................................................................... 6  
  1.2 Research Approach .............................................................................................. 7  
  1.3 Significance of Research ..................................................................................... 7  
  1.4 Parameters of the Study ..................................................................................... 11  
  1.5 Structural Overview ............................................................................................ 14  
2.0 New Solutions to Old Problems: Exploring the Debate ....................................... 16  
  2.1 The Shifting Pendulum of Development .............................................................. 17  
  2.2 The New Language of Development ................................................................ 24  
    2.2.1 The Need for Local Ownership .................................................................. 24  
    2.2.2 The Rediscovery of Partnership and Participation ...................................... 25  
    2.2.3 The Resurgence of Interest in Knowledge .................................................. 26  
  2.3 Summary ............................................................................................................ 27  
3.0 Bringing Discourse into Practice .......................................................................... 28  
  3.1 Theories of Knowledge in Development .............................................................. 29  
  3.2 Donor-Driven Knowledge Management ............................................................. 34  
  3.3 Civil Society Partnerships and Policy Dialogues ................................................. 41  
  3.4 ICT for Development Projects ............................................................................ 49  
  3.5 Summary ............................................................................................................ 57  
4.0 Research Design ................................................................................................... 58  
  4.1 Theoretical Framework ....................................................................................... 59  
  4.2 Methodology ....................................................................................................... 59  
  4.3 Research Sample ................................................................................................ 61  
  4.4 Research Participants ........................................................................................ 64  
  4.5 Data Collection .................................................................................................. 68  
  4.6 Data Analysis ..................................................................................................... 71  
  4.7 Participant Validation ........................................................................................ 72  
  4.8 Triangulation ...................................................................................................... 73  
  4.9 Limitations of the Research ............................................................................... 74
7.1.2 The Goal: To Unlock Economic Opportunity in the South................................. 172
7.1.3 Formulation to Implementation: The proposal becomes a reality......................... 173
7.2 Limitations of Moving Local Content along Local Cow Trails.......................... 176
   7.2.1 The Gap Between Supply and Demand................................................... 178
   7.2.2 The Social Benefits of Local Content Creation.......................................... 182
   7.2.3 Efforts to Improve Inclusiveness Focus on the Wrong End of the Stick............ 185
7.3 The Unrealised Potential of The Road Less Travelled....................................... 188
   7.3.1 ‘Foreign Local Content’ gets Lost in Translation...................................... 190
   7.3.2 What’s in it for the Poor?........................................................................... 194
   7.3.3 The Compulsion to Protect Local Knowledge.............................................. 196
   7.3.4 Finding the Right Balancing Between Public and Private Gain.................... 198
7.4 Summary of Findings ....................................................................................... 200
8.0 Conclusion........................................................................................................ 203
   8.1 Moving Beyond Binary Frameworks............................................................... 204
   8.2 Internal Dynamics: Linking Participation to Incentives.................................... 206
   8.3 External Dynamics: Tensions Between Openness & Closure............................ 212
   8.4 Web 2.0: An Alternative to Inclusion from Above......................................... 215
   8.5 Questions for Future Research...................................................................... 217
Bibliography............................................................................................................. 219
Appendix 1: Detailed Overview of Research Participants........................................ 232
Appendix 2: Plain Language Statement.................................................................... 233
Appendix 3: Interview Guide for Network Managers............................................... 234
Appendix 4: Focus Group Guide for Network Participants....................................... 235
### List of Acronyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APC</td>
<td>Association for Progressive Communications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSO</td>
<td>civil society organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFiD</td>
<td>UK Department for International Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICANN</td>
<td>Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and communication technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT4D</td>
<td>Information and communication technology for development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDRC</td>
<td>International Development Research Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Canadian government foundation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IGF</td>
<td>Internet Governance Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IICD</td>
<td>International Institute for Communication and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Dutch government foundation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRIS</td>
<td>Campaign for Communication Rights in the Information Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOT Force</td>
<td>G8 Digital Opportunity Task Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MDGs</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSSRF</td>
<td>M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Indian NGO)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OKN</td>
<td>Open Knowledge Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD/DAC</td>
<td>OECD Development Assistance Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODI</td>
<td>Overseas Development Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(British independent think tank)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SADEV</td>
<td>Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNCTAD</td>
<td>United Nations Conference on Trade and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WSIS</td>
<td>World Summit on the Information Society</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter One

Introduction
**1.0 Introduction**

New issues emerge on the international development agenda on a regular basis. Whether it is the environment, food shortages, debt relief, or some other topic, the annual reports of multilateral institutions like the World Bank illustrate well the changing priorities of the ‘development industry’. This thesis explores the industry’s relatively new preoccupation with using information and communications technologies (ICTs) to support greater inclusion and fuller participation by individuals and organisations in developing countries in the formulation of solutions to international development challenges. Different types of online networks link different stakeholders in foreign aid spanning almost every imaginable thematic area. The goal of most initiatives is to foster knowledge sharing between geographically dispersed but thematically aligned participants, with a view to improving development performance. The underlying assumption is that for development to succeed, it will require input from diverse stakeholders across the entire ‘aid delivery chain’; not just from so-called experts, many of whom are based in the North. This research is concerned with the extent to which online networks spurred by this realisation have empowered Southern stakeholders to shape aspects of the ‘development project’ over which they previously had limited influence or control, or conversely if they have engendered new modes of exclusion, which marginalise them from active participation. In addressing these concerns, the research seeks to move beyond issues of Internet accessibility and affordability, which dominate discussions of ICT in development, to reveal other factors that support or limit the ability of Southern stakeholders to use online networks to effect change.

In many contexts, the “flattening of the world”, a concept popularised by Thomas Friedman (2005), has made the old divide between North and South, between developed and developing countries, appear increasingly obsolete. The emergence of the Internet is thought to have contributed to this shift by fostering collaboration within and between businesses, allowing new economic powerhouses to rise in parts of the world previously considered poor (Castells 1996). Developing countries in transition like China and India, which together account for close to 40 percent of the global population, have been growing much more rapidly than developed countries for nearly two decades, thereby helping to reduce global income inequality. Yet, despite the hyperbole surrounding globalisation, the divide between North and South remains striking when attention turns to people who have missed out on the spoils of the latest wave of economic growth. We still live in a world of enormous inequalities, with 1.1 billion people in the developed world receiving 80 percent of global income, while 5 billion people in the developing world share the remaining 20 percent. In developing
countries, 815 million people suffer from hunger and malnutrition, which accounts for about half of the 10.4 million child deaths that occur there every year (UN 2005, pp. 1, 71).

Rich and poor countries alike have an interest in changing this picture, which is both morally indefensible and politically unsustainable with crucial implications for our collective welfare. This common interest in reducing the global gulf in wealth and opportunity has given rise to the development industry, which is made up of individuals and organisations from almost every part of the world that are leading the fight against world poverty. The way in which the development industry has sought to meet this challenge has changed considerably over the last 60 years or more, however, no more so than in the last 15 years with the emergence of the Internet and its most popular application, the World Wide Web, appearing to offer new hope for addressing the “‘fundamental conundrum of development assistance’, which is the fact that Northern donors are trying to help Southern beneficiaries to help themselves, but autonomy cannot be externally supplied” (Ellerman 2002, p. 43).

Northern donors are the main decision-makers in international development because they finance the majority of interventions. However, foreign aid is not transferred directly from donors to beneficiaries, but passes through the hands of numerous individuals and organisations involved in an ‘aid delivery chain’ that since the 1990s has become increasingly complex. Martens (2005) who has written extensively on the institutional economics of foreign aid explains that donor agencies play the lead role in directing the aid delivery chain by mediating between the preferences of donor and recipient governments to reach mutually acceptable agreements, which they fashion into fundable programs. All programs require some form of agreement from recipient governments, if only that they authorise the program be implemented in their sovereign territory. Donor agencies rely on a combination of their own staff and external consultants to perform this role. They often delegate program implementation to private companies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which work with community-based organisations to negotiate the terms of development interventions in light of local needs. As such, foreign aid usually consists of two institutional set-ups: donor agencies for macro-level decision-making support, and a combination of for- and not-for-profit contractors for micro-level program implementation. The aid delivery chain may therefore be conceptualised as a chain of contractors that extends from Northern donors to Southern beneficiaries (Martens 2005).

In the past, the aid delivery chain was dominated by Northern ‘experts’ who shaped the development project from the top-down. This reflected the dominant modernisation paradigm in development, which was based on the premise that the livelihoods of people in poor countries could be improved through transfers of capital, and more importantly knowledge
from rich industrialised countries in the West. In short, the overarching assumption that drove macro and micro-level decision-making was that underdevelopment was partly the result of a deficiency in Western knowledge. As a corollary, development was seen as a straightforward matter of North-South knowledge transfer to set developing countries on a linear pathway to economic growth and industrialisation (Rostow 1960). “The underlying assumption behind the thousands of experts that subsequently fanned out over the world to plant their skills was that developing countries lacked important skills and abilities – and that outsiders could fill these gaps with quick injections of know-how” (Fakuda-Parr, et al. 2002, p. 2)

The practical failings of this strategy has given rise to vast bodies of literature and numerous interest groups making calls for change that challenge the assumption that development interventions dreamt up and executed by Northern experts can help to alleviate poverty in the South. In the 1990s, donors responded to such criticism by placing welcome new emphasis on the need for locally-owned development strategies, based on the priorities of developing countries as the key to aid effectiveness. The new assumption that drives foreign aid is that recipient governments should drive the development process by creating appropriate policy conditions for civil society and the private sector to flourish and contribute to public policy and the realisation of local development goals. Contemporary development discourse thus gives priority to activities that ostensibly seek to advance participation by Southern stakeholders in the entire aid delivery chain, based on the realisation that development interventions fail when Northern donors impose solutions on Southern beneficiaries without involving them in decision-making processes, or when they themselves, or the contractors on which they rely, lack a deep understanding of local context.

The shift in development discourse occurred in parallel with the emergence of new ICTs, particularly the Internet, which created unprecedented opportunities for people to engage with each other ‘virtually’ to share their knowledge on a global scale. Diverse donor agencies – from conservative development banks to more progressive private foundations – have actively embraced the technology in an apparent bid to right the wrongs of the past and improve development performance by adopting a new and more inclusive model of support for development, which is firmly grounded in the priorities, as well as the realities, of the people whose interests foreign aid is meant to serve. The crisis of older top-down approaches to international development has subsequently given rise to a proliferation of donor-funded online networks, which are seen by many to capture the essence of the new wisdom in practice because they encompass participants whose cooperation transcends conventional hierarchical distinctions concerning the aid donor–recipient relationship, empowering an increasingly diverse range of stakeholders through reciprocal knowledge exchange.
The literature is rich in theories about the opportunities that online networks present for the development project, which has long overlooked local knowledge and capacities in developing countries by seeking to replace them with knowledge and systems produced elsewhere. For example, Fakuda-Parr and Hill (2002) argue that online networks offer a new model of support for development, which is rendering the old model of North-South knowledge transfer obsolete. Old hierarchies between aid-donors and recipients are breaking down as Southern stakeholders benefit from the ability to draw on a diverse knowledge pool that includes generalised global knowledge as well as local knowledge, experience and ideas from across the developing world, which they can adapt and reinterpret in light of their own circumstances and needs. To use an expression made famous by the former Chief Economist of the World Bank, Joseph Stiglitz (1999), they can ‘scan globally, reinvent locally’ through a selective process of knowledge acquisition. The benefits for Northern stakeholders are purportedly even greater as they learn from and become more responsive to local knowledge, experience and ideas from the South.

Despite almost universal enthusiasm for online networking among donor agencies, a growing number of critics have begun pointing to a possible gap between the vision and reality of network participation for many individuals and organisations in the South. Critics argue that the vast majority of development organisations that have embraced the Internet in support of knowledge sharing fail to recognise the role of power in determining whose knowledge counts (Ferguson, et al. 2008; King & McGrath 2004; Krohwinkel-Karlsson 2007; S. Maxwell & Stone 2005; McFarlane 2006; Powell 2006; Schech 2002; Van der Velden 2002a). Many argue that the apparent prioritisation of local knowledge has been brought about by the privatisation of knowledge that is considered relevant for development, which has underscored the globalisation process that has been aided by the Internet. In this view, the move towards the market and not the state as the principle source of solutions to international development challenges has increased the diversity of Southern stakeholders in the aid delivery chain that are called upon to contribute, but not in the way the new discourse suggests. Rather than shaping decision-making processes from the bottom-up, critics argue they are part of a complex web of state, market and civil society actors spanning both North and South that are embroiled in a new kind of ‘knowledge politics’.

Drawing on the work of Foucault (1972), who illustrated that the knowledge accepted in a society is the result of an inextricable link between knowledge and power, critics suggest that the most significant factor that determines the ability of Southern stakeholders to shape the development project in the new environment is the nature of their knowledge. From this viewpoint, the persistence of Northern donors’ power in directing the aid delivery chain
means that preference is given to contributions that sit broadly within the Western knowledge framework. Although the chain of inequality resulting from this preference goes beyond the North-South divide, many critics argue that it is in this relationship that the routine exertion of power is most problematic because it obscures the diversity of alternative and legitimate local knowledge, experience and ideas from the South that is needed to improve development performance. Rather than hailing online networks and the new ICTs on which they rely as harbingers of a new paradigm in development as do many proponents, critics argue they replicate embedded inequalities and power asymmetries in the aid donor-recipient relationship by “consistently militating against the type of relationship and the type of communication that is essential if development policy and practice is to be anything other than an imposition of external ideas, however well intentioned” (Powell 2006, p. 518).

1.1 Research Aims

The aim of this research is to shed practical light on this debate through an empirical investigation of donor-funded online networks that aim to support participation by Southern stakeholders in macro and micro-level developmental processes. This will be achieved through three qualitative case studies of online networking initiatives that correspond with the three major areas of online networking activity that have received the most critical attention to date. I have termed these areas ‘donor-driven knowledge management’, ‘civil society partnerships and policy dialogues’ and ‘ICT for development projects’. Together they encompass a wide range of Southern stakeholders in the development project, including donor agency staff, civil society organisations, and people from poor and marginalised communities. The purpose of the research is to provide a comprehensive account of factors that support and limit participation in online networks by Southern stakeholders across the entire aid delivery chain. Recognising that online networks are not hermetically sealed from the outside world, I have deliberately chosen to explore these factors from both an internal and external perspective. Thus, in addition to exploring the extent to which each initiative includes and excludes local knowledge within their network borders, I will also explore their relationship with local knowledge outside their network borders. I refer to internal and external trends collectively as the ‘dual dynamics of inclusion and exclusion’.

The core question the research seeks to answer is:

*To what extent do online networks support greater inclusion and fuller participation of Southern stakeholders in aspects of the development project over which they previously had limited influence or control?*
1.2 Research Approach

The research question has been investigated through three qualitative case studies of online networking initiatives hosted by three very different organisations that together encompass Southern stakeholders spanning the entire aid delivery chain. They are the United Nations Development Programme, a multilateral donor agency that has embraced online networking to enable frontline development workers to help shape its aid programs as an integral part of its knowledge management strategy; the Association for Progressive Communications, an international network of predominantly Southern civil society organisations that has embraced online networking as a means to influence public policy in the ICT arena; and the Open Knowledge Network, an ICT for development project that was operational from 2003-2007. The architects of the project explicitly recognised local knowledge as a valuable resource in the fight against world poverty. They embraced online networking to allow poor and marginalised communities across the developing world to create, exchange and publish local content on the World Wide Web. A full discussion of methodological choices and a detailed outline of the research sample is provided in Chapter 3.

1.3 Significance of Research

There has been a great deal of speculation about the risks and benefits of online networking in the international development context. However, there has been scant treatment in existing studies of factors that affect the ability of Southern stakeholders to participate in online networks as active knowledge providers, rather than passive knowledge recipients, even though this is a core concern for scholars of development communication who emphasise their knowledge, perspectives, priorities and skills as the key to aid effectiveness (e.g. Dagron 2006; Mefalopulos 2008; Servaes 2008). Critical attention has focused on three major areas of online networking activity, which correspond with the initiatives that will be investigated in this thesis. Scholars have tended to examine these areas in isolation, reflecting their disciplinary backgrounds and specific interest in ‘knowledge politics’ at different points in the aid delivery chain. However they are united by their concern with the dual dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that are at the heart of this thesis. Much of the value of this project therefore comes from bringing insights from these interconnected yet largely disparate fields together in an attempt to provide a more comprehensive account of issues affecting participation in online networks by Southern stakeholders across the entire aid delivery chain.

In a recent literature review on knowledge sharing for development, Ferguson et al. (2008, pp. 33-34) argue that a broad study of ‘different constellations of development organisations’ is needed to reveal what knowledge sharing means for different stakeholders and how the
interaction between them can be improved. The only other identified instances whereby such a diverse range of initiatives has been brought together in a single study is for the purpose of assisting development organisations, usually civil society organisations, to leverage the Internet to effect change (e.g. Creech & Willard 2001; Surman & Reilly 2003). There is a wealth of applied research in this area, but most of it has been undertaken by practitioners for practitioners, and offers little critical insight on the implications of different approaches for supporting participation by Southern stakeholders beyond proposing what types of ICT tools may be appropriate in different contexts, given issues associated with Internet accessibility and affordability in developing countries. For the most part, the focus is on identifying strategies for improving network performance in accordance with the objectives of the host organisation. However, little has been done to introduce monitoring and evaluation criteria for assessing the impact of online networks on this basis due to the difficulty of linking knowledge sharing to tangible development outcomes (Krohwinkel-Karlsson 2007).

While this research is not specifically designed to address the challenge of evaluating online networks, it does highlight the importance of assessing the extent to which they motivate active participation by Southern stakeholders who are rich in local rather than global knowledge. This is a variable that practitioners may wish to consider when attempting to design measurement indicators for different types of online networks that focus on the broad theme of international development. Its significance has already been recognised by critics whose research until now has been divided between the three broad fields of inquiry on which this dissertation aims to build. However, much of the existing literature is characterised by overly optimistic or pessimistic accounts of the extent to which they include or exclude local knowledge, with very little in between. This polarisation appears to result from failure to empirically test arguments or over reliance on investigations of controversial initiatives for affirmation of theoretical propositions. Indications that the dual dynamics of inclusion and exclusion follow a more complex path is evident in the between spaces as scholars sympathetically critique and propose strategies for improving local knowledge flows in different contexts. Much of the research that has been undertaken in this spirit originates in international development research institutes geared towards industry concerns. At this point, I will briefly describe extant research in each of the fields that are relevant to this research, leaving a more detailed review of the literature until Chapter 3.

**Donor-Driven Knowledge Management**

Most research on donor-driven knowledge management is positioned within mainstream knowledge management, a sub-discipline of management information systems. Most research is concerned with providing overviews of how individual agencies are using ICT to improve
their organisational efficiency and effectiveness, with a view to extrapolating lessons learned for other organisations, often regardless of context (e.g. Bellanet 2000; Carayannis & Laporte 2002; Ellerman 1999; O’Dell, et al. 1998). Few scholars have critically analysed whether knowledge management has made donor agencies more cognisant of the context for their aid programs by improving their responsiveness to local knowledge. Notable exceptions include case studies of four bilateral donor agencies and the World Bank by King and McGrath (2004) and of 13 development organisations by Ramalingam (2005). The latter covers the same agencies, but also offers additional insights into NGOs and research institutes. Both studies criticise the ‘agency-centric’ and ‘techno-centric’ approach to knowledge sharing adopted by most agencies, which is geared towards harnessing global knowledge from inside their institutional borders, rather than drawing on local knowledge from their developing country partners. These sit within a nascent field known as ‘knowledge management for development’, which contends that corporate-sector-style knowledge management is inappropriate in development organisations where more than just internal efficiencies are at stake. A technocratic focus on unequal knowledge transfer can work to short-circuit local knowledge systems and perpetuate the problems of development (e.g. Ferguson, et al. 2008; Krohwinkel-Karlsson 2007; Van der Velden 2002a; Wilson 2007).

Civil Society Partnerships and Policy Dialogues

Much of the research on civil society partnerships and policy dialogues straddles political science, international relations and development studies. It is broadly divided between activist and policy literature. Activists celebrate how civil society groups are using ICT to challenge state and market power. Policy researchers celebrate governance reforms instigated and promoted by multilateral institutions and donor agencies, which have created a profusion of multi-stakeholders forums in which state, market and civil society organisations come together to shape public policy. Scholars in both camps agree that these forums are dominated by urban middle class elites who are rich in global rather than local knowledge (e.g. Chandoke 2003; Chowdhury, et al. 2006; Stone 2005). However they differ in their opinions as to how Southern civil society organisations (CSOs) that are deeply embedded in poor and marginalised communities can effect change, particularly on the global stage. The debate is ultimately about the potential for meaningful change to come from civil society engagement in the formal political world, but the literature that is of most interest to this research has a dynamic conception of the knowledge power nexus in which the boundaries between formal and informal politics are blurred. Many scholars recommend that grassroots CSOs link and coordinate their activities in online networks to build their capacity to engage with decision-makers (e.g. Chowdhury, et al. 2006; Court, et al. 2006; Perkin & Court 2005).
ICT for Development Projects

Most research on ‘ICT for development’ projects is positioned within a disciplinary field known as ‘development informatics,’ which (like mainstream knowledge management) has its roots in information systems. This school takes cognisance of the needs and circumstances of users in developing countries, which differ from those in resource rich settings. The literature that is of most interest to this research focuses on online networks that function as portals to content supplied by network members. At the community level where the goal of these networks is to reduce poverty, most research is devoted to theorising about why so many projects fail. Many studies take as their starting point an assumed connection between knowledge and economic growth, which informs their proposals for more effectively addressing knowledge deficits (e.g. Roman & Colle 2002, 2003). Others advocate strategies designed to empower communities through ‘voice’ (e.g. Skuse, et al. 2007; Tacchi, et al. 2009; Watkins & Nair 2008). Scholars in both camps agree that community participation is the key to success, but their definitions of participation vary. The former emphasise the need to involve communities in network design and operations to ensure their knowledge needs are met. The latter emphasise similar techniques to bring about what proponents consider to be a deeper form of participation in which beneficiaries are transformed from knowledge recipients into knowledge providers.

Drawing on insights from all three fields, this research recognises from the outset that donor-funded online networks vary in the extent to which they support participation by Southern stakeholders who are rich in local rather than global knowledge. However it seeks to address the limitations of existing research by investigating initiatives that strive to put local knowledge and capacities at the fore of their respective fields. I have deliberately framed the study in this way because I share the concern of critics who argue that online networks exclude local knowledge, experience and ideas. However, unlike ‘techno-determinists’ who dominated discussions of online networking at the peak of the hyperbole surrounding the Internet in the late 1990s, I do not consider access to equate with inclusion. True inclusion implies that participants not only have the capacity to contribute to a shared global knowledge pool, but that their contributions are countenanced. While it is not possible to assess the capacity of Southern stakeholders to use online networks in this way, it is not taken for granted in this research, even in cases where their inclusion enjoys high-level institutional support. In this sense, the research does the only thing a ‘Western scholar’ can realistically do in seeking to raise the status of local knowledge in the development project, which is to critically examine the claims of those who say that the conventional model of top-down knowledge transfer is somehow being transcended (Crush 1995).
1.4 Parameters of the Study

Concepts such as ‘online network’, ‘knowledge sharing’ and ‘international development’ are hard to define. They can be used in combination to refer to anything from a geographically distributed team of aid workers who use online project management tools to collaborate through to a Facebook group created by an NGO to raise community awareness and support for a fair trade campaign. While part of the value of a project like this comes from leaving some of the boundaries between different types of online networks fuzzy, it is important to establish clear parameters for the research by explaining the types of initiatives that will be investigated in this thesis.

The online networks that are of most interest to this research are global in orientation. They support knowledge sharing between participants who are geographically dispersed over a number of countries and regions. They are broadly understood to be formal institutional arrangements that support knowledge sharing between individuals or organisations whose relationship is well defined. This definition is necessarily broad because the term ‘online network’ can be used as a blanket description for a variety of models of individual and organisational communication and/or collaboration, which differ in purpose, structure and level of formality. Creech and Willard (2001) and Surman and Reilly (2003) have each proposed a number of characteristics that are useful to distinguish between different types of online networks that focus on the broad theme of international development. Drawing on these criteria, a spectrum of online network features typifying different approaches is presented in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Spectrum of Online Network Features
My interest broadly lies in initiatives that gravitate towards the right-hand side of this spectrum where scholars see the most hope for a new and more inclusive model of support for development to emerge. However, I make one important exception. I have specifically chosen to focus on formal online networks; that is, online networks that have been systematically established by donor agencies or rely on their patronage. They have a more structured and outcome-oriented approach to knowledge sharing than informal networks, which tend to emerge organically from the bottom-up, forming and disbanding spontaneously as a function of interest in a particular issue. Formal networks are more pertinent to this research because they offer greater scope for exploring how the new language of development has been translated into practice. They also tend to involve a wider range of Southern stakeholders for two key reasons. The first is the ‘digital divide’, or lack of Internet accessibility and affordability in many parts of the developing world, which has made online networking more difficult for individuals and organisations in developing countries. The second is that most donor funding for online networks is directed towards formal initiatives, although this may change as patronage for informal initiatives continues to increase (see Weyrauch 2007, p. 8).

Figure 2 outlines the major categories of relevant online networks that focus on the broad theme of international development. It is however important to note that many similar typologies exist and some of the terms used here are used differently in other studies. Drawing on Mendizabal (2006) who recommends a functional approach to understanding networks, my approach has been to try to identify what online networks do in relation to the goals of the host organisation and participants’ positions in the aid delivery chain. It is also important to acknowledge that although the term ‘online network’ is used as a generic term to describe all categories, each model represents a unique combination of virtual and face-to-face interactions, with some incorporating traditional media channels. Although conceptually useful, the typology conceals the interdependence of virtual and face-to-face interactions. It also conceals the complex relationship between ‘open’ and ‘closed’, which is an important theme of this research. Despite these limitations, the typology offers a clear conceptual pathway through the terrain that will be covered by this dissertation.
## Figure 2: Typology of Online Networks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Area</th>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Donor-driven Knowledge Management</td>
<td>Network of Experts</td>
<td>These networks are established by donor agencies to track the expertise of their staff and/or external consultants. Their primary purpose is to ensure effective contracting arrangements, but some are assigned work plans, which require participants to work together to address strategic gaps in the agency’s knowledge base. Membership is based on professional reputation and recognised expertise in a particular field.</td>
<td>UNDP’s Local Knowledge Centres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Society Partnerships and Policy Dialogues</td>
<td>Community of Practice</td>
<td>These networks usually evolve through the thematic mapping of competencies within a single donor agency, combined with the creation of appropriate environments for knowledge sharing. Participation is voluntary. “They attract individuals who are willing to share their expertise in exchange for gaining expertise from others. The principal driver is the desire to strengthen their own skills, more than a desire to work together on common objectives” (Creech &amp; Willard 2001, p. 11).</td>
<td>UNDP’s Global Practice Networks; UN Solution Exchange Networks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Policy Network</td>
<td>Knowledge Network</td>
<td>These networks converge strategically around international organisations and government agencies with some leverage over macro-level developmental processes in their policy domain. They include decision-makers, experts, and civil society organisations and business interests specific to the policy focus of the network (Weyrauch 2007, p. 10). Membership “results from a process of mutual recognition dependent on functional relevance and structural embeddedness” (Kenis &amp; Schneider 1991, p. 42).</td>
<td>UN Internet Governance Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT4D Projects</td>
<td>Information Network</td>
<td>These networks are established by development organisations to provide their developing country partners and clients with knowledge supplied by network members. They work by pooling online content from member organisations and/or allowing individual users to create and contribute content to a central site. Membership by organisations depends on their perceived capacity to meet the needs of the user community; participation by individual users is voluntary.</td>
<td>Development Gateway (initiated by World Bank); OneWorld International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Network</td>
<td>Open Knowledge Network</td>
<td>These networks are similar to information networks, but they aim to address the needs of users in specific geographic locale (Schuler 1996). In poor and marginalised communities affected by the digital divide, computer terminals are often set up in ‘telecentres’ that bundle developmentally useful knowledge with other services, such as computer training courses. Some incorporate traditional media channels to disseminate digital content in the local area.</td>
<td>Open Knowledge Network</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.5 Structural Overview

The remainder of this thesis is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 2 provides a historical and conceptual framework in which the rest of the thesis can be understood. It discusses the changing goal of the development project and the role of knowledge sharing in supporting that goal since the development industry first emerged after the Second World War. This has oscillated between top-down knowledge transfer and reciprocal knowledge exchange for more than 60 years. The central features of contemporary development discourse, which inform the initiatives that are explored in Chapters 5-7, are discussed within this framework.

Chapter 3 constitutes the literature review. It commences by theoretically positioning the literature that is of most interest to this research within the context of competing claims about the potential for donor-funded online networks to bring the new discourse of development into practice. The rest of the chapter is divided into three sections that correspond with the three major areas of online networking activity that have attracted the most critical attention to date, namely donor-driven knowledge management; civil society partnerships and policy dialogues; and ICT for development projects. Relevant research in each of these areas is discussed to provide a comprehensive account of common critiques of dominant network configurations.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of the research design. It discusses and rationalises the use of qualitative comparative case study research methodology to conduct the empirical investigation. It also describes and justifies the sampling strategy used to select cases and research participants for inclusion in the study. Details of the data collection, analysis, and verification techniques are provided. These involved the triangulation of documentary analysis, in-depth interviews, focus groups and participant validation from research participants in Southern Africa, South Asia and Latin America. This chapter will also acknowledge and describe the limitations of the research and how they have impacted the findings.

Chapters 5-7 present three case studies of online networks that correspond with the three major areas of online networking activity that were explored in Chapter 3. The case studies are broadly organised around three questions, which are examined from both an internal and external perspective in order to capture tensions and constraints that support and limit participation by Southern stakeholders both inside and outside of the networks being investigated. They are: What theoretical assumptions underpin the initiative? How are notions of inclusion embedded in practice? And, and finally are there any gaps between the official version of reality and the facts on the ground? In addition to answering these questions, I also
seek to raise broader issues about the desirability of promoting participation by local knowledge actors as a means to improve development performance.

In the final chapter, I draw together common themes from the three case studies to reveal the progress made and obstacles yet to be surmounted by donor-funded online networks to bring the new discourse of development into practice. The discussion commences with a critique of the normative assumptions that framed the empirical investigation in light of the findings. It then addresses internal dynamics that supported and limited active participation by local knowledge actors in each of the initiatives explored, including incentives, language, power and opportunity cost. Shifting to external dynamics, it explores tensions between openness and closure, and how they shaped the boundaries of network activity. Next is an exploration of how online networks could evolve to improve local knowledge flows by embracing Web 2.0 platforms. The thesis concludes by proposing a number of questions for future research in the nascent field of ‘Development 2.0’. 
Chapter Two

New Solutions to Old Problems: Exploring the Debate
2.0 New Solutions to Old Problems: Exploring the Debate

This chapter discusses the changing goal of the development project and the changing role of knowledge sharing in supporting that goal since the development industry first emerged after the Second World War. Since then, notions about what constitutes ‘development’ and the role of knowledge sharing in supporting its realisation have followed a series of what King and McGrath (2004, p. 18) refer to as ‘pendulum swings’, which may be conceptualised as moving intermittently between top-down knowledge transfer and reciprocal knowledge exchange. From a development communications perspective, the former approach is rooted in the widely criticised sender-receiver model of communication, whereby aid recipients are seen as passive audiences ready to be influenced by the messages they receive. The latter envisions communication as a two-way process, whereby aid recipients are active providers of local knowledge, which are an integral component of problem analysis and resolution (Dagron 2006; Mefalopulos 2008; Servaes 2008). Although the metaphor of a pendulum belies the complex battle of ideas that led to the overthrow of one paradigm and the insertion of new ruling ideas at various junctures, the central features of contemporary development discourse are discussed within framework. The purpose of the chapter is to provide a historical and conceptual framework in which the dissertation is positioned.

2.1 The Shifting Pendulum of Development

Numerous scholars link the origins of the development project to President Truman’s inaugural address to the American people on January 20, 1949 in which he afforded a special role to knowledge as a resource for development (e.g. Escobar 1995; King & McGrath 2004; Ramalingam 2005). Truman presented a vision of top-down knowledge transfer, which laid the foundations for that part of foreign aid concerned with knowledge, skills and techniques, known as ‘technical assistance’, for the next two decades. This was the height of decolonisation when large numbers of countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America gained political independence and became objects of development by donors from the capitalist West and communist East. In the West, it was the era of the long post-war boom when the ‘modernisation’ of newly independent states was thought to be unproblematic. Development was viewed as an economic problem that could be easily resolved through the diffusion of capital and more crucially knowledge from rich to poor countries, which would set recipients on a linear pathway to economic growth and industrialisation. Indeed, the dominant economic orthodoxy in the West assumed that poor countries could ‘leapfrog’ rich countries along this path by adopting the same proven measures and technologies, allowing the benefits of science and technology to ‘trickle down’ to the poor (Rostow 1960). Truman stated:
More than half the people of the world are living in conditions approaching misery. Their food is inadequate. They are victims of disease. Their economic life is primitive and stagnant. Their poverty is a handicap and a threat both to them and to more prosperous areas. For the first time in history, humanity possesses the knowledge and the skill to relieve the suffering of these people. [...] The United States is pre-eminent among nations in the development of industrial and scientific techniques. The material resources which we can afford to use for the assistance of other peoples are limited. But our imponderable resources in technical knowledge are constantly growing and are inexhaustible. I believe that we should make available to peace-loving peoples the benefits of our store of technical knowledge in order to help them realise their aspirations for a better life (Truman 1949 quoted in Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States 1964, pp. 114-15).

This vision provided the rationale for the thousands of technical experts who were stationed in developing countries allied to the Western powers during the 1950s and 1960s. It was their role to oversee the implementation of large-scale infrastructure and capital works projects dreamt up by donors, with little local input in order to move developing countries towards the assumed rapid economic take-off. A good deal of projects were bilateral in nature, ‘gifted’ by ex-colonisers in return for political favour in their old spheres of influence and/or strategic advantage in the Cold War. This led to the enrichment of special interest groups in recipient countries, which became increasingly dependent on imported ideas and technologies, but it did little to raise the incomes of the poor. The prescription differed little whether development assistance came from the capitalist West or the communist East (King & McGrath 2004, p. 19). Thus, by the 1970s, evidence of the practical failings of this strategy for eliminating world poverty caused the modernisation paradigm to come under attack.

The most strident critiques came from the Third World where scholars of ‘dependency theory’, derived from Marxian analysis, argued that economic inequalities between countries that were part of the capitalist ‘world system’ were the result of the appropriation of resources from poor countries by rich countries (e.g. Amin 1976; Gunder Frank 1966; Prebisch 1950; Wallerstein 1974). Although dependency theory has variants, most scholars argued that a ‘core’ of wealthy states was being enriched at the expense of poor states at the ‘periphery’ of the international economy. Moreover, many further argued that the cultural hegemony of the core was undermining local knowledge in the periphery, stifling initiative and causing serious social problems, in addition to grave economic woes. In this view, the modernisation paradigm is fundamentally flawed because it ignores external factors that govern the relationship between rich and poor countries, which mean that “Economic development and
underdevelopment are opposite faces of the same coin” (Gunder Frank 1967, p. 9).

Insights of this nature sparked calls for a ‘New World Order’ in the 1970s as a growing influx of developing countries to the United Nations (UN) began voicing their demands for the prevailing world order to be restructured in their favour to allow them to participate more realistically in their own development. Developing countries lobbied for changes to the economy through the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), which was the principle forum for ‘North-South dialogue’ at the time.¹ They lobbied for changes to the ‘information and communication order’ through the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), which is responsible for assuring “the free exchange of ideas and knowledge” as set out in Article 1 of its Constitution. It established an International Commission to study communication problems, which denounced the socio-cultural implications of North-South knowledge transfer in the media in the seminal MacBride Report (1980). These activities resulted in a UN Resolution to establish ‘A New International Economic Order’ in 1974, and a UNESCO Resolution to establish ‘A New World Information and Communication Order’ in 1980. The latter prompted the withdrawal of the US and UK from UNESCO in 1984 and 1985, citing concerns about the impact of local content rules on freedom of press. Apart from this, however, the resolutions ultimately had negligible policy impact. They were most significant for demonstrating the bargaining power of developing countries in the UN, and the willingness of at least some developed countries to engage with them through that institution in this period.

It was against this backdrop that the vast majority of Western donors underwent the first major period of reassessment about the way technical assistance should be delivered, which resulted in the first swing of the pendulum towards reciprocal knowledge exchange. The Pearson and Jackson Reports, which investigated the effectiveness and capacity of the World Bank and UN respectively to meet international development challenges through multilateral efforts, were influential in catalysing the shift by creating new awareness about the importance of Southern participation. The Pearson Report (1969, p. 5) called for a new North-South partnership to end world poverty, arguing, “Both sides have learned that cooperation for development means more than a simple transfer of funds. It means a set of new relationships, which must be founded on mutual understanding and self-respect […] Wealth does not entitle a rich and powerful country to dominate another country’s national life as a consequence of the aid it may have given.” The Jackson Report (1969, p. 3) warned against one size fits all blueprints, arguing “The last two decades have major lessons for all of us […]

¹ The term ‘North-South’ was coined in this period to distinguish the relationship between rich countries and poor countries from the East-West conflict of the Cold War.
there is no such thing as “instant development”. […] each country’s problems demand individual understanding and response. The decisive battle for development will only be won in those countries – not in the remote headquarters of international organisations.”

Many Western donors made a concerted effort to stop doing things to developing countries and start doing things with developing countries. Some symbolically renamed ‘technical assistance’ ‘technical cooperation’ and began working with developing country governments, which were regarded as the key agents of economic growth at the time, to build their capacity to meet the subsistence requirements of their citizens.\(^2\) This was in accordance with the ‘Basic Needs’ approach that originated in the World Bank, but is more commonly associated with the International Labour Office (ILO). The approach was designed to eradicate poverty by promoting state-led economic growth with equity through the establishment of income redistribution mechanisms, such as public health and education, and other essential social services, depending on local needs and preferences (ILO 1977). It had the support of most members of the official development assistance community, as well as many NGOs which became important vehicles for delivering relief aid to failed states where the government lacked practical control over its territory in this period. This was the case until the approach came into conflict with the rise of a new economic orthodoxy in the West, which consumed the development agenda in the 1980s.

Changes to the world economy in the 1970s triggered a major international economic crisis, which intensified at the end of that decade. The crisis was brought about by a general slow down in economic growth in the West after the long post-War boom, and deepened as a result of repeated oil shocks in 1973 and 1978. These events conspired to produce catastrophic stagflation in the world’s richest economies. By 1979 unemployment had soared to over 18 million in Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, exchange rates were erratic, and protectionism was on the rise (Brandt 1980). The crisis had an enormous impact on the world’s poorest economies as well, many of which had over extended borrowing on cheap recycled petrodollars earlier that decade, and now found themselves burdened with enormous debt servicing payments as interest rates soared. Interest repayments alone began to absorb an alarming proportion of their declining export earnings, particularly in Latin America where the threat of default loomed large.

The international economy clearly needed reforming to ensure crisis recovery and growth. Developing country governments tried to revive the prospects for a New World Order, but failed despite new found support from the ‘Independent Commission on International

\(^2\) The World Bank still uses the terms development assistance and technical assistance.
Development Issues’ created by the World Bank. It sided with them on many of the issues debated in the previous decade, presenting its findings in the seminal Brandt Report (1980). Like the Pearson and Jackson Reports published more than a decade earlier, the report called for a new North-South partnership to allow developing countries to participate more realistically in their own development. However, it rejected the view that all rich countries had to do was supply foreign aid, proposing instead a restructuring of the Bretton Woods institutions to give developing countries greater decision-making power, stabilise declining commodity prices to enable them to repay their debts, and regulation of multinational corporations in the developing world, among other things. The proposals received much publicity and wide ranging acceptance as an appropriate solution to the economic crisis in some circles, but it was rejected outright by most Western governments, which pinned their hopes on a variant of classical economic liberalism, subsequently dubbed ‘neo-liberalism’, to revive the international economy.

Western donors were able to enforce their preference for neoliberal solutions in developing countries through the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), rather than the more democratic and inclusive UN, and in the process, the prospects for continuing North-South dialogue soured. The World Bank provided the rationale for this approach by constructing a new reading of the reasons for underdevelopment in which the market came to replace the state as the principal agent of economic growth. In its seminal ‘Agenda for Action’ known as the Berg Report (1981), the Bank claimed that the state as it had taken shape in many parts of the developing world was part of the problem, not part of the solution to economic growth and development. Developing country governments were criticised on grounds ranging from lack of transparency and accountability to corruption, militarism and authoritarianism. In this view, poor countries had their governments, or more specifically their policies, to blame for their developmental failings, and required a radical restructuring of their economies to make them globally competitive.

Together with the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank insisted that a standard set of policies or ‘structural adjustment’ package be put in place as a condition for new loans at a time when many developing countries had no choice but to turn to it for support in order to meet their onerous debt servicing payments. Structural adjustment emphasised the need to improve economic performance by reducing government intervention in the marketplace through an essentially uniform set of policies, that included tax reform, rolling back labour laws, floating the local currency, encouraging foreign investment, privatising state enterprises, liberalising trade, and cutting back on public spending. Some 37 countries were
forced to accept World Bank and IMF imposed conditions of this nature to avoid defaulting on their loans between 1982 and 1988 (Vietor 2007).

Local needs and preferences were blatantly ignored as the pendulum of development swung dramatically back towards North-South knowledge transfer. Western donors began coordinating their increasingly limited foreign aid budgets through programs in which preference for free market reform, and for the abolition of welfare-oriented public spending “were communicated just as forcefully as they were through the ‘structural adjustment’ programmes of the Bretton Woods Institutions” (Goldthorpe 1996, p. 242). The concept of ‘aid coordination’, which emerged in the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee in 1981 when major bilateral donors committed to gaining consistency between their programs, facilitated this merging of interests, and resulted in a united front facing recipient countries (Havnevik 1993). While many elements of the new one-size-fits-all approach to development were based on the same market reforms being pursued domestically by Western donors, they often required recipient governments to implement trade liberalisation and budget austerity measures that far exceeded the reforms implemented within their own countries.

By the end of the 1980s, economic liberalisation produced unprecedented levels of growth in the increasingly integrated global economy, but the gap between rich and poor increased. The question absorbing the development industry was how to best use dwindling foreign aid resources to maintain the subsistence requirements of the world’s poorest people in lieu of reduced domestic government spending. The approach was summed up in a slogan, ‘Adjustment with a human face’, which was the title of a United Nations Children’s Fund report by Jolly et al. (1987) detailing the negative impact of structural adjustment on developing country populations, many of which were experiencing widespread famine, war, and the onset of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. However, it gained wider acceptance as a means to describe policy recommendations arising from the study. These emphasised the need for donor agencies to ensure social safety nets for the poor by partnering with non-state actors. Thus, much in the way Basic Needs sought to add an equity aspect to state-led economic growth, this approach sought to add a poverty reduction aspect to foreign aid that would complement market-led development strategies.

The decade ended in turmoil following the Mexican debt crisis of 1994, the Asian financial crisis of 1997, the Russian default of 1998, the Brazilian devaluation of 1999 and the collapse of Argentina in 2001, all of which revealed the precarious foundations on which many newly liberalised economies had been built. This sparked new calls mid decade for social and political reform to accompany economic reform as part of a new approach to international development that built on the lessons learned over the last half century (OECD/DAC 1996).
As the new millennium began, hopes were raised when all 189 members of the UN pledged their commitment to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). For the first time, the MDGs established a clearly defined set of goals for the development project. These aim to comprehensively address the multiple dimensions of world poverty through the combined efforts of state and non-state actors. They consist of eight time-bound targets, with the overarching goal of halving extreme poverty and hunger by 2015. While expressed in terms of their global impact, they establish a clear need for local priorities, skills and abilities to inform the individual approaches needed for success.

With only five years to go, the prospects of achieving the MDGs are fading. Many civil society organisations, which have overtaken developing country governments in raising ethical concerns about international development issues, argue that downward pressure on national aid budgets is indicative of failure by donor governments to meet their commitments, which in turn stems from their lack of urgency in addressing world poverty (Christian Aid, 2005; Oxfam, 2005). There is no doubt that on the global political agenda the targets have been upstaged by the US-led ‘war on terror’ since 2001, and this trend appears likely to continue under the Obama Administration due to domestic pressures resulting from the global financial crisis. Another issue is the continued decline in influence of the UN vis-à-vis the World Bank, which has received the vast majority of the increased proportion of national aid budgets that major donors have allocated to multilateral programs in the post Cold War era.

In this environment, King & McGrath (2004, p. 25) argue that the new language of development “seeks, at the overall level, to marry donors’ faith in the liberalisation of markets with their espoused commitment to poverty reduction.” Schach (2002, p. 15) argues these dynamics have conspired to produce “the new development orthodoxy of market-led, decentralised development.” It could be argued that this most recent approach is about to confront its next major challenge as emerging economies like China and India transform themselves from aid recipients into donors. These countries are becoming increasingly important bilateral donors, but they are not committed to coordinating their aid programs with traditional donors that have agreed to do so under the OECD umbrella. As such, they operate fairly autonomously from the internationally agreed principles that underpin the new language of development discussed in the remainder of this chapter. China in particular has attracted much international attention and contentious debate for its approach to development in Africa where it is engaging on terms that are not shaped by the dominant orthodoxy of market-led development. The jury is still out on the extent to which they are shaped by Africans themselves.
2.2 The New Language of Development

Notwithstanding the emergent division between new and traditional donors, the metaphorical pendulum of development has once again settled on reciprocal knowledge exchange. Mefalupulos (2008) notes a number of terms used to refer to the emerging model of development communication, which some claim to be rendering the old model of North-South knowledge transfer obsolete, including “empowerment,” “participation,” and the “multiplicity paradigm.” The last term, introduced by Servaes (1999), places a strong emphasis on the plurality of knowledge that should be relevant in defining and helping to resolve the problems of development. King and McGrath (2004) identify three elements of the new language of international development and foreign aid that point to a more inclusive approach. They are: the need for local ownership, the rediscovery of partnership and participation, and a resurgence of interest in knowledge. These are central features of contemporary development discourse, which inform the initiatives that are analysed in this dissertation, and so the main features of each of these tenets is explored below.

2.2.1 The Need for Local Ownership

There is growing acceptance among Northern donors that development is not simply an economic issue, but a political and culturally sensitive one. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), whose own approach to online networking will be explored in Chapter 4, played a leading role in catalysing this shift by challenging the long-held assumption that economic growth is an adequate single measure of development, and advocating a new focus on the multidimensional concept of ‘human development’, based on people’s capabilities to pursue their own development goals (UNDP 1990). Like structural adjustment, human development emphasises improvements to the policy environment in developing countries, but it does not prescribe policy solutions. Instead, it supports participatory institutions and processes so that public policies reflect the aspirations of the people they affect. This implies a core focus on ‘democratic governance’. “If development is what people want it to be, its characteristic means will be techniques for reaching joint agreements on long-term goals and the collective action needed to achieve them – ‘democracy’ or ‘democratic social planning’” (C. N. Murphy 2006, p. 44). Although few donors have made their support for democratic governance explicit, the assumption that drives most of their aid programs is that political liberalisation begets economic liberalisation, thus creating a virtuous cycle. This follows from Nobel award-winning development economist and pioneer of human development theory, Amartya Sen (1999) who argues that political liberties are crucial for economic growth.

A self-reinforcing cascade of donor agencies shifted their priorities from economic to human
development at one point or another in the 1990s when the concept all but replaced one-
dimensional models of economic growth in mainstream development discourse. At the World
Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen in 1995, donor and recipient
governments reached new consensus on the need to put people at the centre of the
development process. Even the World Bank now recognises that for development to succeed,
efforts must be locally owned and driven. This is evidenced by the introduction of the Poverty
Reduction Strategy Paper process in 1999, which brings state, market and civil society actors
together to develop strategies for poverty reduction, which are then used as the basis for
decisions on concessional lending and debt relief. The recent Paris Declaration on Aid
Effectiveness, which was endorsed by over 100 donor and recipient governments, makes it
clear that all parties perceive development performance to be contingent on local ownership.
It consequently reaffirms the commitment of donors to “respect partner country leadership
and help strengthen their capacity to exercise it” in order to accelerate progress towards
achieving the MDGs (OECD/DAC 2005, p. 3).

2.2.2 The Rediscovery of Partnership and Participation

With the rise of human development, there has re-emerged a discourse of partnership and
participation, first noted in the 1970s, which is now evident across the entire aid delivery
chain. At the macro-level of policy, there has been a powerful shift in the language of
development in which local voices of not only state, but also non-state actors are seen as
paramount in shaping the policy frameworks around which donor agencies fashion their
programs. The new focus on ‘multi-stakeholder governance’ has been strongly influenced by
debates on democracy and public policy in international relations and political science, which
reflect growing interest in the potential for participatory institutions and processes to
depth


democracy and improve public policy (Cornwell & Coelho 2007). At the micro-level of
projects, the emphasis is on involving the intended beneficiaries of development interventions
in defining and helping to solve their own problems. The focus on ‘participatory
development’ spread from academia through international NGOs into donor agencies in the
mid 1990s. It owes much to “the Freirian theme, that poor and exploited people can and
should be enabled to analyse their own reality” (Chambers 1997, p. 106).

At both levels, concern about technical assistance is widespread. Thus, the term ‘capacity
building’ has become almost synonymous with this activity in many aid circles (Wilson
2007). In principle, capacity building means fostering home-grown processes, building on the
wealth of local knowledge and capacities, and expanding these to achieve whatever goals
people set themselves (Fakuda-Parr, et al. 2002). The approach emphasises the need for local
ownership based on organisational learning research on how knowledge is acquired (e.g.
Argote 1999; Argyris 1990; Argyris & Schön 1996). In this conception, local ownership is achieved when recipients internalise or absorb knowledge produced elsewhere, integrating it into their own conceptual frameworks, and adapting it to their circumstances and needs, thus allowing for its effective recreation to address local problems (Cummings 2003). This can only occur if donor agencies and the contractors on which they rely have a deep understanding of local context, as well as the capabilities to manage knowledge sharing processes that avoid stifling or attempting to substitute for local knowledge.

2.2.3 The Resurgence of Interest in Knowledge

The new focus on capacity development has coincided with a resurgence of interest in the role of knowledge in triggering and sustaining economic growth. This interest is inherently linked to the emergence of the Internet, which is frequently invoked in strategic management literature on the ‘knowledge economy’. Drawing on Galbraith’s (1967) proposal that a new class of knowledge workers was emerging and Bell’s (1973) thesis that knowledge is a central feature of post-industrial economies, many scholars began contending that all types of organisations, including countries, are dependent on their capacity to mobilise knowledge to thrive in the global economy in the mid 1990s (e.g. Boisot 1998; Drucker 1993). In his renowned trilogy on the ‘network society’, Castells (1996, p. 171) linked this thesis to the Internet, claiming that “Inside networks, new possibilities are relentlessly created. Outside networks, survival is increasingly difficult”. These ideas subsequently captured the attention of world leaders, convincing them of the need to turn their countries into knowledge economies by improving Internet accessibility and affordability for their citizens, among other things (Couldry 2004).

The World Bank picked up on these trends and pushed hard for donors to adopt the same ‘economically-based knowledge focus’ in their aid programs, seizing upon the hope that ICT would enable even the poorest of countries to join the information society (Johnstone 2003). Numerous scholars cite the inaugural speech of incoming World Bank President, James Wolfensohn, in 1996 as heralding the launch of a new ‘knowledge paradigm’ (e.g. King & McGrath 2004; Krohwinkel-Karlsson 2007; Schech 2002; Van der Velden 2002b). In the speech, Wolfensohn (1996) pledged to transform the World Bank into the “Knowledge Bank”, with a view to making it the premier source of knowledge for development. This announcement was followed by the 1999/98 World Development Report entitled ‘Knowledge for Development’, which warned of an impending ‘digital divide’ that would separate poor countries and poor people from the knowledge they needed to advance in the absence of donor support (World Bank 1998). Embedded in this message was a somewhat evangelical call for development organisations to embrace online networking as a crucial new part of their
mission. Although knowledge sharing had always been an integral part of development assistance, the use of the Internet to support this activity was portrayed as a radical departure from conventional approaches, not least because of its innate ability to support capacity development through reciprocal knowledge exchange.

2.3 Summary

This chapter has provided a historical and conceptual framework in which the rest of the dissertation is positioned. It discussed the changing goal of the development project and the role of knowledge in supporting that goal over the last 60 years. Inspired by King and McGrath (2004, p. 18), it used the metaphor of a pendulum to describe oscillations between top-down knowledge transfer from predominantly Northern experts to Southern beneficiaries; and reciprocal knowledge exchange between an increasingly diverse range of stakeholders in the aid delivery chain. With the central features of contemporary development discourse now firmly settled on reciprocal knowledge exchange, the next chapter explores the potential for online networks to bring the new language of development into practice.
Chapter Three

Bringing Discourse into Practice
3.0 Bringing Discourse into Practice

This chapter offers a theoretical positioning of the literature that is most relevant to this research by exploring competing claims about the potential for online networks to bring the new language of development into practice. Following the launch of the new ‘knowledge paradigm’, donor agencies have become increasingly preoccupied with using the Internet to support knowledge sharing at different stages of the aid delivery chain. This effort has been partly to improve and partly to broaden the focus of conventional technical assistance to encompass the more inclusive concept of capacity development. The specific practices adopted include all those that focus on knowledge sharing within donor agencies and those practices geared around the notion of knowledge sharing with and by their developing country partners at both the macro level of policy and the micro level of projects. These practices correspond with the three major areas of online networking activity that have received the most critical attention to date. They are: donor-driven knowledge management, civil society partnerships and policy dialogues, and ICT for development projects. Sections 3.2 to 3.4 of this chapter explore critiques of dominant network configurations in each of these fields.

3.1 Theories of Knowledge in Development

Some observers suggest that the proliferation of donor-funded online networks that support knowledge sharing between individuals and organisations at different stages of the aid delivery chain is contributing to a renewal of the development project by changing the ‘topography of knowledge’ that is used to shape solutions to international development challenges (Fakuda-Parr, et al. 2002, p. 17). In this view, online networks offer a new model of support for development that is rendering the old model of knowledge transfer obsolete. Not only do they allow knowledge to flow in every direction within and between developed and developing countries, but their emergence has also coincided with new recognition that some of the most valuable knowledge for development resides in the South (Denning 2002; Fakuda-Parr & Hill 2002; Stiglitz 1999). Thus, Fakuda-Parr and Hill (2002, p. 194) enthuse “The appeal of networks as a new model of technical cooperation for capacity building is that they bypass the root causes of the failures of the last decades of technical cooperation […] These causes include, among others, the donor-driven notion of technical cooperation and a faulty notion of the expert-counterpart model in which knowledge is transferred from a Northern expert to a Southern counterpart”. In online networks, they claim the old hierarchies of knowledge sharing are broken down.

There is however a great deal of scepticism and mistrust about the extent to which donor-funded online networks are helping to bring the new discourse of development into practice.
Critics argue that most development assistance organisations that have embraced the Internet to support knowledge sharing operate with what some describe as a ‘rationalist’ or ‘neo-liberal’ notion of knowledge. This they claim ignores the role of power in determining whose knowledge counts (Chataway & Wield 2000; Ferguson, et al. 2008; Kroh winkel-Kar lsson 2007; S. Maxwell & Stone 2005; McFarlane 2006; Powell 2006; Schech 2002; Van der Velden 2002a; Wilson 2007). Critical attention has honed in on the 1998/99 World Development Report, which has provided the most influential and systematic analysis of the role of knowledge in development to date, but suffers from a lack of engagement with the epistemological dimensions of knowledge (Johnstone 2003; Powell 2006). Even though we do not have complete knowledge, it implies that vast quantities are available, located mainly in the North. ICTs are presented as conduits for diffusing this knowledge, which is by definition beneficial and useful to close ‘knowledge gaps’ in the South. It states:

Knowledge is like light. Weightless and intangible, it can easily travel the world, enlightening the lives of people everywhere. Yet billions of people still live in the darkness of poverty – unnecessarily. Knowledge about how to treat such a simple ailment as diarrhoea has existed for centuries – but millions of children continue to die from it because their parents do not know how to save them. Poor countries – and poor people – differ from rich ones not only because they have less capital but because they have less knowledge (World Bank 1998, p. 1).

Critics of the dominant ‘development rationality’ argue this analysis erroneously assumes, along with “much scholarship about knowledge and development […] that the main task is to transfer commoditised chunks of information and knowledge from one place to another” (Chataway & Wield 2000, p. 817). Foucault (e.g. 1970; 1972) has been instrumental in unveiling the mechanisms by which the dominant discourse in society produces permissible modes of knowing while disqualifying others. Drawing on this analysis, critics argue that the persistence of Northern donors’ power in directing the aid delivery chain is reflected in the widespread preference for global knowledge that sits broadly within the Western knowledge framework – that is, generalised expertise on accepted ‘best practice’, based on intellectual consensus in dominant epistemic communities. Some criticise the dominance of economics as the lead discipline in development, despite rhetorical emphasis on the multi-dimensional concept of human development (Apffel-Marglin & Marglin 1996; McNeil 2005). Although the chain of inequality resulting from these preferences goes well beyond the North-South

---

3 Epistemic communities are made up of knowledge-based experts who hold a common set of causal beliefs and shared notions of valid knowledge based on common epistemological positions and methodological approaches (Haas 1992).
divide, many critics argue that it is in this relationship that the routine exertion of power is most problematic because it obscures the diversity of alternative and legitimate local knowledge, experience and ideas from the South that is needed to improve development performance (Ferguson, et al. 2008; Krohwinkel-Karlsson 2007; Powell 2006).

This line of thought owes much to postcolonial scholars who have converged upon the truth claims of modern rationalism to show how the production of Western knowledge is inseparable from the exercise of Western power. Said (1978), Mudimbe (1988), Mitchell (1988) and Bhabha (1994), among others, have extended Foucault’s insights to postcolonial situations in much of the developing world. The critical insights offered by these scholars have opened up new ways of thinking about the Enlightenment tradition of viewing knowledge as rooted in reason and rationality as unproblematic. Indeed, many argue the idea that the world is objectively knowable is ‘unreasonable’ (von Wright 1993), ‘irrational’ (N. Maxwell 1984), ‘a repressive regime’ (Visvanathan 1997), ‘a powerful ideological fiction’, ‘simply impossible’, ‘an optical illusion’ and ‘a god-trick’ (Haraway 1989, 1991). Haraway (1991) argues the concept of objectivity provides the illusion of transcendence from all limits and responsibility so that people cannot be held accountable for their knowledge claims. She argues, “It is tied to militarism, capitalism, colonialism, and male supremacy – to distance the knowing subject from everybody and everything in the interests of unfettered power” (p. 187). Post-development scholars argue that objectivity serves the interests of development organisations by providing justification not only for their programs, but also for their very existence, despite the weakness of the development project in practice (Apffel-Marglin & Marglin 1996; Crush 1995; Escobar 1995). Appfel-Marglin and Marglin (1996, p. 1) state:

The expertise informing development projects earns its label precisely by being based on the premise that the world is objectively knowable, and that the knowledge so obtained can be absolutely generalised. The knowledge of the experts – engineers, technicians, economists, anthropologists, and many others – can be exported worldwide and applied in varying contexts because of this premise. Local knowledge, in contrast, is just that, local. Universality is the privilege of this modern mode of thought. It is this privilege which has enabled this mode of knowing to confidently override local ways of knowing and doing, secure in its ability to deliver superior results.

Critics of the development industry’s preoccupation with using the Internet to support knowledge sharing concur with these scholars’ overarching concern about the power of the development project to generalise, homogenise and objectify. They find the prospect of accelerating the spread of Western ‘best practice’ to the developing world alarming, but as noted by Schech (2002), only the most strident critics suggest that the Internet is being used to
establish the hegemony of the West in ever more remote parts of the globe. She cites Corragio (2001) who argues that the Internet is a convenient vehicle for promoting the neoliberal agenda, and Sadar (1996) who argues it marks a new phase in the long history of the West’s attempt to colonise the South. Most critics recognise that the Internet can also be used to promote alternative ways of knowing and experiencing the world, but Shech (2002) argues that many employ a static view of the ‘knowledge-power nexus’, which denies the possibility of meaningful resistance and, as a corollary, fails to grasp the transformative potential of counter-discourses on the relations of power in society. For example, Castells (1996) acknowledges the existence of ‘subaltern social movements’ that make use of the Internet to communicate alternative agendas and ideologies in what he calls the ‘Fourth World’, but he contends that their ability to redefine and reconstruct the relations of power in society is limited precisely because of their position at the margin.

The literature that is of most relevance to this research is more optimistic about the potential for local knowledge that has been applied and is proven to work in the South to be incorporated into and contribute to shifts in the global knowledge pool that is used to shape solutions to international development challenges. In other words, there is an implicit recognition that by exposing people to new forms of control, development organisations and the contractors on which they rely expose themselves to being transformed by the people they enrol. Renowned Latin American post-development scholar Arturo Escobar (1995) has been most influential in shaping this perspective by arguing that the Internet has opened up new spaces for the problems of development to be redefined and reconstructed. This position stands in stark contrast to the crude structural determinism that characterises more pessimistic accounts. Instead of conceptualising donor agencies and the contractors on which they rely as static in imposing their views on the developing world without distinction or compromise, Escobar sees them as permeable to ‘counter-discourses’ with the potential to transform the global knowledge pool from the bottom-up. He states:

If one were look for an image that describes the production of development knowledge today, one would use not epistemological centres and peripheries but a decentralised network of nodes in and through which theorists, theories, and multiple users move and meet, sharing and contesting the socio-epistemological space (Escobar 1995, p. 225).

Much of the research on knowledge sharing for development that is based on this more dynamic understanding of the knowledge-power nexus is theoretical in nature. It emphasises the complex relationship between different knowledge systems in development (Ferguson, et al. 2008; McFarlane 2006; Powell 2006; Wilson 2007). McFarlane (2006, p. 287) describes
this as a ‘post-rationalist’ approach that conceives of knowledge as ‘partial, social, and produced through practices’. Many scholars emphasise the need for an ‘epistemological turn’ that ‘conceives of difference as a resource rather than a problem’ in order to facilitate learning between the so-called experts in development and those who are more in touch with local realities on the ground (Wilson 2006, p. 4). For some, the starting point is to recognise that problem analysis and resolution is a highly contested and intensely political process, rather than a rational and consensual one (Cornwell & Coelho 2007; S. Maxwell & Stone 2005; McFarlane 2006). For others, the goal is to resolve this issue by leveraging the Internet to promote what Van der Velden (2004, 2005, 2006) terms ‘cognitive justice’. Post-colonial scholar, Oderra-Hoppers (2000, p. 5) suggests cognitive justice involves moving the ‘frontiers of discourse’ and opening ‘new moral and cognitive spaces’ within which ‘constructive dialogue and engagement for sustainable development’ can begin. Radical feminist, Donna Haraway (1991, p. 189) suggests it requires ‘embodied objectivity’ or ‘positioned rationality’ that ‘recognises our own semiotic technologies for making meanings’ and offers people ‘partial perspective’ from a particular and specific position, rather than a transcendental view from above so people are ‘answerable for what [they] learn how to see’. In other words, dialogue between different knowledge actors is required.

Such critical theoretical accounts have been influential in the academy, particularly in the humanities, but their inability to put forward practical solutions has rendered them less helpful to policymakers and practitioners working in international development. A more promising approach is to engage in empirical research that explores the concrete ways in which local knowledge intersects with global knowledge in the manner advocated by Escobar (1995). He warns against searching for grand alternative models and strategies in his seminal critical discursive analysis of development. Along with Crush (1995), he emphasises the role of local ethnographies for contesting the homogenising power of Western knowledge in development, albeit in an incremental way, by reasserting the value of local knowledge in real-life settings. Conventionally, such works investigate the concrete forms that development interventions take and/or highlight local sites of resistance to those interventions at the micro-level of projects. However, this approach may also be used to investigate the relationship between different knowledge actors in macro-level decision-making processes.

Numerous anthropologists of development have sought to demonstrate how powerful the knowledge of the experts has been by uncovering half-buried local knowledge, experience and ideas (e.g. Blaser, et al. 2004; Hobart 1993; Moore 1996). Critical explorations of online networks may be seen as contributing to this literature by revealing those who have been empowered and those who have been marginalised by different approaches. Studies that have
been undertaken in this spirit invariably draw on research that is grounded in the humanities, which points to the situated, interpretive, and contextual nature of knowledge. Unfortunately, most indicate that most donor-funded online networks privilege global over local knowledge, which has reduced the pool of Southern stakeholders that can participate as active knowledge providers rather than passive knowledge recipients. Critical attention has honed in on three major areas of online networking activity, which are discussed in the remainder of this chapter. They are: donor-driven knowledge management; civil society partnerships and policy dialogues; and ICT for development projects.

3.2 Donor-Driven Knowledge Management

Knowledge management is an organisational tool and management discipline that emerged in the private sector in the mid nineties. Although many definitions exist, arguably the most cited comes from the American Productivity and Quality Center (APQC), which defines knowledge management as “a systematic process designed to connect people with one another and with the knowledge and information they need to achieve results through the identification, capture, validation and transfer of knowledge” (APQC 2009). It emerged from the perceived challenges and opportunities of the knowledge economy discussed in the strategic knowledge management literature, which emphasised knowledge as the most valuable organisational asset over and above tangible inputs and outputs (e.g. Boisot 1998; Drucker 1993). After a decade of corporate downsizing, many firms feared that staff lay-offs had led to the removal of their most valuable asset. They subsequently embraced knowledge management to manage their knowledge more efficiently and effectively with a view to ensuring their competitive advantage in the knowledge economy. As an indication of its growing popularity, one third of all Fortune 1000 companies included knowledge management in their business plans in 1999 (McCampbell, et al. 1999). Today, it is a ubiquitous managerial preoccupation in both the public and private sectors (Denning 2002).

Knowledge management crossed over to the development sector in the late nineties when development organisations began adopting the same techniques as corporate firms to manage their internal knowledge resources based on the same rationale of increased efficiency and effectiveness (Barnard 2003; Hovland 2003; King 2005; King & McGrath 2004; Van der Velden 2002a). The World Bank led the trend with its self-proclaimed transformation into the ‘Knowledge Bank’, and other agencies quickly followed suit. Uptake was not limited to the official development assistance community, with international NGOs also among the earliest adopters (Ramalingam 2005). Together, these predominately Northern agencies have become the leading proponents of knowledge management in the development context. They have proceeded to extol its virtues through purpose-built institutions such as Bellanet and the
Global Knowledge Partnership, which aim to “broaden the community of actors from the development assistance community seeking to understand and implement knowledge management strategies within their organisations” (Bellanet 2005). In particular, there has been a strong push for Southern NGOs to improve their efficiency and effectiveness through the application of knowledge management tools and techniques.

In the first instance, proponents were influenced by early knowledge management research, which emphasised the need for multinational corporations to bridge their growing and disparate internal knowledge resources to overcome ‘knowledge gaps’ between the centre and the periphery (Nonaka & Takeuchi 1995). Research emphasising the need for development assistance organisations to overcome the same problem soon emerged. In a literature review by the London-based Overseas Development Institute (ODI), Hovland (2003) notes that the bulk of research focused on international NGOs based in the North. She cites Suzuki (1998) and Madon (2000) who argue that the geographical distance between headquarters and field offices often lead to gaps between global and local knowledge. Typically, field staff are annoyed at the constant stream of requests issued by headquarters and see this as adding to their workload, while head office staff are annoyed that field offices all too often dismiss their requests, which are perceived to be out of touch with local realities. To boost their legitimacy and influencing power and improve local accountability, they urge international NGOs to adopt knowledge management to bridge knowledge gaps between different operational units.

Research of this nature inspired what McElroy (2000) has termed ‘first generation knowledge management’, which aims to improve knowledge sharing within a single organisation to enable it to learn and innovate by making ‘codified’ or ‘explicit’ knowledge readily available to staff. The term explicit knowledge is often used interchangeably with the term ‘information’ in knowledge management. It refers to knowledge that can be readily expressed in words and numbers and is readily transmittable between individuals (Polanyi 1962). First generation knowledge management relies on information systems and applications, particularly database-driven content management systems, to provide a common repository of explicit knowledge that can be accessed through the corporate intranet. In addition to hosting documents, the intranet is also used to serve word processing software and project management tools, staff directories, calendars, and email clients, all of which are seen as value-neutral conduits for the codification of explicit knowledge that already resides inside the organisation, allowing it to be stored and retrieved by staff spanning multiple locations.

By the turn of the century, knowledge management research became influenced by social science research indicating that the most valuable, dynamic and versatile organisational knowledge is situated and contextualised, or ‘tacit’ in nature. Unlike explicit knowledge, tacit
knowledge is based on people’s experience, as well as the ideals, values, and emotions they embrace. Whereas explicit knowledge is transmittable in formal language, tacit knowledge is difficult to articulate because it is deeply rooted in action and involvement within a specific context. Michael Polanyi (1962, p. 52) who was the first to extensively explore tacit knowledge explains, “rules of art can be useful, but they do not determine the practice of an art; they are maxims, which can serve as a guide to an art only if they can be integrated into the practical knowledge of the art. They cannot replace this knowledge.” Thus, he argues, “we know more than we can tell” (1967, p. 4). Another influential concept came is that of the ‘community of practice’ put forward by Lave and Wenger (1991) who argue that organisational learning is a social process, which is inherently situated in nature. It involves community participation, rather than the acquisition of explicit knowledge. Building on both concepts, Nicolini et al. (2003, p. 9) point out that tacit knowledge predates explicit knowledge and indeed makes it possible. In other words, tacit knowledge is ‘pre-reflexive’. Although intrinsically reliant on tacit knowledge, explicit knowledge will be of little value in the absence of opportunities for tacit knowledge development.

Early in the new century, insights of this nature convinced knowledge management researchers of the need for a second generation of techniques to better equip organisations to harness the more valuable tacit knowledge of their staff. Advocated strategies centre around the creation of Internet-enabled ‘communities of practice’, which aim to provide supportive forums for the sharing of tacit knowledge by enabling participants to build relationships of trust through informal exchanges, joint activities, reciprocal mentoring, shared experiences and stories. This is in addition to building a shared repository of communal resources, which embody the accumulated knowledge of the community over time and serve as a foundation for future learning. In their seminal text on ‘cultivating communities of practice’, Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002, p. 7) define them as “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise by interacting on an ongoing basis”. Popular tools include electronic mailing lists, discussion boards, blogs, wikis, and social media sites, as well as face-to-face meetings and workshops.

Importantly, technology is considered an enabling rather than an essential element of communities of practice, which are more dependent on human relationships than information systems and applications. Hence, second generation knowledge management “perceives knowledge as a human resource and recognises that, while explicit knowledge may be manageable, tacit knowledge is shared through practice” (Van der Velden 2002a, p. 28). The shift from first to second generation knowledge management has therefore been described as a move from ‘knowledge-centred’ to ‘knower-centred’ approaches (Van der Velden 2002a).
and from database-driven to people-driven solutions (Allee 2003). These strategies are intended to complement rather than substitute for older ones. The overarching goal is to use a combination of first and second-generation techniques to capture and convert tacit knowledge into new explicit knowledge, thereby improving the organisation’s ability to learn.

Despite the theoretical benefits of an integrated approach, research suggests that most organisations have failed to move beyond first generation solutions. In the private sector, organisational spending patterns have only recently begun to reflect a shift from first to second generation knowledge management (Capozzi 2007). In the development sector, the experience is much the same. In an empirical study of knowledge management in 13 international development organisations by ODI, Ramalingam (2005, p. 14) reports that most continue to emphasise first generation approaches. He states, “The widespread and tangible outputs of knowledge and learning work tend, thus far, to be based on improved information systems, rather than improved processes or changed behaviours [...] Organisations which focus the larger part of their knowledge and learning efforts on the human dimensions were in the clear minority.”

A new interdisciplinary body of literature known as ‘knowledge management for development’ is emerging, which raises serious concerns about the implications of first generation knowledge management in development organisations. Contributing scholars tend to straddle knowledge management and development studies. They argue that by treating knowledge as an object reliant on explicit ideas, this approach naturally gives preference to global knowledge, which can be more easily captured and codified than local knowledge due to its claims of generalisability (Barnard 2003; Barrett, et al. 2005; Ferguson, et al. 2008; Hovland 2003; King 2005; King & McGrath 2004; Krohwickel-Karlsson 2007; Powell 2006; Ramalingam 2005; Van der Velden 2002a; Wilson 2007). In other words, it supports the transfer of expert knowledge from senior advisors and consultants to lower levels of the organisation, but it fails to improve the flow of practical or experiential knowledge from the bottom-up. Powell (2006, p. 525-6) argues “the tools are based on the linear processes of a service industry rather than the complex interactions of a knowledge industry. They do not consider the relationships among different knowledges; nor do they consider the potential damage done to the agencies that impose them by undermining and distorting of the potentially most effective channels for acquiring detailed local knowledge.” That is, “frontline development workers [who] are inundated with knowledge from above” (p. 525).

Many scholars advocate communities of practice to bridge the gap between global and local knowledge inside development organisations, often with a view to improving the relevance of development policy and programs to local realities on the ground. However, few take into
account power relations, which may affect the ability of relatively junior field staff to engage with senior staff on equal terms. In an analysis of ‘knowledge in practice’ that emphasises organisational politics and power relations, Walsham and Barrett (2005) suggest this is due to a widespread ‘managerialist’ interpretation of unity of purpose and consensus among agency staff. Yet, as has already been noted, tensions between headquarters and field offices are commonplace. Former director of knowledge management at the World Bank, Stephen Denning (2002) suggests these tensions are indicative of the systematic undervaluing of local knowledge, which is seen to arise from the fact that deep understanding of local context may reveal a strong lack of ownership or resistance to aid programs. Field staff may understand this, but they are not encouraged to share their knowledge because it would reveal “the disconcerting gap between donor rhetoric and political reality” (Denning 2002, p. 235). In these conditions, the need for culture change that accompanies the successful introduction of second-generation knowledge management in private firms may be especially difficult to instil inside development organisations (see Capozzi 2007; Walsham & Barrett 2005).

A growing number of scholars have sought to apply these insights beyond the relatively insular concerns of mainstream knowledge management to address asymmetrical knowledge flows between development organisations and their developing country partners (Barnard 2003; Ferguson, et al. 2008; Hovland 2003; King 2000, 2005; King & McGrath 2003, 2004; Krohwinkel-Karlsson 2007; Powell 2006; Ramalingam 2005). Kenneth King and Simon McGrath (2003; 2004) pioneered this approach with a major study of knowledge management in donor agencies that specifically sought to question whether the indiscriminate transfer of corporate-sector style knowledge management has complemented new development discourse concerning the need for local ownership, partnership and participation (also see King 2000; 2005). The conclusions of the study answer in the negative, arguing that corporate-sector style knowledge management has encouraged them to become more inward looking; seeking to capitalise on what they already know, without paying attention to what forms and types of knowledge might make a difference to their partners, or how they in turn can learn from them. They call for a broader conception of knowledge management for development that extends beyond the agencies themselves. King (2005 p. 76-77) states:

What is missing in all this discussion of […] learning networks and communities of practice are creative mechanisms whereby the hundreds of program officers in the Northern agencies can engage in a very different way with their Southern partners,

---

4 It could be argued that the focus of mainstream knowledge management is broadening as private companies embrace social media to engage with their customers. Research addressing the management of knowledge across organisational borders nonetheless remains sparse (Mentzas 2006).
using some of the new knowledge possibilities. If an agency were to begin from the perspective of being a unique organisation charged with the development of something other than itself, there would be a series of immediate insights as the new knowledge approaches were applied to current practice. [...] It could be suggested that the new assumptions of 'genuine partnership' between North and South would have made it mandatory to start the exploration of knowledge sharing with the primary actors in the so-called recipient countries.

There has in fact been a move by donor agencies towards recognising the need to improve their responsiveness to local knowledge flows not only from their own staff, but also from their developing country partners. Very little empirical research has been carried out, however, to explore the extent to which they have embraced new ways of working to accompany the new mindset. Most studies on knowledge management in development organisations focus on tools, methods, and best practices with a view to extrapolating lessons learned for other organisations, often regardless of context (e.g. Bellanet 2000; Boom 2005’ Carayannis & Laporte 2002; Ellerman 1999; Guzmán 2007; O’Dell et al. 1998). Many focus on the World Bank and are positioned within mainstream knowledge management where the Bank is revered for its ‘best practice’ approach. Among other accolades, it was named one of the top twenty “Most Admired Knowledge Enterprises” by the independent knowledge management research company Teleos for five successive years from 1999 (KNOW Network 2005). This is mostly due to its apparent success in using digital storytelling to convert tacit knowledge into new explicit knowledge. Although storytelling is perhaps the oldest form of knowledge transfer, it is an effective second-generation knowledge management technique for unveiling pre-reflexive tacit knowledge based on experience, which is vital for organisations to learn (Denning 2000). It has allegedly improved the World Bank’s capacity to think creatively and be innovative, but such accolades reveal little about knowledge politics at the Bank or whose knowledge counts.

In a recent literature review of knowledge sharing and learning in development organisations commissioned by the Swedish Agency for Development Evaluation, Krohwinkel-Karlsson (2007) attributes the gaps in the empirical literature to the commercial origins and orientation of knowledge management, which presumes a focus on competitiveness as the principal goal of knowledge sharing, as well as internal consistencies relating to the overarching goal of profit maximisation. She suggests the main challenge for researchers of knowledge management for development is to expand existing understanding from “an internal to a systemic perspective and to reconsider the basic question of who is to learn what from whom?” This echoes an earlier review by Hovland (2003) who argues that more research is
needed to see if knowledge management can improve Southern engagement both inside and outside of development organisations.

Empirical studies that take this question as their starting point are rare (Powell 2006). They include a case study of the World Health Organisation (WHO) by Barrett et al. (2005. The major finding is that the WHO focuses too strongly on using information systems to ‘project’ global knowledge at its developing country partners and pays insufficient attention to local knowledge from its worldwide network of county offices. Thus, it is argued, “A key challenge will be for WHO professionals to decide how to develop and incorporate global-local knowledge sharing into their practice. In other words, how can they draw on globally produced knowledge alongside locally produced knowledge?” Concern about the exclusion of local knowledge is repeated in empirical studies of the British, Japanese and Swedish bilateral donor agencies and the World Bank by King and McGrath (2003, 2004); and in a synthesis of lessons learned from 13 development organisations by Ramalingam (2005), which covers the same agencies but also offers insight into international NGOs and research institutes. These studies have been particularly influential in providing practical grounds for concern about the predominantly techno- and agency-centric focus of the knowledge management strategies adopted by a wide range of agencies. They provide evidence suggesting that senior staff recognise the need to improve local knowledge flows, but this is seen to contradict their bureaucratic imperative to favour ‘global best practices’, which permeates the organisational culture of the agencies investigated.

In a recent ‘meta’ literature review published by the European Association of Development Research Training Institutes, Ferguson et al. (2008) set out an ambitious agenda for future research that indicates clear need for empirical research on knowledge management for development to assist in the improvement of current practices. Two of the authors are senior editors of the Knowledge Management for Development Journal, which is a focal point for empirical research on this topic. They argue that more studies are needed to explore the ‘human aspects of knowledge management for development’, based on the knowledge needs of different stakeholders and how these intersect with the objectives of the organisation, and the development project as a whole. This implies a core focus on the role of incentives, attitudes, language and culture in supporting and limiting active participation by a range of local knowledge actors with a view to uncovering how participatory learning can be sustained. The call for greater attention to cross-organisational knowledge sharing could not be more highly stressed. This paves the way for a conceptual broadening of this field to encompass concerns that will be discussed in the next section. In this context, it suggests a
need for applied research on cross-organisational communities of practice, which are “not well understood and in need of more detailed investigation” (Ramalingam 2005, p. 16).

The first case study in this dissertation, presented in Chapter 5, aims to address the gaps in the literature by offering practical insight into the knowledge management strategy of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the world’s most geographically extensive and arguably most inclusive multilateral donor agency. In tracing the evolution of technical assistance to knowledge management, Wilson (2007, p. 185) claims that “UNDP has been the most conscious of the epistemological challenges associated with knowledge transfer” due to its reflexive critique of technical assistance and leading contribution to new development thinking. This is practically evidenced by the agency’s second-generation approach to knowledge management, and its position among the few donor agencies experimenting with cross-organisational communities of practice that draw on local knowledge from its developing country partners.

3.3 Civil Society Partnerships and Policy Dialogues

Cooperation between donor agencies and civil society organisations (CSOs) has been commonplace since the 1980s when donors began channelling their support in the provision of social safety nets for the poor through NGOs to bypass governments in many developing countries. There has however been increased enthusiasm among donor agencies for building partnerships with CSOs since the late 1990s when a confluence of the neoliberal and democratisation agendas expanded their role in the development project from micro-level program implementation to macro-level policy formulation. The result has been the emergence of a large civil society sector in the South with direct links to sources of finance in the North, a growing proportion of which comes from outside the official development assistance community. A wide range of non-governmental non-market actors, such as trade unions, faith-based organisations, women’s associations, human rights organisations, community-based organisations, and activists populate the civil society sector, but NGOs receive the lion’s share of donor funding, which has in turn contributed to their proliferation. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, it was not uncommon for the number of registered NGOs in a country to increase by as much as 400 percent in the 1990s (Reinicke, et al. 2000).

The ‘NGO-isation’ of macro-level developmental processes has been the subject of much debate by scholars whose research explores how smaller less established CSOs can link and coordinate their activities to effect political change, but the use of ICT to support knowledge sharing by different knowledge actors is rarely considered in this context. It was brought about by governance reforms, instigated and promoted by multilateral institutions and donor
agencies in the late 1990s, which have created a profusion of multi-stakeholder forums for policy deliberation in which citizens are enlisted to enhance the accountability and responsiveness of the state. In principle, these forums promote “the coming together of different interest groups on an equal footing, to identify problems, define solutions and agree on roles and responsibilities for policy development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation” (Banks 2005, p. 85). Operationally, they allow self-selected representatives of civil society and the private sector to provide policy advice to governments. Cornwell and Coelho (2007, p. 1) describe them as ‘hybrid democratic spaces’ for knowledge exchange and negotiation, which are regarded by state actors as their spaces into which citizens are invited, but may conversely be seen by citizens as spaces conquered by their demands for inclusion. They include one-off events, such as UN Summits; regularised processes, such as the World Bank Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers; and relatively durable institutions such as ‘public policy networks’, which help to set policy standards, pressure decision-makers to take action, and engage in policy monitoring and evaluation.

All of these initiatives have been driven by what Cornwell and Coelho (2007, p. 4) describe as “the belief that involving citizens more directly in processes of governance makes for better citizens, better decisions and better government”. They link this to the ‘deliberative turn’ in debates on democracy and the politics of public policy in international relations and political science. This reflects growing interest in the potential of participatory institutions and processes to consolidate democratic systems of governance in the South, and contribute to their renewal in the North. Gaventa (2006, p. 1) refers to this field as the ‘deepening democracy school’, which “focuses on the political project of developing and sustaining more substantive and empowered citizenship than is often found in representative democracy alone.” It is informed by the work of philosopher Jürgen Habermas (1981) who argues that democracy requires a discursive sphere where matters of common interest can be deliberated and the force of public opinion can influence public policy. This thinking carries forward from the Enlightenment tradition and its emphasis on arriving at a more humane, just, and egalitarian society through the human potential for reason through critical public debate.

Howell and Pierce (1981) suggest that multi-stakeholder governance is a mainstream response to the problems of poverty and inequality in the global economy, which positions ‘civil society’ as an apparent solution to those problems, with a responsibility to assist the development agenda. It is celebrated in policy literature for helping governments drive the development process by creating more appropriate policy conditions for civil society and the private sector to flourish by allowing their representatives to participate in the decisions that will govern their future. This is in contrast with the broadly defined activist literature, which
opposes the dominant orthodoxy of market led development, and has embraced the concept of civil society to construct alternative visions of development according to a distinct set of political values, usually associated with the global justice movement. Both discourses reflect broader trends within civil society at large whereby some actors pursue official channels for change, and others do not see any benefit in a dialogue with the formal political world and focus instead on changing values, behaviours and attitudes in the informal political sphere. Importantly, however neither path is clear-cut and there are multiple discourses and nuances within each.

At the peak of the hyperbole surrounding the Internet in the late nineties, it was not uncommon for the policy and activist literature to converge in the somewhat techno-deterministic view that online networking by CSOs was helping to bring about a new paradigm in international relations whereby an emergent ‘global civil society’ would become powerful enough to counterbalance nation states in shaping a borderless world from the ‘bottom-up’ (e.g. Anheier, et al. 2001; Calabrese 1999; Norris 2001; Warkentin 2001). Although most scholars recognise that international networking by CSOs is not an entirely new phenomenon, many argue that it has been unprecedented in scale and scope since the emergence of the Internet, which has enabled “the self conscious construction of networks of knowledge and action, by decentred, local actors that cross the reified boundaries of space as though they were not there” (Lipschtz 1992, p. 390). The ‘emancipatory’ potential of civil society as distinct from the state is taken as the starting point for much of this literature, much of which contends that there is a strong correlation between the “inherent dynamics of the Internet and those of an emerging global civil society”, whereby the former is an inherently democratic medium and “global civil society is inherently progressive, dynamic and inclusive” (Warkentin 2001, p. 5).

Much of the empirical literature that extols and attests to the political strength of global civil society has been documented in similar terms. For the most part, civil society is presented as a powerful source of grassroots resistance to state and market power. Most accounts focus on informal networks of NGOs and activists who use ICT to rally together in a seemingly spontaneous manner to hold governments to account in some conception of the ‘public interest’ (e.g. Price 1998; Ronfeldt et al. 1998). Such celebratory accounts of online networking by Leftist groups abound. At the same time there are of course many conservative, nationalist, and anti-democratic movements, but the strategies adopted by these groups are rarely researched in such detail. What nearly all accounts have in common is that

5 Trade unionism, the anti-slavery movement and the struggle for women’s suffrage are oft-cited examples of transnational networking by civil society prior to the emergence of the Internet.
they highlight the ability of civil society to ‘swarm’ in support of a diverse range of issues. This is because like Internet architecture, civil society lacks a centre of command; “it is multi-headed and impossible to decapitate” (Rondfelt et al. 1998, p. 119). This feature puts informal networks and social movements of a variety of political persuasions at the ‘vanguard’ of flexible and creative approaches to development and social change, but it also prevents them from becoming well integrated into the formal political world (Surman & Reilly 2003, p. 17). Donor agencies and governments are ill equipped to engage with the informal networks of civil society, which Ribeiro (1998) describes as “pragmatic, fragmented, disseminated, circumstantial and even volatile political actors”.6 Multi-stakeholder venues for policy deliberation may be seen however, as an official response to their activities which have confounded and complicated conventional governance structures to such an extent that they have earned their representatives a seat at the negotiation table. While many civil society groups have welcomed the opportunity to engage with decision-makers directly, official policymaking venues are just one aspect of a much larger political sphere for these actors and arguably the most difficult to penetrate. A key concern for many critics therefore is who is included and who is excluded, on what grounds, and with what ‘epistemic authority’ (Chakravartty 2007; Chandoke 2003; Cornwell & Coelho 2007; S. Maxwell & Stone 2005; McDuie-Ra & Rees 2008).

Limited political freedoms or lack of a culture of critical public debate are widely understood to be the main barriers to entry for Southern CSOs that are critical of their government (Carden 2009; Chowdhury, et al. 2006; Court, et al. 2006). However, most research focuses on subtler modes of exclusion to explain what Reinke et al. (2000) have termed ‘the participatory gap’ which restricts participation in policymaking to a privileged few. Of particular note is an edited volume by Simon Maxwell and Diane Stone (2005), which explores the exclusion of individuals, organisations, disciplines, and ideas from public policy networks. “Put crudely, the argument is that those who count are Northern economists, usually male, and usually working in the World Bank or one of the major bilateral agencies” (p. 9). Stone (2005) points out that policymakers require persuasive reasoning of what constitute policy problems, and depend on experts from dominant epistemic communities for authoritative advice. Experts have a ‘cognitive interest’ in their particular mode of problem analysis and resolution, which encourages resistance to other perspectives, and cordons off policy debate from those who do not speak the same specialised language. McNeil (2005) argues that the status associated with scholarly expertise and professional training is

---

6 In the 2008 UN presidential election, Barack Obama attracted a great deal of media attention for being among the first politicians to use ICT to mobilise informal civil society networks and social movements in support of his campaign (e.g. Fraser & Dutta 2008).
especially empowering for experts in the field of economics, which is the lead discipline in public policy networks sponsored by the World Bank and major bilateral donors.

In addition to a particular mindset and training, it requires time, commitment and patronage to access multi-stakeholder institutions and processes, particularly at the global level. Few Southern CSOs have sufficient financial or human resources to devote to these forums which are dominated by influential Northern players. Among the most visible representatives of global civil society are international NGOs. Civil society representation in national policy forums in much of the developing world is similarly limited to well-established NGOs that work in partnership with development organisations based in the North to deliver aid programmes. Many critics accuse these organisations of being captured by urban middle class elites who are rich in global rather than local knowledge (Chandoke 2003; Chatterjee 2004; McDuie & Rees 2008). They contrast these with CSOs that are deeply embedded in poor and marginalised communities and have a profound understanding of local context. It is their exclusion from multi-stakeholder institutions and processes that has prompted many critics to argue “These are spaces of power in which forms of overt or tacit domination silence certain actors or keep them from entering at all” (Cornwell & Coelho 2007, p. 11).

It is at this point the policy and activist literature diverges, with both proposing different strategies to bolster the political clout of smaller less established CSOs. In the policy camp, research that sits within the deepening democracy school of development studies emphasises the value of partnering with NGOs that operate at higher levels of aggregation to build their capacity to engage with decision-makers (e.g. Carden 2009; Chowdhury, et al. 2006; Court, et al. 2006; Perkin & Court 2005; Weyrauch 2007). Researchers use different terms to describe the optimal network arrangement, but many describe ‘knowledge networks’ that are bound by organisational cohesiveness and objectives that qualify them as representative of specific interests and help to establish their credibility with donors. They provide members with a means to produce ‘evidence based research’ and communicate their findings for maximum impact. There are two main audiences for their work: the decision-makers they most want to influence and other civil society groups with an interest in the same area. They have a structured, sustained, and outcome-oriented approach to knowledge sharing with decision-makers, with interactions that intersect with formal policy venues in order to build relationships in the policy community. Based on these features, Perkin and Court (2005, p. 15) argue they allow grassroots CSOs to bypass “established hierarchies of power”, which leave them “isolated at the bottom end of the line, only able to communicate their evidence to the actor ranking one step above them in the vertical hierarchy”.

Implicit in this idealised conception of policy influence is an assumption that international
development challenges can be resolved through civil society participation in the formal political world. That is rejected in much of the activist literature. There, most research focuses on the political agency of grassroots CSOs outside of what Chakravartty (2007, p. 307) calls “the institutionally bounded space of ‘official civil society’”. For it is outside this space many activists contend that the transformative potential of civil society resides. In debates about development, this view is strongly influenced by post-colonial studies. It sees attempts to deepen democracy by donor agencies as giving them unhealthy control over the policy process in developing countries through their relationship with NGOs (Chakravartty 2007; Chandoke 2003; Chatterjee 2004; McDuie-Ra & Rees 2008). In this view, the growing role that these actors have come to play in delivering donor-funded programmes compromises their autonomy in formal policymaking venues. The need for NGOs to build their legitimacy in these spaces underpins the drive for them to partner with grassroots CSOs. For many activists, however, such partnerships allow potentially oppositional actors to be coopted by the predominately Northern-based organisations on which they rely for funding to affirm their preferred policies and programs. Rather than knowledge networks, most advocate informal networks and social movements. These they often cite as evidence of a radical form of democracy and post-modern culture on behalf of what Milani and Laniado (2007) call ‘moral entrepreneurs’ who reject the hierarchical structures associated with ‘old world politics’ in favour of bottom-up forms of organisation that engage in disruptive activities to challenge state and market power.

This ‘autonomist’ argument assumes complicity by NGOs in replicating the dominant orthodoxy of market led development, ignoring those that are deeply involved in donor-funded projects while also actively contesting the development agenda through their advocacy work. Calabrese (2004, p. 321) argues that it “romanticizes the autonomy and emancipatory potential of contemporary social movements”. He claims that CSOs cannot afford to ignore formal politics. Ammore and Langley (2004, pp. 105-106) argue that many activists fail to grasp that civil society politics does not take place in clearly delineated boundaries, but is “running with contradictions and is constantly in flux.” As such, “it cannot be understood as made by CSOs rationally pooling their interests to secure the optimal outcome”. Rather, they argue, CSOs struggle to define the terms of their alliances, which are inscribed with the same power relations found in the institutions they seek to challenge. It is the exclusions produced by these actors in the making of solidarity, which they argue require greater attention in research. This implies that knowledge networks may be no more or less legitimate or accountable to the people whose interests they claim to represent in the formal political sphere than more bottom-up forms of organisation in the informal political sphere. Both open up opportunities for some actors while simultaneously closing down opportunities for others.
In this reading, multi-stakeholder governance is an improvement on the *per se* exclusion of civil society perspectives from macro-level decision-making processes. Although embedded inequalities and power asymmetries restrict the types of actors that are granted access in the first instance, the relationship between those actors and a less bounded version of civil society are no longer seen as static.

Indeed, Stone (2005, p. 92) suggests that overlapping network styles allow knowledge networks to play a special role as “brokers between insider and outsider communities” in the formal political sphere. Those with strong principled ideas or values often play active roles in less formally structured advocacy networks, which play an important role in shaping norms and values in civil society and setting the moral climate for policymaking (Amoore & Langley 2004). Mendizabal (2006, p. 6) describes this function in terms of ‘amplification’, which can serve several roles, including information dissemination and two-way communication where local knowledge flows upwards. This suggests that where they stimulate inclusive practices that they then carry into the formal political sphere, knowledge networks can help to bridge the participatory gap that restricts access and active participation in policymaking by grassroots CSOs not only inside, but also outside their formal network borders. However, these positive effects cannot be extended to knowledge networks at large. On the contrary, Stone (2005 p. 89) suggests there are strong grounds about the framing of the agenda by dominant NGOs and the privileging of a particular kind of knowledge. Thus, she argues, “Rather than organisational density and diversity, disrupting hierarchy and dispensing power, they can also represent new constellations of privatised power.”

These issues come to the fore on the global stage where a growing number of knowledge networks are claiming to speak on behalf of poor and marginalised communities in the South. Although many include Southern CSOs among their close members and partners, most are headquartered in the North where the most powerful members are based. There is a rich literature on North-South partnerships in development, which points to a gap between the vision of equality to which participants aspire and what occurs in practice (e.g. Barnard 2003; Drew 2003; R. James 2001). Although participants may describe themselves as partners, in reality they operate as bureaucracies of different size and complexity that exert power and domination over others. Power invariably follows from resources, most of which are based in the North. Drew (2003) also cites the dominance of the English language, and the choice of communications channels used to support interactions as factors that often result in a ‘parent-child relationship’ whereby Northern partners ‘teach’ Southern partners, rather than facilitating the access and impact of Southern voices in policy debates. Thus, the fear is that the communication of Southern perspectives by well-intentioned knowledge networks may
end up leaving them no less silenced than before, regardless of how persistently and sincerely they express concern for the poor.

Many researchers point to the largely untapped potential of South-South networks to overcome many of the problems that plague North-South relationships. However, there is a dearth of empirical research to explore this proposition from the point of view of Southern CSOs that are actually involved in policy processes (Chowdhury et al. 2006). Of the few empirical studies to explore civil society participation in global policy processes, most are based on the experience of influential Northern players. The fact that South-South networks do not feature more prominently in this literature is due both to their lack of representation and the difficulty of delineating ‘Southern discourses’ on the global stage (Dingwerth 2008). In ‘the handbook for policy influence’, Weyrauch (2007) provides a detailed overview of a wide range of South-South networks that are involved in regional policy processes in Latin America for CSOs that are thinking about joining a network to effect policy change. She emphasises the highly complex and resource-intensive nature of collaborating across borders for policy influence, which requires a combination of virtual and face-to-face interactions, but the interdependencies between these channels or their relative merits for helping weaker members to make their voices heard are not discussed. Empirical studies on evidence-based policy engagement by CSOs in Africa, Asia and Latin America stress that there is no single model for maximising policy influence where much depends on the decision-making regime, but reinforce the rewards of working in networks to form a unified voice when engaging with decision-makers (Carden 2009; Chowdhury et al. 2006). However they pay scant attention to the communications environment required to support collaboration between Southern CSOs.

In a broad literature review on ‘networking and policy processes for international development’ published by ODI, Perkin and Court (2005) argue that much of the literature assumes knowledge networks of CSOs aiming for policy influence are inherently inclusive. In contrast, they emphasise the need for the ‘communication environment’ to be ‘genuinely interactive’ to avoid misrepresenting weaker members. They identify representation as one of the keys to the success of these networks and call for more studies to explore the implications of power relations on communication. They also call for more research on the extent to which Southern CSOs can use ICT to share their knowledge and the role of incentives in motivating them to do so. These questions echo those explored in the previous section on donor-driven knowledge management. The fact that they have not been explored to the same extent in this context appears to be due to the overarching focus of the literature on building the capacity of Southern CSOs to engage with decision-makers, rather than with each other.

The second case study in this dissertation presented in Chapter 6 aims to address gaps in the
literature by offering practical insight into the Association for Progressive Communications (APC), a predominately South-South network, which is arguably the peak representative of civil society in multi-stakeholder institutions and processes in the ICT policy arena. It played a leading role in the World Summit on the Information Society, which was held jointly by the United Nations and the International Telecommunications Union in 2003 and 2005. Empirical studies on civil society participation in the WSIS are evident in both the policy and activist literature. Policy researchers praise APC for contributing to the democratisation of the global governance process, due largely to its effectiveness as a broker between insider and outsider communities (e.g. Mueller et al. 2007). Activists criticise it for contributing to the incorporation of civil society perspectives into a managed consensus that did little to address the concerns of developing countries (e.g. Chakravartty 2007).

3.4 ICT for Development Projects

Ever since donor agencies began to draw on the language and tools of action research in the early 1990s, it has been widely considered to be both a methodological prerequisite and a critical determinant of success for the intended beneficiaries of development projects to participate in defining and solving their own problems. The rhetorical emphasis on participation at the micro-level of projects has been particularly strong in the ICT for development (ICT4D) sector, which emerged in the late nineties as a result of high-level commitments by multilateral institutions and donor agencies to support participation by developing countries in the information society. To support this goal, donor agencies initially embarked on a concerted effort to close the ‘digital divide’ by increasing Internet accessibility and affordability in the South. This was initiated through the creation of telecommunications and satellite links, Internet service providers, and public access points or ‘telecentres’, where these facilities were thinly spread or absent. Projects of this nature still continue, alongside efforts to reform ICT policy environments that frustrate rollout. Of more interest to this research however are ICT4D projects, which emerged early this century when donors began turning their attention to the content and services the Internet can deliver (Roman & Colle 2003, p. 86). Most of the resultant projects aim to support participation in the Information Society by individuals and organisations in developing countries through the creation of online portals that function as gateways to digital content supplied by network members.

The vast majority of ICT4D projects that focus on the creation of online portals take an assumed connection between knowledge and economic growth as their starting point. This derives from the strategic management literature that was so influential in shaping the resurgence of interest in knowledge in development in the late 1990s. In this conception, ICTs are seen as valuable conduits for addressing knowledge deficits in developing countries by
facilitating the transfer of developmentally useful knowledge to them. Informed by this assumption, most portals aggregate content from decentralised sources of global knowledge, which the implementing organisation deems relevant to the needs of target beneficiaries. In other words, they promote a largely one-way flow of information from formally selected organisational network members to individual users who are positioned as passive recipients of mediated messages from above. This is despite the interactive potential of the Internet to facilitate two-way knowledge flows. They have been heavily criticised for their narrow conception of participation, which critics argue equates with access, rather than active participation in what many term the ‘Knowledge Society’ (e.g. Gandy 2002; Mansell 2002; McElhinney 2005; Tacchi, et al. 2009; Tachhi 2006; Van der Velden 2002b, 2004a).

There is however a smaller area of ICT4D project activity that emphasises what proponents describe as a deeper form of participation in which target beneficiaries are empowered through ‘voice’ (Skuse, et al. 2007; Tacchi et al. 2009). Here, the focus is on the need to address asymmetries between rich and poor countries in the field of social media, including television, radio, print and new media. As justification for their calls for a more fair and balanced communication order, dependency theorists have long argued that the right to communicate is a critical precondition for poverty reduction (see Pasquali 2005). This argument was taken up in the MacBride Report (2005) which catalysed the largely ineffective UNESCO Resolution to establish a New World Information and Communication Order, which was discussed in the previous chapter. It later formed the basis of an advocacy campaign by civil society participants in the World Summit on the Information Society, which will be discussed in Chapter 6. The Summit resulted in a high-level commitment by governments to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented information society where everyone can create, receive, share and utilise information and knowledge (WSIS Declaration 2003). From this new starting point, ICTs have been positioned as valuable tools for addressing the global communications imbalance between rich and poor countries by allowing people to share their own local knowledge in their own languages.

The tussle between these competing approaches has received a great deal of attention at the industry level where critics have converged on the controversial ‘Development Gateway’ project of the World Bank. The Gateway is the world’s largest ‘information network’ devoted to the broad theme of development. It was launched in 2001 as part of the Bank’s commitment to become the premier source of developmentally useful knowledge from across the aid delivery chain. Today, it consists of a global portal and nearly 50 inter-linked country portals, which employ content editors to manually publish contributions from the World Bank and national project partners. The well-funded portals do not suffer from a lack of users, but
they have been heavily criticised by observers on both sides of the debate explored thus far for failing to pay attention to their knowledge needs. In an evaluation commissioned by the World Bank’s own Operations Evaluation Department, Walker (2003) criticises the lack of feedback loops between content editors and users. This makes it difficult for editors to determine the relevance of the content offering to local conditions. In contrast, an independent evaluation commissioned by the activist oriented ‘Bretton Woods Project’ by Jha et al. (2003) criticises the Gateway for failing to enable users to share their own knowledge. Along with numerous other critics, they argue the Gateway filters content through a Northern lens. Given its scale, they argue that this has reduced the plurality of alternative and legitimate local knowledge from the South that is needed to keep development debates open (e.g. Jha, et al. 2004; McFarlane 2006; Mehta 1999, 2001; Samoff & Stromquist 2001; Schech 2002; Thompson 2004; Van der Velden 2002a, 2002b; Wilks 2001).

These critiques highlight the most common issues associated with dominant network configurations, which ‘push’ information from the top-down and neglect to ‘pull’ information from the bottom-up. The tensions between these dynamics arguably become more complex at the community level where implementing organisations are under enormous pressure to meet performance criteria that go well beyond the website metrics commonly used to gage the popularity and therefore also the success (or so the thinking goes) of information networks like the Development Gateway. Their challenge is to demonstrate the economic and social impact of knowledge sharing on people’s lives. This task is further complicated by the fact that most ‘community networks’ centre around ‘telecentres’, which may be broadly defined as places that offer communal access to computers and other digital technologies in poor and marginalised communities where access is all but impossible in single households (Jha, et al. 2004). While telecentres vary, they typically offer Internet access, word processing and printing services, and computer training courses, often at a cost. In principle, community networks add value to this service offering by allowing people to access and/or create locally relevant content in their own languages. However, it may be difficult to distinguish the value of this service offering over other telecentre services, which is probably why they are rarely considered separately in the literature.

Most research is positioned within a disciplinary area known as ‘development informatics’, which (like knowledge management) has its roots in information systems. However, it draws

---

7 It could be argued that popularity is as good a measure of success as any other, given the difficulty of evaluating the benefits of knowledge sharing noted in Chapter 1. It is however still interesting to note the World Bank does not hold the Development Gateway to the same standards of accountability as other organisations, especially with regards to performance agreements (Wilks 2003; Jha et al. 2004).
on the language and tools of action research to take cognisance of the particular needs and circumstances of users in developing countries. Within this school, a sub-discipline known as ‘community informatics’ focuses primarily on telecentre projects. Some researchers describe community informatics as a ‘movement’, which prioritises information and communication over technology and seeks socially and culturally appropriate solutions beyond the realm of conventional user contexts with a view to empowering poor and marginalised people to join the Information Society (Gurstein 2007; Loader, et al. 2000; Loader & Keeble 2004; McIver Jr. 2003). They invariably argue that community participation in project planning and implementation is crucial to ensure that the anticipated benefits of telecentre projects materialise. Most stop short, however, of advocating participatory methods that would empower the intended beneficiaries of these projects to question their initial conception of how ICTs can be used to advance their economic and/or social development.

In the first instance, the emphasis on participation appears to derive from the need to close the ‘design-reality gap’ identified by prominent development informatics scholar Richard Heeks (2002). Heeks argues that the design conceptions that inform the vast majority of information systems projects in the developing world derive from the assumptions of the stakeholders who dominate the process. He argues these stakeholders are usually drawn from Northern and/or rational-technical contexts and impose solutions derived from that context. These designs often fail to match the realities of end-users in the South, thereby causing projects to fail (p. 6). Factors that can affect the design-reality gap include Internet accessibility, affordability, service stability, and access speeds; availability of technical support personnel; information literacy skills; social and cultural norms; and ‘relatively subjective realities, including perceptions and values’ (also see Heeks 1999a).

At a broader level, the emphasis on participation is directed towards ensuring the financial and social sustainability of donor-funded telecentre projects (Caspary & O'Connor 2003; Falch 2000; Madon, et al. 2009; Roman & Colle 2002). Financial sustainability is seen to occur when the telecentre develops sufficient revenue streams to ensure its survival when the donor-funded period comes to an end. Social sustainability, on the other hand, is seen as the positive impact of the telecentre on the social and economic development of the community. To ensure sustainability on both fronts, most researchers call for “conscientious attention to participation” (Roman & Colle 2002, p. 12). Advocated techniques include spending time in the field to deepen the project implementers’ understanding of local circumstances and needs; conducting campaigns to foster local champions and generate community acceptance; giving the community a stake in the telecentre whereby they stand to benefit financially from its success; and recruiting and training local people to manage the telecentre and evaluate its
operations in light of local needs. Kanungo (2002, pp. 417-418) claims “Such actions perform the function of keeping the village folk engaged, keeping stakeholders engaged, continually sounding out different individuals so as to regenerate the idea and continually seek affirmation amongst the participants.”

In a critique of the assumed link between participation and telecentre success, Bailur (2004) suggests that these methods have more in common with the ‘user-centred design’ stream of information systems than the ‘participatory development’ stream of development studies. In information systems and interaction design, user-centred design is seen to lead to greater acceptance of systems that require new ways of working because users have a say in how they need and want them to work, rather than being forced to accommodate the software developers approach (e.g. Carroll 2000; Checkland 1981; Cooper 1999). In development studies, the call for participation is a call for partnership with local people to encourage local ownership of the outcome. Both schools proffer tools and techniques, which are extolled for helping project implementers to meet the needs of diverse stakeholder interests by exploring the situation from their perspectives. These derive from action research, which is an umbrella term for a wide range of methodologies in the social constructionist epistemological framework that aim to solve problems in programmes, organisations and communities through collaboration between researchers and local interest groups, with a view to capturing elusive social, cultural, political and environmental elements in the analysis (Patton 1990).

Historically, action research evolved in the social sciences as a form of resistance to conventional research practices that have been perceived by participants as a means of imposing external agendas on communities by actors often far removed from local concerns. It is based on the premise that participation by those affected by the research is essential for meaningful problem solving. In an account of the parallels between information systems and development studies that has given rise to action research in both contexts, Thompson (2008, p. 826) argues for “an urgent need for committed interaction between development studies and ICT disciplines.” This he argues derives from the challenge that new models of networked social interaction are likely to pose to established debates in development studies. As the more ‘mature discipline’, he suggests that development studies should play the leading role in engaging with “peoples’ demands to participate, peer to peer, in the information society” (p. 833). In a literature review of ‘information systems in developing countries’ Walsham and Sahay (2006) suggest that this role is warranted because the few researchers who seek to critically address issues in ICT disciplines such as power, politics, and inequality more generally must draw on theories in other domains.

In development studies, Robert Chambers (1993; 1997) has been the most influential in
proposing ‘participatory rural appraisal’ as a means to involve poor people in examining their own problems and needs, setting their own goals, planning, managing, and monitoring their own achievements. He originally developed the method for use in rural communities, but it has subsequently given rise to a host of similar methods appropriate for use in other contexts. Chambers (1997) attributes the origins of these methods to the adult education methods of Brazilian post-colonial philosopher Paulo Freire (1970) who criticised what he termed the ‘banking concept’ in education whereby students are seen as empty accounts open to deposits made by teachers, as an instrument of oppression that encourages them to accept and adapt to their reality without challenging or attempting to change it. Instead, he called for education to become an instrument for emancipation, whereby teachers encourage students to critically analyse and reflect upon the world around them, awakening their desire to transform their reality. By adopting similar techniques in micro-level development projects, Chambers (1993) argues that project implementers can bring about a ‘reversal of learning’, which allows poor people to take control over their own lives.

Bailur (2008) argues that deep participation of this nature is all very well in theory but it is too expensive to implement, too politically complex, and too demanding of beneficiaries. Thus, she suggests that telecentre projects tend to be characterised by a pragmatic approach to participation more indicative of information systems where the outcome has effectively been decided before participation commences. In other words, that there will be a telecentre and it will aid in the community’s development is often taken for granted. Going a step further, she questions whether there is actually any correlation between participation and the social and economic impact of telecentre projects. Indeed, she argues that the call for participation that pervades the community informatics literature derives precisely from the fact that the vast majority of these projects have not proven to be sustainable despite enormous investment “because their potential seems remote from a population where basic needs are still to be addressed” (Bailur 2008, p. 4) In this context, she suggests that participation is unlikely to overcome the fundamental gap between the basic needs of poor and marginalised communities and the lofty aspirations of project implementers.

A popular response to this argument is provided by a perceived link between social networks and economic growth, as embodied in the influential concept of ‘social capital’, which originated in political science, but has been more extensively explored in economics. The term is often attributed to Robert Putnam (1995) who used it to describe the value of social networks in fostering reciprocity and trust, thereby ‘lubricating social life’. He argued that social capital, like physical capital and human capital, influences productivity. Fukuyama (1995) has focused more closely on the role of social capital in triggering and sustaining
economic growth by drawing a distinction between ‘low-trust’ and ‘high-trust’ societies. He identifies the norms and networks that enable people to cooperate as key to the efficient functioning of economies and stable liberal democracy. Drawing on these theories, a new consensus has emerged about the importance of social networks to economic development. This in turn has strengthened the push for participation as important means through which both social capital and effective development efforts can be fostered (Malik & Wagle 2002).

The concept of social capital has provided much of the impetus for the community networks that are of most interest to this research. These are often referred to as ‘digital inclusion’ projects because they aim to foster social inclusion by providing various types of support for people to use ICT to create and exchange local content. In emphasising a causal link between social networks and economic development, the concept of social capital provides much of the justification for these projects. Theoretically, it resolves the notoriously elusive issue of financial sustainability by construing them as legitimate investments in social capital formation in the minds of donors that privilege economic over social outcomes. However, attributes such as trust and reciprocity are hard to engineer. Accordingly, empirical studies of telecentres that receive funding from UNESCO to support local content creation have concluded that they are most effective when they map onto or complement existing social networks and build on existing community media (see Skuse, et al. 2007; Slater & Tacchi 2004; Tacchi, et al. 2009; Tachhi 2005; Watkins & Nair 2008). This begs the question, what added value do these projects bring to poor and marginalised communities above and beyond the existing communications ecology?

Slater and Tacchi (2004) suggest they are a means of “engaging people with ICT, enabling them to have a voice and to harness and circulate locally relevant knowledge. [They] can also encourage innovation and creativity in poor users and communities and significantly increase ICT literacy skills.” Mansell (2002) suggests that they provide a valuable ‘alternative to the dominant ‘broadcast’ mode of information provision’ by helping people to acquire the capabilities needed to function effectively in a world that increasingly favours online social interaction. Drawing on human development theory, she suggests that they empower people to embrace their ‘human right’ to become active participants in the Information Society. This follows from Gandy (2004) who suggests they focus on closing the ‘real digital divide’, which is the divide between people considered as mere consumers and those who are active citizens in the Information Society. Tacchi et al. (2002) and Tacchi (2009) conceptualise the role of these projects in even broader terms of political agency and governance, suggesting a possible broadening of this field to encompass concerns explored in the previous section. However they describe the immediate benefits of their empirical research in much more
tempered terms of fostering ICT literacy skills by allowing people to create and exchange local content for entertainment purposes.

Such optimistic accounts of the potential for community networks to empower people though voice call attention to the need for a radical critique of participation in this context. Bailur (2008) stresses the need for greater understanding on what participation actually means in telecentre projects. When local people are invited to participate, she asks how are they selected? Do they represent a cross-section of society or are they simply the most influential members of the community? This follows from Heeks (1999b) who argues that there is a mistaken assumption in much of the ICT4D literature that participation breaks down inequalities. In fact, many studies have found that telecentre projects replicate and reinforce inequalities, producing what Madon et al. (2009, p. 13) call ‘a local form of digital divide’, whereby many of the most marginalised people in the community are excluded. These issues have not been lost on many scholars whose independent research on digital inclusion is funded by UNESCO. They argue “the role of local content creation is an area that requires a deeper level of inquiry if we are to truly understand the implications of access and using new technologies and through it, giving voice to areas of direct concern to the poor” (Skuse et al. 2007, p. 48). In particular, they ask, “If a poor man or woman is afforded the opportunity to make a piece of content what are the tangible and intangible benefits connected to that process? Voice, like communication more broadly, can only be understood in context and when discussing the potential of new media to liberate and empower, we must critically reflect on the relative abilities of different individuals and social groups to actually get their voices heard.”

The third case study in this dissertation presented in Chapter 7 aims to address the need for further research on telecentre projects that promote digital inclusion through a critical exploration of the Open Knowledge Network (OKN), a high-profile ICT4D project that emerged from the G8 Digital Opportunity Task Force in 2000. The architects of the project were pioneers in convincing major donors to extend the concept of communication rights to community-based ICT4D projects. They built the only identified global community network that allowed poor and marginalised communities across the developing world to create, exchange and publish local content on the web. OKN was not however a digital inclusion project in the conventional sense of the term. It shared the same overarching goal as dominant network configurations to address knowledge deficits in participating communities, but the way it sought to meet this challenge set it apart from the mainstream and ultimately sounded its death-knell when the donor-funded period came to an end in October 2007.
3.5 Summary

This chapter began by positioning the literature that is of most interest to this research within the context of competing theoretical claims about the potential for online networks that have been established by donor agencies or rely on their patronage to bring the new discourse of development into practice. The bulk of the chapter explored the three major areas of online networking activity that have received the most critical attention to date. The overall theme of the critical literature in each field is that dominant network configurations privilege global over local knowledge and this has reduced the pool of individuals and organisations from developing countries that can participate as active knowledge providers, rather than passive knowledge recipients. The next chapter discusses the research methodology and methods that were employed to analyse this issue in relation to three online networking initiatives that correspond with the three fields of inquiry that were explored in this chapter.
Chapter Four

Research Design
4.0 Research Design

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework, research methodology and methods employed to analyse three different types of online networking initiatives that correspond with the three major areas of online networking activity that were explored in the previous chapter. My objective in designing the empirical investigation to cover such a broad range of research sites was to provide a comprehensive account of the progress made and obstacles yet to be surmounted by online networks that strive to put the local knowledge and capacities of Southern stakeholders at the fore of their respective fields. This implied a significant fieldwork component to gather insights from diverse stakeholder groups, including donor agency staff, civil society organisations, and poor and marginalised communities. Details of the sampling strategy, as well as the data collection, analysis, and verification techniques used to conduct the research are provided in this chapter. The limitations of the investigation and how they have impacted on the research findings are also discussed.

4.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that guides this research is social constructionism. In this view, meaning is not discovered but constructed through human beings’ interaction with each other and their world. It is also relative in that it acknowledges that people inhabit different worlds, which constitute different ways of knowing and constructing meaning. It therefore rejects positivist notions of universal truth, based on the assumption that there is no single valid interpretation of truth (Crotty 1998). Rather, what is interpreted as truth is the result of the ‘system of significant symbols’ that governs human thought and behaviour (Geertz 1973, p. 44). Social constructionism is pivotal to the concept of local knowledge on which this research hinges. However it also highlights the major limitation of the research, which is the role of my own ‘system of significant symbols’ in informing the findings. It therefore becomes essential to acknowledge that the findings presented are based on my interpretation of the research data.

4.2 Methodology

The research question has been investigated using qualitative comparative case study methodology. Comparative case studies combine single case studies of multiple research sites for the purpose of comparison. Like single case study research, they use case study methodology to explore human diversity, but they are more inclined to generalise about human conditions and interactions based on similarities between cases (Mills et al. 2010, p. 10).
111). Crucially, however, qualitative comparative case studies differ from quantitative ones in that they combine the study of the general with the study of the particular (Ragin 1989).

Case study methodology excels at bringing holistic understanding to complex problems within real-life settings. It is also an extremely useful methodology for understanding relationships, behaviours, attitudes, and motivations in organisational and community settings, which makes it ideal for this sort of project (B. L. Berg 2001). It involves systematically gathering enough information about the problem being investigated to be able to provide a rich, detailed, in-depth account of how it operates or functions. Comprehensive understanding is arrived at through a process Clifford Geertz (1973) has termed ‘thick description’. This involves interpreting the meaning of descriptive data, thereby opening the way for new discoveries to emerge (B. L. Berg 2001; Stake 2003; Sturman 1997). In an overview of case study methodology, renowned case study researcher, Robert Yin (1984, p. 23) defines the methodology as an empirical enquiry that uses multiple sources of data to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within real-world settings.

Case study methodology is well suited to qualitative research because it strives for a more holistic interpretation of the problem being investigated than is typical of quantitative research (Holloway 1997; Stake 2005; Sturman 1997). This is the main strength of case study research, but it has also made it subject to criticism for two key reasons. First, intense exposure to the case may bias the findings of the research. In this context, the alleged deficiency of case study research is common to all qualitative inquiry, making it appear less rigorous than quantitative research, because it allows more room for the researchers’ subjective and arbitrary judgement to shape the findings. Flyvbjerg (2004) disputes this point, arguing that case study researchers often report that their preconceived views were wrong and that the case material has compelled them to revise their initial hypotheses on essential points. This was certainly my experience as new understandings forced me to reconsider the assumption that framed the investigation, that inclusion could somehow be a panacea for the problems of development, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

The second major criticism of case study research is that it can offer no grounds for establishing the reliability or generalisation of findings when only one or two cases are studied (Ragin 1989; Yin 1984). Renowned qualitative case study researcher, Robert Stake (2003, p. 140) disputes this point. He has argued convincingly that “case study method has been too little honoured as the intrinsic study of a valued particular” and that “Generalisation should not be emphasised in all research”. That said, there is still an entrenched an expectation that academic research should contribute to scientific knowledge, implying that case studies undertaken in this context must to some extent be instrumental in nature. Unlike
intrinsic case studies, which are undertaken to bring better understanding of a particular case, instrumental case studies are undertaken to bring better understanding of a particular issue that the case represents or helps to illustrate.

My hope is that this research will make a contribution to existing understanding in the field of development communication that is inherently dual in nature. The use of comparative case study methodology provides greater scope for the generalisation of findings than would be possible if studying a single case; the principle being that if the findings hold true in more than one case, they are more likely to hold true for other cases not included in the sample (Yin 1984; Ragin 1989; Stake 2003; Sturman 1997). At the same time, I have endeavoured to ensure that my commitment to generalise does not draw attention away from unique features that are important for understanding each case. According to Stake (2003, p. 137), this blurring of boundaries is quite normal in qualitative case study research, since researchers typically have several interests, both particular and general, so “there is no clear line distinguishing intrinsic case study from instrumental”.

**4.3 Research Sample**

The selection of cases is of crucial importance to qualitative case study because the potential to improve understanding of the issue being investigated depends on choosing the cases well (Kuzel 1992). Brady and Collier (2004) explain “Most [qualitative comparative case study researchers] start with the seemingly simple idea that social phenomena in like settings (such as organizations, neighbourhoods, cities, countries, regions, cultures, and so on) may parallel each other sufficiently to permit comparing and contrasting them. […] The qualitative researcher’s specification of relevant cases at the start of an investigation is really nothing more than a working hypotheses that the cases initially selected are in fact alike enough to permit comparisons” (Brady & Collier 2004 p. 125).

To select cases for inclusion in this research, the initial phase of the empirical investigation involved gathering data on a broad range of online networking initiatives that correspond with the three major areas of online networking activity that were explored in the previous chapter. This was done on the basis of publicly available information listed on their websites, newsletters, discussion lists, press releases, and with reference to the wider literature. The objective was to identify one ‘atypical’ case from each field, with features tending towards the right-hand side of the spectrum of online network features presented in Chapter 1, Figure 1. It is common to employ this kind of sampling technique when selecting cases for inclusion in qualitative studies because ‘typical’ cases are often not the richest in information. Atypical cases often reveal more about the issue being investigated and offer greater scope for
clarifying causes and consequences, rather than simply describing the symptoms of the problem and how frequently they occur (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Patton 1990; Stake 2003).

Based on this sampling strategy, I deliberately avoided consideration of the myriad World Bank-sponsored initiatives that are evident in each field. This may seem like an erroneous omission, given that the World Bank is arguably the most ardent supporter of knowledge sharing for development, but this domination has attracted a great deal of attention. As was seen in the previous chapter, a large proportion of extant research that has been devoted to exploring the extent to which donor-funded online networks support or limit participation by Southern stakeholders has focused on World Bank-sponsored initiatives, especially the Development Gateway. It is widely criticised for privileging global over local knowledge, which has reduced the pool of individuals and organisations in developing countries that can participate as active knowledge providers rather than passive knowledge recipients (e.g. Jha, et al. 2004; McFarlane 2006; Mehta 1999, 2001; Samoff & Stromquist 2001; Schech 2002; Thompson 2004; Van der Velden 2002a, 2002b; Wilks 2001).

Rather than reiterating the same criticisms made by other researchers, I wanted to explore initiatives hosted by organisations that I considered to embrace the ideals of reciprocity and inclusiveness that drove my interest in the research topic, and the World Bank did not meet this criterion. I sought to identify initiatives that were at the forefront of practical efforts to improve local knowledge flows in their respective fields. Other important features included greater emphasis on human relationships over technology, and the incorporation of a flexible range of communications channels that take cognisance of the needs and circumstances of participants in developing countries. A pre-requisite for inclusion was that the initiatives involve participants in Southern Africa, South Asia and Latin America so as to enable me to explore issues experienced by a range of Southern stakeholders per se, rather than revealing the unique concerns of a particular cultural group. For practical purposes, I also sought to identify initiatives with a high degree of confluence in stakeholder presence in these regions to contain travel expenses associated with undertaking the fieldwork component of the study.

The initiatives that were ultimately selected for inclusion in the empirical investigation are: the United Nations Development Programme ‘Knowledge Services’, the Association for Progressive Communications, and the Open Knowledge Network. Some of the features that make them interesting cases for exploring the dual dynamics of inclusion and exclusion were canvassed in the previous chapter, but they are reiterated below.
The United Nations Development Programme ‘Knowledge Services’

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the most geographically extensive and arguably the most inclusive donor agency in the world. It enjoys a favourable reputation in the developing world vis-à-vis other, often better resourced, donor agencies due to its support for locally-owned development strategies well before that concept became an industry buzzword. In the late 1990s, UNDP transformed itself into a self-proclaimed ‘knowledge organisation’ with a strong focus on providing demand-driven knowledge advisory support to its developing country partners. It has adopted a variety of online network models for this purpose, including networks of experts and communities of practice. Known collectively as ‘knowledge services’, they are an integral component of UNDP’s knowledge management strategy, which differs from other agencies due to its emphasis on supporting local knowledge sharing among frontline development workers, as opposed to transferring global knowledge from headquarters to the field. UNDP is also one of few donor agencies that is experimenting with cross-organisational communities of practice as a means to improve its responsiveness to local knowledge flows from its developing country partners.

The Association for Progressive Communications

The Association for Progressive Communications (APC) is a knowledge network of 52 civil society organisations that is arguably the peak representative of civil society in multi-stakeholder institutions and processes in the ICT arena. A core function of its work involves implementing donor-funded ICT4D projects, but it also advocates for and on behalf of its members and other civil society groups that partner with it on various projects and advocacy campaigns. What distinguishes APC from the host of knowledge networks (and international NGOs) that perform similar roles in other issue areas is that it is comprised primarily of Southern CSOs that make extensive use of the Internet to facilitate knowledge sharing between insider and outsider groups. This has much to do with the history of its ascendency, which has left an indelible mark on its approach to knowledge sharing today. Prior to the emergence of the Internet, APC played a pioneering role in ensuring that Southern CSOs would not be marginalised from emergent opportunities to use ICTs to effect political change. This underlies the power it has been capable of garnering as a representative of Southern perspectives in global policy debates where it seeks to defend and expand opportunities for online advocacy and activism in the developing world.

The Open Knowledge Network

Unlike the other initiatives, the Open Knowledge Network (OKN) is no longer operational. It was an ICT4D project, which emerged from the G8 Digital Opportunity Task Force in 2000. The architects of the project were pioneers in convincing major bilateral donors of the need to
address the dearth of locally relevant content on the Internet for poor and marginalised communities in the developing world. They created the only identified global community network that allowed people from poor and marginalised communities who lacked the necessary technical and financial resources to work online to create, exchange and publish local content on the World Wide Web. Although OKN shared the same overarching goal as most community networks to close knowledge gaps through the provision of developmentally useful knowledge, the way it sought to meet this challenge set it apart from the mainstream and ultimately sounded its death knell when the donor funded period came to an end.

4.4 Research Participants

In recruiting research participants, my objective was to gather insights from as many Southern stakeholders as possible from the three cases. The term ‘stakeholder’ refers to any individual or organisation that is affected by, or can influence decisions or actions taken by the initiatives investigated. Example stakeholders differ widely across the three cases, which together span the entire aid delivery chain. In UNDP, they include knowledge management professionals, senior managers and policy experts, and relatively junior program officers, as well as government agencies, civil society organisations and private consultants with whom they work. In APC, they include APC staff and CSOs involved in implementing donor-funded ICT projects and/or with an interest in ICT policy, as well as donor and government agencies that control project funding and the policy frameworks on which they are based. In OKN, they include project managers, telecentre operators, and target beneficiaries from poor and marginalised communities, as well as project donors and evaluators.

Of these stakeholders, those deemed most likely to be able to shed light on the research question were categorised into four target research participant groups, namely global network managers, regional network managers, organisational members and individual users (See Figure 3). The first two groups included knowledge management professionals from UNDP, APC staff, and OKN project managers. The other two groups included program officers from UNDP, grassroots CSOs from APC, and telecenter operators that were partners in OKN and their clients. These stakeholders were pinpointed in the literature as being rich in local rather than global knowledge, which could affect their ability to contribute to the initiatives being investigated. The physical location of the global network managers was not considered important. For all other groups, physical location in Southern Africa, South Asia and Latin America was a pre-requisite for inclusion in the recruitment drive. I wanted to include at least one representative from each group in each region. Where there was some flexibility in their location, I targeted participants located in or near Johannesburg, Harare, New Delhi, Lima
and Rio de Janeiro, which were the major points of confluence in physical stakeholder presence between all three initiatives (see Figure 4).

**Figure 3: Target Participant Groups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Global Managers</th>
<th>Regional Managers</th>
<th>Organisational Members</th>
<th>Individual Users</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APC</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OKN</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 4: Location of Target Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Regional Presence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Southern Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>Johannesburg ✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Harare ✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OKN</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was relatively easy to identify the global and regional managers of each initiative based on publicly available information listed their websites. Identifying representatives of member organisations was more challenging since available information was generally limited to the organisation as a whole, rather than staff representatives involved in the initiatives being investigated. Identifying individual users was almost impossible without a prior introduction. As such, the recruitment drive took place in stages; ‘snowballing’ as I obtained the necessary leads to target participants from all relevant target participant groups. This technique is recommended when members of the target sample are involved in some kind of network with others who share a common interest (Gilbert 1993, p. 74).

To catalyse this process, I emailed the global and regional managers inviting them to participate in the study, after obtaining ethics approval from my university. I was fortunate they accepted. I incorporated that news into modified email invitations, which I then sent to member organisations hoping it would lend some authority to the study and induce them to become involved as well. In most cases, I sent personalised emails to staff who were likely to be involved in the initiatives based on their job title. In cases where staff profiles were unavailable, I used generic email addresses. This strategy had the desired effect and I received acceptances to personally participate or to appoint a representative to participate from almost everyone targeted. Several respondents offered to put me in touch with individual users in the three regions where the field study was to take place, with some going as far as to offer the transportation and translation services required to make this possible.
Encouraged by the successful response rates, I sought to lock in appointments with consenting participants in order to plan the itinerary for my field trip (see Figure 5). However, upon embarking upon my ‘race around the world’ in August 2005, it quickly became apparent that much of what had been pre-arranged would not go according to plan. I underestimated the complexities of confirming meetings with people in positions ranging from fairly senior UN officials to remote community development workers. Meetings were often rescheduled or cancelled at the last minute, which prevented me from undertaking all activities as planned. Unforeseen events meant that I was unable to include insights from all of the groups targeted, most notably individual users of the UNDP networks. However, I was fortunate to have several unplanned meetings, which enhanced the diversity of perspectives I had originally intended to capture. Most notably, cross-linkages between participants involved in more than one case allowed me to gather insights from what I have termed ‘external stakeholders’ who helped to shed additional light on external dynamics affecting network participation.

Figure 5: Planned Fieldwork Activities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Network</th>
<th>Scope</th>
<th>Target Participants</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Mode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>Global</td>
<td>Global Manager</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Regional Manager</td>
<td>Bangkok</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Individual Users</td>
<td>New Delhi</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>Regional Manager</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Individual Members</td>
<td>Harare</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Southern Africa</td>
<td>Regional Manager</td>
<td>Panama City</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Individual Users</td>
<td>Rio de Janeiro</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>Regional Manager</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Individual Users</td>
<td>Lima,</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Organisational Member</td>
<td>Rio de Janeiro</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APC</td>
<td>Global</td>
<td>Global Manager</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>Organisational Member</td>
<td>New Delhi</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Southern Africa</td>
<td>Organisational Member</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>Organisational Member</td>
<td>Lima,</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Organisational Member</td>
<td>Rio de Janeiro</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OKN</td>
<td>Global</td>
<td>Global Manager</td>
<td>London,</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>Regional Manager</td>
<td>New Delhi</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Organisational Member</td>
<td>New Delhi</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Southern Africa</td>
<td>Individual Users</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Regional Manager</td>
<td>Harare</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Organisational Member</td>
<td>Harare</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>Individual Users</td>
<td>Rio de Janeiro</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Organisational Member</td>
<td>Lima</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Participants agreed to undertake or help organise all planned fieldwork activities.
In all cases, adaptability and flexibility was the key to participant recruitment in a sampling strategy that ultimately snowballed from purposive to opportunistic. I actively followed all leads provided and embraced opportunities to speak with as many people as possible about each case during my field trip (see Figure 6). For a detailed overview of research participants, please refer to Appendix 1. The people who generously gave up their time to participate did so as individuals seeking to further their own practice. Thus, the views and opinions they expressed were solely their own and do not necessarily represent the views of the United Nations Development Programme, the Association for Progressive Communications, the Open Knowledge Network, or any of the organisations with which they are affiliated. All interviewees consented to being identified based on this understanding. Their names appear in the case studies, with the exception of individual users of OKN who are not identified by name. In instances where the views expressed by research participants might be considered to put them at risk in any way, I have kept their comments anonymous. This was mostly done at my own discretion, but also at the request of participants in some cases.

Figure 6: Actual Fieldwork Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Network</th>
<th>Regional Focus</th>
<th>Target Participants</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Mode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>Global</td>
<td>Global Manager</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Global Manager</td>
<td>New Delhi</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>Regional Manager</td>
<td>Bangkok</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Southern Africa</td>
<td>Regional Manager</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>Regional Manager</td>
<td>Panama City</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APC</td>
<td>Global</td>
<td>External Stakeholder</td>
<td>New Delhi</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Global Manager</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Global Manager</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Organisational Member</td>
<td>New Delhi</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>Organisational Member</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>Organisational Member</td>
<td>Lima</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>External Stakeholder</td>
<td>Lima</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OKN</td>
<td>Global</td>
<td>Global Manager</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Regional Manager</td>
<td>New Delhi</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Organisational Member</td>
<td></td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>Individual Users</td>
<td></td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Southern Africa</td>
<td>Regional Manager</td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Organisational Member</td>
<td>Harare</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Individual User</td>
<td>Mutare (Zimbabwe)</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>Regional Manager</td>
<td>Rio de Janeiro</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Organisational Member</td>
<td>Lima</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Individual Users</td>
<td>Huaral (Peru)</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.5 Data Collection

A variety of qualitative research methods were used to collect information about the three cases, namely documentary research, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and participant validation. Data collection was organised into three phases (see Figure 7). In most cases, I was unable to complete the first stage before embarking on the second, although the third stage invariably came last. I found this way of structuring data collection useful for clarifying the type of evidence I would need to answer the research question and what would be possible to ascertain from different sources. I categorised different types of information in terms of global and local sources, emulating the conceptual division between global and local knowledge that features so prominently in the literature that was explored in the previous chapter. Global sources included those capable of shedding light on overall network operations, including factors that supported and limited participation by organisational members and/or individual users in the developing world. Local sources included those capable of shedding light on factors that supported or limited participation by organisational members and/or individual users in a particular locality. They ranged from senior managers responsible for network operations in an entire region to poor people from sparsely populated remote rural villages.

Stage 1: Global Sources

Global sources were consulted to clarify and expand on data gathered in the preliminary analysis. They enriched my understanding of overall network operations and helped to frame the issues that were most important during the second data-gathering phase.

Documentary analysis

Documentary analysis was employed to create a rich picture of the ‘discourse of inclusion’ that characterised each initiative. This is embodied in the in-depth histories that appear in the case studies. These are designed to position the initiatives vis-à-vis dominant network configurations in their respective fields. In some cases, they were produced exclusively with reference to third party sources. In other cases, documentary analysis was used to complement other methods. The particular approach adopted reflects a unique combination of the amount of information already available on each case and the type of information that was specifically available to me. In each case, documentary analysis was a considerable undertaking. The materials consulted include public records such as annual reports, policy documents, project proposals, press releases, media articles, and academic studies. Where possible and relevant, this was complemented with private internal evaluations of the initiatives being investigated.
In-Depth Interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted with the global manager of each initiative to further enrich my picture of the ‘discourse of inclusion’ and to formulate my initial understanding of the ‘modes of exclusion’ affecting Southern stakeholders. An appreciation of global perspectives helped to shed light on divergences in local participation rates, possible explanations for those divergences, and operational procedures designed to overcome or potentially seen to reinforce the emergent modes of exclusion. The method was chosen because it allows respondents to express themselves at length, but allows the interviewer to steer the discussion. It provided sufficient flexibility to enable me to formulate questions as required and to pursue more meaningful topics as they arose. I used an interview schedule to guide the interviews, which was submitted to participants in advance, along with a plain English language statement reiterating the purpose of the interview (see Appendices 2-3), and a consent form outlining the agreed conditions of participation, which included being tape-recorded. Face-to-face interaction was not considered critical at this stage of the research so I used the voice-over IP software, ‘Skype’, to interview participants online if they were located outside of the five cities I visited on my field trip. The audio recording software, ‘Wiretap Pro’ was used to record the interviews.

Stage 2: Local Sources

Local sources were consulted to clarify and expand on issues that surfaced in the investigation of global sources to create a rich picture of the ‘modes of exclusion’ that limited active participation by local knowledge actors in each of the initiatives explored. This was the most intensive data-gathering phase of the research because it involved a significant amount of fieldwork to personally gather insights from research participants in three regions. The purpose was to hone my understanding of gaps between the vision and reality of network participation. Crucially, however, this phase of the research gave me greater appreciation of the very real benefits of network participation by local knowledge actors in some contexts. Spending time in the field was crucial to permit me to reach this more holistic understanding of the initiatives than would have been possible had I engaged with research participants online. It was also essential to avoid submitting participants to the same constraints I suspected they encountered in their efforts to contribute to the initiatives being investigated.

In-Depth Interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted to gather insights from a range of local sources, including regional managers, organisational members and external stakeholders where applicable. Most interviews took place onsite at the participants’ workplace and were usually followed by a
tour of the premises. Participants were presented with the same written statement and consent form that was provided to online interviewees. These were agreed and signed prior to tape recording. I did not apply a standard interview schedule to all participants during this phase of the research. Rather, *ad hoc* questions were prepared for each group, geared to elements to be emphasised in each case and the context in which each participant functioned. All questionnaires covered a core of similar themes concerning factors that limited their ability to contribute to the initiatives and strategies for overcoming problems identified (see Appendix 3). However they were adapted to focus on the benefits of network participation in situations where the experience was overwhelmingly positive. Interviewees were encouraged to elaborate and expand on areas of their own concern, thus lessening the constraints of my preconceptions and providing subsequent interviews with new issues to be canvassed. All of the interviews took place in English, but two required the assistance of a translator.

**Focus Groups**

My intention was to use focus groups to gather insights from individual users of UNDP Knowledge Services and OKN, which were the only cases where they were a relevant stakeholder group. However, I was only able to use this method to gather insights from individual users of OKN, and even then only in South Asia and in Latin America where the project was not yet operational. In Africa, I interviewed a community development worker to build my understanding of the user experience. Focus groups were my preferred research method because they utilise group interaction to gather insights, which is important in situations where people may not be able to talk at length about the research topic. A more detailed questionnaire was used to guide focus group discussions than was necessary for in-depth interviews because translators were required. Translators were given a copy of the questions in advance so they could clarify meanings if necessary. They read the questions to participants and provided simultaneous translations of their responses to me.
4.6 Data Analysis

Having gathered multiple sources of qualitative evidence, the interview and focus group recordings were transcribed verbatim. I did this personally so as to enhance my familiarity with the data. The lengthy transcripts generated from over 40 hours of recordings were then entered into the qualitative software program ‘Nvivo’ which assists in managing and synthesising themes from large amounts of qualitative data (Richards 1999). The data was organised into general themes pertaining to each case and new nodes were added as new themes emerged. Later, common themes from all three case studies were merged in new nodes, which served as an overarching reference for structuring the individual case studies and for informing the overall findings of the research as a whole.

According to Gibbs (2002, p. 59), the construction of nodes using Nvivo is an “analytic process to build up a conceptual schema.” It may be done without any reference to the data collected or from a close reading of the text. He argues, “there is often much to be gained from approaching the data with an open mind, and with no preconceptions about what analytic framework might be appropriate.” The two modes of generating nodes are not
mutually exclusive, and I used a combination of both techniques. Some nodes were established based on prior research and the core question guiding the study, but many emerged from engaging with text. In this context, I used a technique advocated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) who recommend developing nodes “in vivo” in order to tease out themes from texts without regard for existing theory. This is consistent with a methodological approach known as ‘grounded theory’, which requires researchers to let the data speak for itself, allowing new discoveries to emerge (Glaser & Strauss 1967; Strauss & Corbin 1990). It refers to using words taken directly from the text to name the nodes created.

The abandonment of prior assumptions is to some extent a key feature of all qualitative research, but grounded theory makes the connection explicit. The distinguishing feature of qualitative case study, on the other hand, is the belief that human systems have “characteristic wholeness or integrity that are not simply a loose connection of traits”. As a consequence of this belief, qualitative case study researchers typically aim to tease out the interrelationships between variables in order to capture and express this holistic quality (Strauss & Corbin 1990, p. 61). Thus, my overarching objective during this phase of the research was to reach a deeper understanding of each case by analysing the interdependencies between parts and common interdependencies across the three cases. Relevant comments and opinions were extracted from each transcription during this process and reorganised within the resulting conceptual schema created in Nvivo. The instrumental themes of the research and intrinsic features that are important for understanding each case are thus illustrated throughout the analysis with excerpts from the interviews and focus group discussions.

4.7 Participant Validation

Upon completing the data analysis, I embarked on the third and final data collection phase. This involved conducting what Lincoln and Guba (1993) have termed ‘member checks’, which are designed to ensure the credibility of qualitative analysis through participant validation. Several interviewees agreed to participate in the research on the proviso that they would have the opportunity to correct any factual errors and/or challenge misinterpretations prior to publishing my research. Thus, the purpose of this stage of the research was to honour my commitment in a way that would also alleviate my own concerns about my capacity to comprehend ‘the social world of others’ (Lincoln & Guba 1985). I emailed research participants a draft copy of the relevant case study for their feedback between August and December 2009. Given the extended time frame between the fieldwork component of the research and conducting member checks, I asked interviewees to consider any direct quotes as representative of their views at a particular point in time, rather than an up-to-date depiction. Most responded by approving the case study without changes, with many echoing sentiments
that concurred with the overall findings. Some volunteered additional information and/or points of clarification, which were incorporated into the case studies where relevant. Across the three case studies, there were sixteen validation cases, with two thirds of those asked to review the cases responding. However few responses were received from participants in the APC case study. The difference in response rates between cases may reflect variations in sectoral priorities, but it is difficult to know for certain.

4.8 Triangulation

As suggested by Yin (1984) case study research uses multiple sources of evidence, the methodological approach of triangulation, to illuminate the issue in question. Holloway (1997, p. 157) describes triangulation as a process by which the same problem is investigated from multiple perspectives, which can help to overcome the biases inherent in a single perspective. Triangulation is important in qualitative research, which rejects the universal truth claims of positivist research in favour of the social constructionist premise that meaning is constructed through human beings’ interactions with one another and their world. In this view, meaning is also relative because people experience the world differently and this leads them to construct different meanings. Thus, the only way that we can know anything is through representation (Denzin & Lincoln 2003). In this context, triangulation is not a strategy for validation in the positivist sense, but an alternative to validation (Flick 2002, p. 230). It is best understood as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to qualitative inquiry by enabling the researcher “to display multiple, refracted realities simultaneously”, which is the closest we can come to truth (Denzin & Lincoln 2003, p. 8).

Triangulation has been employed in this research in several ways. In the broadest sense, it has been employed to identify common themes from multiple case studies, which together help to shed light of the gap between the vision and reality of online network participation for Southern stakeholders across the entire aid delivery chain. It is also an essential ingredient of each case, which piece together qualitative insights from multiple stakeholder groups in multiple contexts. In contrast to conventional triangulation strategies where the goal is to demonstrate validity by achieving the same results through different methods, the inclusion of multiple perspectives in this research has meant that no single observation or interpretation was perfectly repeated in any one case, let alone between them. This is typical of qualitative casework where the goal of triangulation is to build a holistic understanding of the problem being investigated by examining it from as many different perspectives as possible.

In this research, triangulation helped to illuminate significant variations in the extent to which a range of Southern stakeholders are affected by the modes of exclusion identified in each
case. This subsequently became a central theme of the case studies, which all explore the benefits of network participation for some, and factors that keep them out of reach for others. Thus, as an alternative to validation, my approach has been indicative of the reflexive research process favoured by Stake (2003) who describes qualitative case study research as characterised by pondering impressions, deliberating recollections and records, and reflecting and revising preconceived notions of what is going on. He states:

The conceptions of most naturalistic, holistic, ethnographic, phenomenological case studies need accurate description and subjective, yet disciplined, interpretation; a respect and curiosity for culturally different perceptions of phenomena; and empathetic representation of local settings – all blended (perhaps clumped) within a constructivist epistemology (Stake 2003, p. 149).

4.9 Limitations of the Research

Like the vast majority of research in each of the three fields of inquiry on which this dissertation hopes to build, this study has an important intrinsic limitation in that it originates from a Western researcher. Being qualitative in nature, the generality of the findings is also limited despite efforts to ensure validity in multiple contexts. In the end, the case studies are based on my interpretation of qualitative insights from a limited number of research participants. Other more specific limitations impacting the research are as follows:

• Despite my best efforts, I was unable to recruit participants from all of the relevant stakeholder groups in all three regions for each case. The most glaring omission is that of individual user perspectives from the case study of UNDP where key informants consisted of global and regional network managers. Offsetting this deficiency, network managers offered incredibly frank insights on the risks and benefits they believed the agency’s knowledge management strategy posed to both senior and junior staff. Moreover, most made it abundantly clear that they empathised with the concerns of the latter group and saw their own role as empowering junior field staff.

• The case study of OKN does not capture individual user perspectives from all regions. Focus groups were held with target beneficiaries of the project in South Asia and Latin America, but the one that was planned to gather insights from target beneficiaries in Southern Africa did not eventuate due to the gravity of the economic crisis in Zimbabwe, which precluded me from travelling 200 kilometres from Harare to the resettlement scheme of Nyamazura, Mutare, where the focus group was to take place. Instead, a community development worker who was employed to assist residents of Nyamazura to
share their knowledge through OKN was interviewed to shed light on the user experience in that region. In Latin America where OKN was not yet operational, the focus group was held with individual users of a community network hosted by an organisational member of APC. Participants provided insights from their experience using that network, which were then extrapolated to OKN.

- Finally, the speed of technological progress, coupled with growing recognition of some of the issues explored in this dissertation, led the very makeup of the initiatives being investigated to change considerably over the course of the project. UNDP has extended its open community of practice from India to other countries; APC has upgraded both its internal and external communications systems; and OKN effectively ceased operations when the donor-funded period came to an end in October 2007. I have had to rely on a combination of documentary analysis and member checks to inform my understanding of developments that occurred after the initial data collection phase.

4.10 Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the research design used to conduct the empirical investigation. It discussed and rationalised the use of qualitative case study research to provide a holistic account of the dual dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that is the focus of this research. It also discussed the sampling strategy used to select cases that correspond with the three major areas of online networking activity explored in Chapter 3. The next three chapters present the case studies, beginning with UNDP. They are broadly organised around the following core questions: What theoretical assumptions underpin the initiative? How are notions of inclusion embedded in practice? And, are there any gaps between the official version of reality and the facts on the ground? Each case study also raises broader issues about the desirability of supporting active participation in online networks by Southern stakeholders as a means to improve development performance.
Case Study 1: 
United Nations Development Programme
‘Knowledge Services’
5.0 United Nations Development Programme

This case study explores knowledge management initiatives of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the most geographically extensive and arguably most inclusive donor agency in the world. In tracing the evolution of technical assistance to knowledge management in development, Wilson (2002, p. 185) claims that “UNDP has been the most conscious of the epistemological challenges associated with knowledge transfer” due to its reflexive critique of technical assistance and leading contribution to new development thinking in this area. Like most donor agencies, UNDP embraced knowledge management in the late 1990s. Unlike most agencies, however, it adopted a second generation or ‘people-centred’ approach, which combines a variety of online network models, including networks of experts and communities of practice, to draw on knowledge, experience and ideas from field staff as well as tens of thousands of experts from other UN agencies, think tanks, universities, NGOs and private consultancies who contribute to its programs while maintaining their independence. Known collectively as ‘Knowledge Services’, the networks are designed to respond to requests from the agency’s worldwide network of 135 country offices, which are the first point of contact for local institutions seeking knowledge advisory support. UNDP is also one of few donor agencies experimenting with cross-organisational communities of practice as a means to draw on local knowledge from frontline development workers outside its institutional borders.

UNDP provides an interesting case to explore the potential of donor-driven knowledge management to support greater inclusion and fuller participation of Southern stakeholders in aspects of the development project over which they previously had limited influence or control. Much of the literature explored in Chapter 3, Section 3.2, extols people-centred approaches to knowledge management for their potential to improve development performance by making donor agencies more responsive to local knowledge not only from their own staff but also from their developing country partners (e.g. Ferguson, et al. 2008; Hovland 2003; King & McGrath 2004; Powell 2006; Van der Velden 2002a). However, most empirical research has been devoted to critiquing dominant network configurations, which tend to support the transfer of global knowledge to the field (e.g. King & McGrath 2004; Ramalingam 2005; Wilson 2007). This case study aims to expand current understanding of the risks and benefits of donor-driven knowledge management by exploring how UNDP’s theoretically acclaimed approach has impacted on the type of knowledge it provides to its clients, and how that knowledge intersects with local knowledge from its developing country partners.
Of necessity, the case study focuses on only part of the myriad knowledge sharing initiatives in which UNDP is involved. It does not comprehensively consider the internal knowledge sharing initiatives, which are part of the agency’s aspirations to become a learning organisation. These include South-South staff exchange programs and the UN University. Neither does it comprehensively consider the external knowledge sharing initiatives which involve the agency’s developing country partners. These include consultative discussions concerning country programming and the ‘Capacity Development Network’, which supports knowledge sharing among development experts and practitioners who are interested and engaged in capacity development work. The scope of the case study is confined to three knowledge management initiatives. These are ‘Regional Knowledge Services’, ‘Global Knowledge Services’, and a UN-wide Knowledge Management Partnership Project in India, known as the ‘Solution Exchange’.

The case study is divided into five sections. The first provides the context for the ensuing analysis of UNDP’s knowledge management strategy with an overview of its positioning vis-à-vis other donor agencies. The second section examines Regional Knowledge Services. This is the most conventional component of the strategy because it deals exclusively in expert-generated knowledge, which has long formed the basis of conventional technical assistance. The third section explores Global Knowledge Services, which deals primarily in local knowledge from relatively junior practitioners. It examines cultural changes engendered by these networks, which have earned praise for empowering junior field staff. It also examines sites of resistance to the changes, which have prevented some practitioners from participating. Shifting to external trends, the fourth section explores the rationale and the implications of excluding external practitioners from the networks. Here, I argue that their exclusion is necessary to ensure the validity of the knowledge advisory support UNDP provides to its clients. However, this has limited its capacity to provide rich contextual insight into development problems from anything other than an internal perspective. The final section explores the Solution Exchange, which draws on local knowledge from frontline development workers in India. I argue that initiative is an important addition to UNDP’s core knowledge management strategy, which appears set to make it more innovative. However, new mechanisms are needed to regulate the application of novel but unproven ideas by practitioners or innovation may come at a price.

The case study is based on documentary analysis and six in-depth interviews, which took place between August and November 2005. Opinions were sought from knowledge management professionals from the Global Knowledge Services team based in corporate headquarters in New York and from three Regional Knowledge Services teams based in
Southern Africa, Asia Pacific, and Latin America. The respondents all hold senior positions and actively contribute to UNDP’s knowledge management strategy. One exception is the interviewee from Southern Africa who is a ‘knowledge worker’ or implementer of the agency’s knowledge management strategy in that region. In addition, an interview was held with a senior UN knowledge management professional who was responsible for introducing knowledge management to UNDP and is now spearheading the Solution Exchange project in India. Finally, an interview was held with the Executive Director of a prominent Indian NGO who spoke about the Solution Exchange project from an external stakeholder perspective.

5.1 Background

UNDP has been at the centre of the global development effort since its inception. It is the direct descendent of the first major multilateral donor agencies, the United Nations Special Fund and the Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance, which were created by the UN General Assembly in its earliest days to coordinate the provision of capital and technical assistance to newly independent states in the Third World. UNDP was established in 1965 as a result of the UN General Assembly’s decision to merge those institutions to prevent them from being constrained to the limited menu of services offered by the specialised agencies in the UN system, which was the locus of the UN’s development expertise. Today, UNDP is a self-proclaimed ‘knowledge organisation’, with a small core presence in the UN’s offices in New York, and staff on the ground in 166 countries. It describes itself as “the UN’s global development network, an organisation advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life” (UNDP 2009)

UNDP is accountable to the UN General Assembly and is administered through the Economic and Social Council. To govern the agency, the Economic and Social Council elects an Executive Board, which is made up of representatives from 36 member states from every region in the world. In addition to setting policy guidelines, the Executive Board decides upon UNDP’s involvement with individual developing countries that are eligible to receive development assistance from the UN. It determines the volume of assistance to be provided to each recipient country over successive five-year cycles and it approves all ‘country programs’ over that term. The Administrator is appointed by the UN Secretary General, confirmed by the General Assembly, and is answerable to the Executive Board.8 The current Administrator

8 Prior to 1999, the Administrator was a US citizen, but with the US’ real contribution dropping throughout the 1990s, European governments convinced UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, to appoint Mark Malloch Brown of Britain. The trend away from the agency’s US-centricity continued with the
is Helen Clark. She supervises a bureaucracy of more than 7,000 core employees, the bulk of whom are based in the agency’s 135 country offices (C. N. Murphy 2006, p. 306).

The importance of the country offices to UNDP’s organisational structure and to its overall approach to development cannot be overstated. The country offices provide the most consistent and extensive presence for the UN around the world, allowing UNDP to serve as the de facto ambassador for the UN in many developing countries where its chief country officers or ‘Resident Representatives’ usually hold the highest position in the UN Country Team. In the latter role, they are responsible for coordinating the development activities across the UN system, which includes the Food and Agricultural Organisation, International Labour Organisation, and other major providers of development assistance, such as UNICEF and the World Food Programme. In some countries, at the government’s request, they coordinate all development assistance, including that of the World Bank and major bilateral donors. In addition to their core responsibility of overseeing the delivery of UNDP country programs, Resident Representatives have also been charged with leading the UN’s efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by working with developing country governments to integrate the targets into their national policy frameworks and to harmonise development assistance accordingly (UNDP 2009).9

UNDP has been able to play a pivotal role in these efforts not only because of its physical presence, but also due to its comparatively favourable reputation in the developing world vis-à-vis other donor agencies, many of which have significantly more resources at their disposal. It enjoys a special relationship with developing country governments, which tend to view it as a trusted advisor in the development process (Biermann & Bauer 2004; C. N. Murphy 2006). This relationship derives from a number of strengths. These include UNDP’s ability to offer grants (as distinct from repayable credit); its equitable governance structure, which grants them a voting majority on the Executive Board10; and most importantly, its support for locally owned development strategies well before that concept became an industry buzzword. In the first independent history of UNDP, Craig N. Murphy (2006) explains how UNDP has been working in partnership with developing country governments since the 1970s to formulate

---

9 UNDP has recently begun appointing Country Directors to run its day-to-day operations in countries with large UN Country Teams, in light of the responsibilities of Resident Coordinators.

10 Regional quotas of eight African, seven Asian, five Latin American and Caribbean, four Eastern European and twelve ‘Western European and others’ grant a voting majority to developing countries, but decisions are usually made by consensus (Brierman & Bauer 2004).
‘country programs’ that are based on national development priorities. It was also one of the first donor agencies to make national project execution common practice, shifting from providing technical assistance for large-scale capital works to building the capacity of governments to meet the basic needs of their citizens. This was a key feature of its ‘New Dimensions in Technical Co-operation’ framework of 1975, which aimed to foster self-reliance by relying more heavily on local rather than international expertise. Recipients naturally viewed this system in positive contrast to the top-down style of other donor agencies and UNDP became known as the “development program of the developing countries” in this period (C. N. Murphy 2006, p. 139).

Views differed in the developed world where major donors tended to view UNDP as a weak development actor whose system of country programming increased the authority of corrupt or incompetent governments, while increasing the dependence of their citizens on them (C. N. Murphy 2006). As neoliberalism took hold in the 1980s, this perception was compounded by hostility towards the UN vis-à-vis the World Bank by many Western governments. In the 1990s, the US government began exerting pressure for UN reform by withholding dues. Unlike other UN agencies, UNDP’s core budget is financed entirely through voluntary contributions from member states. This makes it particularly susceptible to pressure from the US government, which is its largest contributor in real terms. Its contribution to UNDP fell dramatically in the 1990s, causing its annual core budget to drop by more than 40 percent from USD 1.1 billion in 1990 to USD 625 million in 2001 (Encyclopedia of the Nations 2009). UNDP was consequently one of the first UN agencies to respond to pressure for reform by embarking on a series of sweeping organisational changes, which are widely recognised for making it more focused, efficient and effective in its work (Biermann & Bauer 2004; Klingebiel 1999). Since 2001, the agency has enjoyed strong growth in its annual core budget. In 2005, this reached USD 921 million, some 15 percent short of the 1990 level that was set as the core budget benchmark for 2007 (UNDP 2004, p. 34).

The reforms set the stage for UNDP’s transformation into a ‘knowledge organisation’ by improving its external image and internal capacity in the increasingly competitive development industry. C. N. Murphy (2006, p. 259) credits the external reforms for giving UNDP its ‘backbone’ by making advocacy a core function of its work. He attributes them to

---

11 National project execution was common in the 1970s, but it didn’t become the norm until the 1990s.

12 Several factors in addition to the organisational reforms contributed to the rejuvenation of UNDP’s annual core budget, including global support for the MDGs, and newly available streams of security-oriented aid resources after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the US.
the decision in 1990 to make ‘human development’ the agency’s mission.13 This provided the overarching framework for its most important advocacy tool, the Human Development Report, which was launched the same year under the leadership of the late Mahbub ul-Haq and Amartya Sen, with the “single goal of putting people back at the centre of the development process” (UNDP 1990).14 UNDP commissions eminent development experts to produce the Reports in collaboration with its staff. They are granted complete editorial independence and are empowered, and indeed compelled to challenge prevailing assumptions and criticize public policy in a manner that would have been unthinkable in prior decades when UNDP had little independent voice. The agency is now considered a leading contributor to development thinking, with the concept of human development now a central feature of the global policy agenda. Criticism notwithstanding, the agency is widely respected for its ‘alternative viewpoint’, particularly by policymakers and CSOs that advocate greater focus in public policy on human rights and poverty alleviation to improve the lives of the poorest and most vulnerable groups in society.

Subsequent reforms mirror the ‘structural re-engineering’ process undertaken by numerous donor agencies in the late 1990s as the knowledge agenda played out at the highest levels of the development industry (Ramalingam 2005, p. 16). Although the reforms commenced prior to his appointment, they are often attributed to Mark Malloch Brown who presided over a sweeping change management process during his term as UNDP Administrator from 1999-2005 (see UNDP 1999a). He reoriented UNDP’s operational activities to a number of ‘practice areas’ where demand for its services was greatest. This change is credited with giving the agency the focus many donor governments thought it had lacked (Biermann & Bauer 2004; Klingebiel 1999). Previously, UNDP had attempted to cover all areas of technical assistance related to development. With mounting concern about aid effectiveness, Malloch Brown sought to leverage its relationship with developing country governments by concentrating its work on providing policy advice and capacity building activities in a few well-defined areas (UNDP 1999b).

The practice areas have evolved over the years in response to new demands from program countries and changes in the global policy agenda, but ‘governance’ has consistently served as the foundation, based on UNDP’s comparative advantage in that area and the assumption

13 UNDP’s mission was expanded to ‘sustainable human development’ in 1994 as a result of new concerns arising from the World Conference on Development and the Environment of 1992, more popularly known as the ‘Earth Summit’, that development per se should not harm the environment.

14 In addition to annual global reports, UNDP has commissioned the production of more than 500 local, national, sub-regional and regional Human Development Reports.
first made explicit in the 1993 Human Development Report that human development requires transparent and accountable public institutions and processes (UNDP 1993). This is reflected in the distinction UNDP tends to make between policymakers, who are considered its ‘clients’, and non-state actors, which are considered its ‘local partners’ because they carry out the bulk of projects it agrees to support. Figure 8 shows the evolution of the practice areas from 1998 to 2007. Since 2000, they have been guided by the MDGs, which are likely to remain at the heart of UNDP’s work at least until 2015.

**Figure 8: UNDP’s Practice Areas**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poverty reduction</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic governance</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy &amp; Environment</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s empowerment</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis prevention &amp; recovery</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from C. N. Murphy (2006, p. 321).

Concurrent reforms sought to align UNDP’s internal capacities with its new mandate by withdrawing capacity in non-priority areas and relocating central support functions to the field. Malloch Brown undertook a dramatic downsizing of headquarters, and initiated a decentralisation process that continues to this day in which staff from central divisions are progressively being relocated from headquarters to the field in order to improve their responsiveness to the needs of program countries (see UNDP 1999c). The long-term objective of the decentralisation process is an organisational structure characterised by a small core presence at headquarters providing overall direction, oversight and high-level strategic support; a number of regional centres providing technical backstopping and operational support to specific clusters of country offices; and country offices that are substantively equipped to oversee the efficient and effective delivery of programs (UNDP 2003, p. 17).

---

15 UNDP usually works exclusively with governments, but in so-called ‘failed states’, it works directly with civil society and private sector organisations (C. N. Murphy 2006, p. 206).
C. N. Murphy (2006, p. 302-8) credits the change management process with boosting staff morale because it was done in an inclusive manner, and was accompanied by changes to UNDP’s organisational culture, which transformed it into a leaner, results-oriented ‘knowledge organisation’ that is able to learn from its operational activities and build on existing knowledge and capacities in developing countries. These cultural changes were brought about by the introduction of a multiyear funding framework that integrates program objectives, resources, budgets and outcomes; a staff performance appraisal system; an annual global staff satisfaction survey; greater investment in staff development and training; and new business systems and processes, including a web-based project management and accounting system which speeds up decision making and the dispersal of funds to the country offices; and a networked model of knowledge management, which capitalises on regional and country specific expertise and experience, rather than transferring information from the centre.

Today, UNDP considers its approach to knowledge management, along with its worldwide networks of country offices to be ‘two of its main comparative advantages’ (UNDP 2007, p. 7). Together, they allow it to provide demand-driven ‘knowledge advisory support’ to its predominantly governmental clients as specified in their country program, thus helping to build their capacity to achieve agreed development objectives. In addition, they enable country offices to provide knowledge advisory support that is generally non-project related. It typically involves providing policymakers with development planning advice and general problem-solving services, as well as engaging in policy advocacy. Knowledge sharing of this nature has increasingly become UNDP’s core function. The remainder of this case study draws on qualitative insights from key stakeholders involved in three initiatives that make up UNDP’s knowledge management strategy. It aims to uncover the extent to which they support participation by local knowledge actors both inside and outside of the agency’s institutional borders in shaping its policies and programs.

5.2 Local Knowledge Centres

The most conventional of UNDP’s knowledge management initiatives consists of what C. N. Murphy (2006, p. 267) calls ‘local knowledge centres’. These provide expert advisory support to specific clusters of country offices upon request. They centre on ‘Regional Knowledge Services Teams’, staffed by ‘knowledge workers’ who work alongside the agency’s policy specialists in ‘Regional Service Centres’ and ‘Sub-Regional Resource Facilities’ (SURFs) across the developing world. Their substantive capacity varies depending upon where they are based. Regional Service Centres house larger teams of policy experts spanning most of the practice areas, whereas SURFs rely more on external consultants from other UN agencies, think tanks, universities, NGOs and private consultancies in their region. These differences
are the result of the as yet unfinished decentralisation process in which the SURFs are gradually being subsumed by more substantive Regional Service Centres. At the time of writing, Regional Service Centres had been established in the Asia Pacific (Bangkok, Colombo, Suva), Central and Eastern Europe (Bratislava) and Southern Africa (Johannesburg). Others were planned for the Arab States (Cairo), Latin America and the Caribbean (Panama City), and West Africa (Dakar), which continued to be served by SURFs.

The SURFs are overseen by a central division in UNDP headquarters in New York, the Bureau for Development Policy. The Bureau is responsible for providing policy leadership on human development issues, based on lessons learned from operational activities and the evolving requirements of program countries. As part of the initial decentralisation process, between 1997 and 2000, UNDP relocated two-thirds of the Bureau’s policy experts from headquarters to nine SURFs in Addis Ababa, Bangkok, Beijing, Beirut, Bratislava, Harare, Islamabad, Port-of-Spain and Suva. The objective was to “improve the quality, relevance and responsiveness of the support UNDP offers program countries through its country offices [and to] strengthen its institutional knowledge base with country- and region-specific information and experience” (UNDP 1997, p. 4). Kim Henderson who manages the Global Knowledge Services Team within the Bureau for Development Policy summarised the rationale for the decentralisation as follows:

*We used to have policy advisors who were all-seeing, all-knowing, holders of knowledge sitting in ivory towers in New York, not in touch with the realities of the field, so we took quite a big proportion of our policy advisors’ positions and out-posted them to the SURFs. The idea was to put them closer to the field, closer to country offices, to develop a real client services approach.*

The newer and more substantive Regional Service Centres are overseen by one of five Regional Bureaus, which oversee UNDP’s regional programs and provide the country offices with day-to-day operational support. Until recently, they were located in headquarters, alongside other central divisions responsible for strategic planning, evaluation, finance, administration and the like, and their staff had little contact with the SURFs. Several interviewees claimed that central control resulted in numerous incidents whereby external consultants contracted to work on regional programs had a different policy position from the agency’s own policy advisors. To ensure greater alignment, Malloch Brown began to decentralise the Regional Bureaus from 2003 (UNDP 2003, p. 16). Where complete, the policy specialists have been integrated into regional program teams, which serve as a single point of inquiry for the country offices in their region.
In the new environment, Regional Knowledge Services Teams are overseen by decentralised Regional Bureaus with linkages to the Bureau for Development Policy being maintained through the out-posted policy advisors. Indeed, matrix management arrangements ensure that regional program teams are aligned to all of the central divisions in New York, each of which have pooled their resources to support the country offices. Some interviewees were concerned that the enhanced level of decentralisation posed ‘a risk of fragmentation’ to the basket of products and services offered by local knowledge centres because Regional Bureaus emphasise different things. However others indicated that significant variations already existed between the SURFs, despite their strong ties to the Bureau for Development Policy. Eric Overvest who heads the Knowledge Services Team in Latin America and the Caribbean, which had yet to make the transition from a SURF to a Regional Service Centre, commented:

*We already have a lot of freedom. We have a lot of space to work on knowledge management that we would never have in a more centralised environment in which we would really have to stick to corporate rules and what headquarters tells us to do.*

### 5.2.1 Knowledge Services and Knowledge Products

Regardless of their structure, local knowledge centres have a dual responsibility for organising the delivery of technical support services that were not previously available to the country offices, and for assisting in the codification of best practices in the subject matters of UNDP programs. In other words, they provide ‘knowledge services’ and ‘knowledge products’. In an early independent evaluation of the SURF system, Weidner and Rahman (2000, p. 17) suggest these are ‘fundamentally different functions’, with the latter more conventional knowledge management activity originally taking a backseat due to resource constraints. At that time, knowledge workers spent most of their time researching and compiling information for the country offices on demand. Many have since progressed beyond this role, but it remains the core focus for others. How the teams work in those cases is that Resident Representatives or other senior country officers can contact them by phone, fax or email when they need help to advise their clients on an issue that their staff know little about. Knowledge workers respond to these requests within an average of five working days with a research report on what is already known on the topic at hand, or to provide a referral to a relevant expert who can better assist the country office by conducting an in-country mission and/or producing a more in-depth research report.

The system relies on strong ties to the centres of excellence in each region. These ties are embodied in the ‘roster of certified experts’ developed and maintained by the Regional Knowledge Services Teams. Consultants are selected for inclusion in the rosters in one of two
ways. First, knowledge workers contact other UN agencies, think tanks, universities, eminent NGOs and private consultants to learn about their expertise on topics of relevance to the country offices in their region and to solicit potential consultants from those sources. Second, country offices provide knowledge workers with the details of consultants with whom they have worked in the past and have found to be of a particularly high calibre. Along with the agency’s in-house experts, these stakeholders constitute a vast network of experts upon which knowledge workers can draw when providing referrals to their country office clients. This allows the country offices to be assured that the consultants they hire have been properly vetted, so there is less risk in procuring their services. According to the Knowledge Services brochure, “the client is thus provided with the latest, best and most trusted knowledge or expertise on the subject” (UNDP Knowledge Services 2003, p. 4).

The introduction in 2004 of a web-enabled expert referral system, or ‘wide expert roster’ has alleviated some of the burden on knowledge workers to coordinate the provision of knowledge services by enabling senior country officers to begin sourcing consultants themselves. The system was introduced by the Special Unit for South-South Cooperation to facilitate “the transfer of information on expertise from countries of the South” (UNDP Special Unit for South-South Cooperation 2009). The move towards self-service has enabled some knowledge workers to more actively focus on the production of knowledge products, in some cases following a more techno-centric and agency-centric approach. Two of the three representatives of Regional Knowledge Services Teams interviewed recounted how they were refocussing their attention on the production of knowledge products in areas where demand for expertise is greatest and in areas where demand is considered likely to grow in the future.

The head of the Asia Pacific Knowledge Services Team, Robert Juhkam, reported that the shift was made possible by the transition from a SURF to a Regional Service Centre, which had bolstered the internal resources available to service the country offices. He described how the 25 country offices in that region used to be served by two SURFs, which together housed just eight policy advisors who spent most of their time on mission, preparing and assessing country programs and projects. In 2005 the SURFs were integrated into a Regional Service Centre, which houses 60 policy specialists organised into teams spanning most of the practice areas. The practice teams are substantive enough to process most country office requests for technical support themselves. This has allowed knowledge workers to focus on improving the quality and consistency of the services they provide, while also making their expertise amenable to easy reference by other country offices seeking technical support in the same area through the introduction of ‘tools and templates for better managing and sharing knowledge’. Juhkam explained:
In the SURF days, we played a stronger role coordinating and producing research for the country offices. Now we produce standards for how to produce a comparative research paper for example, and we try to promote the idea that colleagues respond to requests from the country offices with research that follows that template.

For Eric Overvest who heads the Latin America and the Caribbean Knowledge Services Team, the shift was precipitated by a perceived need to rein in the unwieldy original model of knowledge services to prevent scarce resources being diverted away from the areas where UNDP has a competitive advantage in the region. Working in a comparatively under-resourced environment, Overvest described how his unit was assisting the predominately external network of experts in that region to produce tools and methodologies that effectively limit the range of technical support services the country offices can access via the SURF; a shift he referred to as a move from ‘retail’ to ‘wholesale’ knowledge management. He said, ‘Knowledge services are for a particular client. It’s sort of a retail model where we send an expert and they apply their knowledge in different situations. The big shift in our SURF is going from a retail model to a wholesale model and providing the same knowledge products to different clients.’ He explained the rationale for the shift as follows:

We used to do a lot of replies to requests from the country offices, a lot of emphasis on referrals to our regional network in Latin America, lots of research. Personally I do not believe too much in this work. We did an analysis and came to the conclusion that 60 percent of our work was outside the concentration areas of UNDP. For example, the country office in Honduras needed consultants to advise them on technical specifications for medical equipment and we had to find consultants for those people. But that’s not our role, I’m very sorry! It’s diverting our resources to issues that are not our core business. It would take us several days to get that information, but we did get it. But in the end, the project was not really strategic for the country office - it was not key in their portfolio. So why are we doing this?

5.2.2 Trading Responsiveness for Efficiency

The promise of efficiency gains underpins the move from knowledge services to knowledge products in both regions, which appears to be driven as much by supply as by demand. It follows recommendations put forward by independent auditors (Weidner & Rahman 2000, p. 18-19), and an internal Knowledge Management Task Force, which argued “UNDP needs systematic processes for gathering, distilling, organising, finding and presenting information in ways that improve staff understanding in key substantive and administrative areas […] and turn this understanding into a competitive advantage in the development marketplace”
It is however a departure from UNDP’s otherwise strong emphasis on ‘connection’ as opposed to ‘collection’, which has distinguished its approach from other donor agencies (Henderson 2005, p. 12). Most interviewees lamented the fact that UNDP has lagged behind other agencies in the latter area. However, strategies for addressing this concern have varied in accordance with UNDP’s decentralised approach. Whereas the drive to codify expert knowledge appeared to be replacing more dynamic people-centred approaches as the principle mode of technical support for country offices in Latin America and the Caribbean, it was clearly intended to augment the principal focus on connection in the Asia Pacific.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the Knowledge Services Team was contracting certified experts to produce ‘knowledge management toolkits’, which could be accessed by program officers over the corporate intranet. Overvest described the toolkits as encompassing ‘exactly what it is that we want to distil and what it is that we want to present to our clients’, based on UNDP’s core competencies in that region. The first element of each toolkit consists of a conceptual framework, which provides guiding principles for UNDP’s approach to the issue at hand. The second includes assessment tools to help program officers assess the issue. The third includes best practice solutions to help them address the issue. Other elements include marketing tools, which highlight the sort of technical support UNDP can provide to its local partners and clients, tools for training program officers to deliver the toolkits, and monitoring and evaluation tools. Overvest explained the objective of the toolkits as being to transform program officers into experts on topics where UNDP has a strong competitive advantage in order to reduce country office reliance on external experts because, ‘certified experts are expensive so you can’t always send them’. He said:

In our traditional model of consultancy, experts come and go. The knowledge doesn’t stay within UNDP. If we want to become a substantive knowledge-based organisation, we should somehow get the knowledge that is in the heads of these consultants and invest it back into UNDP. So that’s what we did with the toolkits. We distilled their knowledge into tools, which can be used by program officers in different circumstances. In the end, we want to make program officers more substantive. We want to increase their capacity. We want them to become experts in certain themes where we see there are key opportunities for UNDP.

In contrast, the Knowledge Services Team in the Asia Pacific was assisting practice teams of in-house policy specialists to produce less prescriptive knowledge management toolkits, which could be accessed by program officers over the corporate intranet. Juhkam described them as useful for assisting ‘the average practitioner in the country offices who may be new
to the area, but more importantly new to UNDP to understand how we do our business and what our niche is’. One team had already produced a toolkit, which Juham claimed had ‘impacted on UNDP globally. They are pushing certain issues in such a way that they are servicing other regions of the world’. This suggests that the comparatively modest goal of this approach to provide program officers with a reference point to do their work, makes these toolkits more amenable to transferability than the ones produced in Latin America and the Caribbean. Reflecting on an attempt to apply one of those toolkits in Africa, Overvest said ‘it did not work because your lessons learned, your tools, come from your knowledge base and your knowledge base is different.’

Despite claims of wider relevance, the knowledge management toolkits produced in the Asia Pacific are firmly based on local realities, rather than generic global best practices. At the time of my field study, the Knowledge Services Team was preparing to launch the ‘Solutions Network of Asia Pacific’ (http://www.snap-undp.org) in order to provide the practice teams with a virtual workspace in which to share knowledge and collaborate with other experts in the region on issues pertaining to the Millennium Development Goals. Although not specifically designed to assist them to codify their expertise into toolkits that too could be a positive by-product of the new system, according to Juham. The principal objective is to provide an open space for development experts in that region to build on existing ideas, tap new ideas, share and learn, thereby improving their capacity to think creatively and be innovative. For the in-house policy advisors, participation in these networks helps to ensure that the technical support they provide to the country offices evolves dynamically in response not only to the evolving requirements of program countries, but also to new insights from the major centres of excellence in the region.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, there is a risk that UNDP will become less responsive to epistemic communities as input from external experts is tailored to specific terms of reference. Insularity could be particularly detrimental to UNDP which specialises in providing policy advice in what C. N. Murphy (2006, p. 347-8) describes as ‘incompletely theorised fields’, which reflect “the tension between its commitment to serve the various goals and plans of the UN’s many developing country members, and its equal commitment to the egalitarian principles that have given UNDP both its distinctive organisational culture and its ‘backbone’.” For these tensions to be sufficient to ensure innovation, he argues that UNDP needs to remain very open to the epistemic communities in which knowledge is produced. Citing Ernst Hass (1990, p. 209) who implored international organisations to pursue greater openness to epistemic communities, he states “it often seems that the diplomatic task is more
easily accomplished by obfuscation that alienates the external communities in which any organisation has to rely in order to learn” (C. N. Murphy 2006, p. 351).

Mirroring the concerns of critics of donor-driven knowledge management more generally, C. N. Murphy (2006, p. 348) claims “UNDP has a host of mechanisms that insulate it from new information coming from the outside”. The original model of knowledge services was an important exception to this trend because it gave UNDP access to new expertise in many fields. As the substantive capacity of the local knowledge centres improves with the transition from SURFs to Regional Service Centres, initiatives such as the Solutions Network of Asia Pacific are crucial to prevent this advantage from being reduced. Looking beyond the agency itself, they may also play a valuable role in strengthening the centres of excellence in the South. In regions where resource constraints have precipitated a departure from the original model of knowledge services to the production of relatively static knowledge products without a parallel investment in open spaces for mutual learning with epistemic communities, insularity could be the price to be paid for efficiency gains if it were not for counter-trends to be discussed in Sections 5.4 and 5.5.

### 5.3 Global Practice Networks

Complementing the local knowledge centres, some twenty thematically defined ‘global practice networks’ stand as an innovative component of UNDP’s core knowledge management strategy. These have evolved organically in response to the agency’s practice areas and the expressed interests of its staff. They draw primarily on local knowledge based on experience from relatively junior practitioners who subscribe to them on a voluntary basis. They include six major practice networks: democratic governance, poverty reduction, crisis prevention and recovery, energy and environment, HIV/AIDS, and management, which is recognised as a ‘functional practice’. In addition there are numerous sub-practice networks with more targeted themes, two cross-cutting networks covering gender equality and evaluation, and four cross-organisational networks that are open to other UN agencies and partners, including Millennium Development Goals, Human Development Report, human rights policy and UN coordination (see Figure 9). Participation rates vary between the networks, but most members are based in the agency’s worldwide network of country offices.
**Figure 9: Global Practice Networks**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knowledge Network</th>
<th>Type of Network</th>
<th>No. of members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crisis Prevention and Recovery</td>
<td>Development Practice</td>
<td>1,236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic Governance</td>
<td>Development Practice</td>
<td>1,348</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy and Environment</td>
<td>Development Practice</td>
<td>1,117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>Development Practice</td>
<td>806</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty Reduction</td>
<td>Development Practice</td>
<td>1,244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Functional Practice</td>
<td>2,403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Cross-Cutting</td>
<td>763</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>Cross-Cutting</td>
<td>758</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millennium Development Goals</td>
<td>UN wide</td>
<td>2,340</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Development Report</td>
<td>UN wide</td>
<td>1,013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights Policy</td>
<td>UN wide</td>
<td>601</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN Co-ordination</td>
<td>UN wide</td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Enterprise and Microfinance</td>
<td>Sub-practice (Poverty Reduction)</td>
<td>680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information and Communications Technology</td>
<td>Sub-practice (Poverty Reduction &amp; Democratic Governance)</td>
<td>555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decentralisation, Local Governance and Urban Development</td>
<td>Sub-practice (Democratic Governance)</td>
<td>817</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources</td>
<td>Sub-practice (Management)</td>
<td>983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>Sub-practice (Management)</td>
<td>1,301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procurement</td>
<td>Sub-practice (Management)</td>
<td>1,076</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Management</td>
<td>Sub-practice (Management)</td>
<td>1,287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HDR Statistics</td>
<td>Sub-practice (Human Development Report)</td>
<td>556</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Statistics valid as at June 30, 2005. Source: Henderson (2005, p. 20).*

The practice networks are managed by the Global Knowledge Services Team, which sits within the Bureau for Development Policy in New York. The team includes facilitators and research analysts. Matrix management arrangements are intended to ensure that they are familiar with trends and issues affecting the networks for which they are responsible, while ensuring cross-fertilisation and coherence between them. Network activity focuses primarily on online communication, with funding constraints limiting opportunities for face-to-face interactions. Most networks maintain a virtual presence on the corporate intranet and publish monthly e-newsletters, which highlight resources and activities in their thematic area. The major practice networks have a more advanced communications infrastructure, which incorporates collaborative groupware tools and functions, such as calendaring, contact management and file sharing. For the most part, however, communication is limited to moderated mailing lists, which are used to support the following activities:
1) **General queries** whereby members pose questions to each other, typically in response to requests for technical support from the agency’s clients.

2) **E-discussions** on issues of concern to members, which may lead to the production of policy notes and practice notes, which articulate UNDP’s official approach to issues that fall under the thematic auspices of the network; and

3) **E-consultations** whereby senior staff submit proposed policy and practice notes to members for feedback.

The way the system works for ‘general queries’, which account for the bulk of network communication, is that members email requests to the facilitator who may edit them before sending them out to members. In instances where the subject of a query transcends the theoretical auspices of the network to which it has been submitted, the facilitator may also forward it to their colleagues for cross posting on other networks. Members email their responses to the facilitator who syntheseses the points raised and produces a summary of what is already known on the topic at hand. They compile this information, along with individual replies, into a standardised product, known as a ‘consolidated reply’, which is emailed to the network within 10 working days of a query being lodged. Steve Glovinsky who pioneered the consolidated reply concept during his term as head of the Global Knowledge Services unit in the late 1990s likened the approach to a ‘business model’ that combines the concept of a community of practice with a global research service for program officers.

Program officers and other junior field staff were previously forced to bluff their way through requests for advice from their clients or use scarce resources contracting experts to provide them with technical assistance. The local knowledge centres have alleviated some of this burden, but they still constitute relatively formal technical support mechanisms for country offices, which are beyond the reach of the average practitioner. As communities of practice, the global practice networks have bridged the shortfall by putting program officers in contact with each other, providing a metaphorical ‘water-cooler’ of sorts where they can share lessons learned from around the globe. As a research service, they build on the experiences shared with third-party information on what is already known on the topic at hand. In some cases, this is supplemented with regional best practices contributed by the Regional Knowledge Services Team where the query was lodged. This has made it quicker and easier than ever before for field staff to authoritatively advise their clients on a diverse range of issues at minimum expense to the agency. Glovinsky explained the significance of the general query service with reference to his own experience as a program officer. He said:
When I was a field person, you just wish somebody was out there that you could bounce things off. The government says, ‘we’re going to write the Decentralisation Act and you can help’, so you just make it up because you’ve got nobody to bounce these things off. Now, if anyone has a question on decentralisation, you put it on the network and in ten days you get everything there is to know on the topic, which you can run off and give to the Ministry. So we just realised what was going on – these people have the same jobs and they want to talk to each other. So we hooked them up, but the other thing we did was to turn it into a service. We guarantee them an answer. We get it from their peers and we poke around the web for documentation. So we’re finding a way to tap the experience knowledge of practitioners and factoring expert knowledge into it. So we’re putting both of them together and getting it to field workers who before they had this wouldn’t have a clue where to look for it.

Collison and Parcell (2004) devoted a small section of their seminal work on best practice approaches to knowledge management to UNDP. They suggest that the general query service is the defining feature of its approach. They state, “The striking feature is that they guarantee a response to a request from a country office. […] The UNDP country office feels able to answer any query of a government by tapping directly into the decentralised network of policy advisors and the global experience of UNDP” (p. 224, 226). Case studies of the knowledge management strategies of other agencies suggest that the concept is yet to be emulated (Barrett, et al. 2005; King & McGrath 2004; Ramalingam 2005). This is significant because consolidated replies facilitate the transfer of rich contextual insights into development problems and solutions from across the developing world to the agency’s partners and clients. Kim Henderson who manages the Global Knowledge Services Team explained the very real impact that consolidated replies can have in the field. She said:

*Whoever lodges the query gets back this fantastic summary, which is like a mini policy paper in this lovely format. Many members pass this on to government and NGO counterparts, so even though they’re internal products they are directly reaching our external partners and some of our partners have even used the advice in consolidated replies to change legislation, change election dates, and so on.*

Crucially however, the global practice networks are predicated on a very different set of assumptions than the local knowledge centres explored earlier. The centres draw exclusively on expert-generated knowledge, which is assumed or has been proven to work in diverse country contexts (within the confines of a single region in accordance with UNDP’s decentralised approach). The global practice networks draw primarily on local knowledge that is firmly grounded in practice. In this context, local knowledge focuses on the complex social,
cultural, and political variables that affect the implementation of expert knowledge in a specific locality. As such, it may not be applicable outside of the context in which it was created. Applicability elsewhere is established through the subjective reasoning of recipients and shared professional norms based on reciprocity and trust. Thus the motive to share this type of knowledge also differs. Contributors are not financially rewarded, but may build their reputation and improve their prospects for career advancement if they demonstrate impressive understanding of these complex issues. Glovinsky explained the drivers of active network participation in this environment, which he described as “people-centred community building”. He said:

*Our approach is inclusive, it’s building the networks and bringing more people in touch with each other so that they get to know and trust each other. We have our little rules of participation but people can say whatever they like – they can make up stories, they can make fools of themselves, and we’ll put that on. As a member, it’s up to you to decide what makes sense, and hopefully you’ll have a meeting where you’ll get to make a personal connection. Because once you have a personal connection, you’re more likely to help somebody out if they have a question. So it gets back to building a real community. Knowledge is what people know so it’s about trust.*

### 5.3.1 The New Culture of Local Knowledge Sharing

The global practice networks have earned praise for engendering a shift in organisational culture within UNDP. Before they were introduced in 1999, online communication was reserved for senior staff; junior staff were not allowed to send emails without their manager’s approval. That was just a decade ago, and now junior staff are encouraged to communicate freely and openly via the practice networks, and to provide feedback to senior staff via e-discussions and consultations. The rapid pace of change was described by one interviewee as ‘nothing short of a revolution’, the three core elements of which include: bridging silos between operational units; challenging conventional hierarchical relationships between senior and junior staff; and, most significantly, overcoming the agency’s conventional preference for global over local knowledge. Overall, interviewees were of the opinion that these changes have allowed UNDP to provide a more inclusive model of knowledge advisory support to its clients, with expert and practice-based knowledge from around the globe and across the hierarchy now considered valid for application in the field.

Of the cultural changes cited by interviewees, perhaps the least contentious is that the practice networks have helped to promote intra-organisational knowledge sharing along thematic lines. Ramalingam (2005, p. 16) reports that matrix structures were a popular feature of the
re-engineering process undertaken by many donor agencies in the late 1990s, but that knowledge sharing rarely extends beyond senior management meetings where those in charge of different thematic or geographical areas meet once or twice a year to discuss common issues and share experiences. Based on an empirical study of 13 development organisations, he claims that the ‘trickle down’ into closer knowledge sharing between junior staff from different operational units has generally been limited because support mechanisms are rarely clearly defined or promoted at this level. In contrast, UNDP’s practice networks support matrix-style knowledge sharing among even the most junior practitioners.

Several interviewees also claimed the global practice networks have cut across the organisational hierarchy by making bottom-up knowledge flows part of everyday work practices. Powerful sites of resistance notwithstanding, the inference is that some senior staff now value relatively junior practitioners for what they know, in addition to what they can do. Several interviewees cited the Bureau of Management as a particularly innovative operational unit where senior managers have embraced the opportunity to engage with junior staff working on practical issues such as project management, finance, procurement and human resources through the Management Network. Robert Jukham who heads the Asia Pacific Knowledge Services Team also noted similar support for local knowledge among senior managers from his Regional Bureau. He said:

*That’s been a major cultural shift. I mean there is some hierarchy left in the organisation, but for the most part you have senior management interacting with the average project assistant or finance associate on some of the largest networks.*

The most significant cultural change for the purposes of this research is that the practice networks have elevated the perceived validity of local knowledge to that of global knowledge in terms of its application in the field through the general query service. This shift is made more remarkable by the fact that the networks were originally intended to expedite the dispensing of expert-generated knowledge from policy advisors based in headquarters to the country offices. The current approach emerged organically during the initial trial, which was conducted by the Bureau for Development Policy in 1998. It involved eight program officers aligned to the Poverty Reduction Unit who were all interested in the topic of ‘sustainable livelihoods’. A mailing group was set up and participants were asked to pose five questions on that topic. A facilitator was meant to liaise with the policy advisors in New York to answer their questions within 10 working days. However, before they had time to do this, the program officers began to answer each other, thus providing the basis for a very different model of support for the country offices than was first envisioned. Henderson explained the benefit of the current approach:
The successful feature of the networks is that community members answer each other. It’s really moved UNDP away from the situation where we had all-seeing, all-knowing policy advisors sitting in headquarters and then country office colleagues because we now get this country office to country office exchange.

5.3.2 Top-Down Resistance to Local Knowledge

Despite their enthusiasm for the cultural changes described in the previous section, interviewees cited powerful pockets of resistance to local knowledge among senior staff, including the policy advisors, as well as some managers. According to Steve Glovinsky who played a leading role in formulating UNDP’s approach to knowledge management, ‘They don’t see the value of it. It’s too scary for them.’ Although there are no statistics available to demonstrate the impact of these trends on network participation, interviewees claimed that junior staff make up the vast majority of network participants, suggesting the networks serve primarily as forums for horizontal exchanges between practitioners. Kim Henderson who manages the Global Knowledge Services Team said, ‘staff from all levels of the organisation participate, but junior staff have found the communities to be particularly useful forums in which to raise and contribute to issues shaping their work.’

It is perhaps unsurprising that the policy advisors are reluctant to endorse or participate in the practice networks, which effectively equate their expertise with the experiential knowledge of their junior colleagues. These stakeholders have a vested interest in the original model of knowledge services provided by the local knowledge centres whereby they are contracted to impart generalised expertise to different clients. Like the move to fairly static reusable knowledge products, the practice networks have the potential to reduce the number of opportunities they have to effectively ‘sell’ their expertise in different contexts because they make experiential knowledge of implementation readily available to field workers across the developing world. To paraphrase a rather ugly colloquialism, why would the country offices purchase their expertise if they can access more detailed accounts of what works and what does not work in the field via the global practice networks? Henderson explained the impact of these trends on participation by the policy advisors in the practice networks. She said:

The policy advisors don’t pay as much attention as we would like them to in responding to queries. What we like to see is a lot of activity and responsiveness from other country offices, supplemented by resources and guidance from the relevant policy advisors in that area. But the policy advisors don’t all engage and in fact they’ve found this evolution quite threatening because it’s really moved away from the model where they were valuable because they knew things because now this
model rewards everybody’s experience. It’s shifting away from expert knowledge to experiential knowledge. And we feel in our team, and in UNDP generally, that both are valuable. You find some people that say one is more valuable than another and a lot of senior managers who think expert knowledge is more valuable.

Despite their reticence to contribute, several interviewees claimed policy advisors participate passively in the practice networks to assess the evolving needs of program countries, rather than contributing their expertise to them. This implies that the networks serve a valuable role in facilitating bottom-up flows of local knowledge to higher levels of the organisation. To illustrate, Henderson described a situation whereby the Democratic Governance Network was receiving a growing number of queries from the country offices about whether they should engage with political parties so the facilitator held an e-discussion on that topic in late 2004. This had the highest level of contributions to any e-discussion ever held in UNDP. She noted, ‘Our policy advisors paid attention to that discussion because we didn’t have anyone working on that issue and they saw there was a need out there in our country offices for some policy guidance on the issue, so a policy note was drafted.’

Another powerful pocket of resistance to the new culture of local knowledge sharing that was mentioned by several interviewees comes from some senior managers, a phenomenon Glovinsky attributed to organisational hierarchies favouring centralised power and control. He noted that senior managers within the Bureau of Management, which has already been highlighted as a key proponent of the global practice networks took two years before they were ‘brave enough to put a policy out for comment.’ He said:

*The threatened ones turn out to be the managers. It’s the old knowledge is power thing. If you’re a manager and you have no confidence in what your people are doing, you try to control things. You don’t want them sharing because you don’t know what they’re saying. It’s the whole philosophy of the experts have the knowledge and everybody else is just talking nonsense. You get people who honestly say, “we’re the experts and everybody else is just ignorant people passing bad information around”. They have no concept of how valuable experience knowledge is.*

Managerial resistance to the new culture of knowledge sharing has important implications for UNDP’s capacity to tap local knowledge from its experience on the ground in 166 countries because these stakeholders have the power to prevent junior field staff from participating in the practice networks. Two interviewees claimed that managerial resistance had impeded network participation in their region. One described overt opposition from senior managers in the Regional Bureau and several country offices in their region. They implied that much like
the policy advisors, the senior managers in question participate passively in the networks. However they do this for monitoring and surveillance purposes, with the intent to identify staff who ignore their directives to abstain from participating. S/he said:

*One of the managers said if you are participating in the networks and if I see your name on one of those email lists sending information around then I know that you have nothing else to do! So that sets the stage. Imagine; that’s hardly going to stimulate your people to participate!*

As has already been indicated, managerial resistance to the practice networks is by no means uniform across the agency. Indeed, some senior managers are among the strongest advocates of the new culture of local knowledge sharing. However, Robert Jukham was the only interviewee who considered managerial resistance to the practice networks ‘marginal’. He heads the Asia and Pacific Regional Knowledge Services team where the global practice networks enjoy strong managerial support. This may be due to a generational change in the senior echelons of that Regional Bureau where younger senior managers are seen to appreciate the benefits of bottom-up knowledge sharing. He said:

*Among the strongest advocates of networking are in our senior management team. In fact our Deputy Regional Manager is one of the strongest voices in the region for being good knowledge sharers, but the picture is mixed across the organisation. Some senior managers are certainly not good knowledge networkers. They either don’t belong to the networks or they’re not participating in the networks. Some of our Resident Representatives are certainly that type. But we have a younger group of senior managers who have adopted a strong personal culture of knowledge sharing and that is reflected in their own participation in the networks.*

The implication of these trends is that the global practice networks may not have engendered the kind of broad sweeping cultural changes described earlier. In fact, they may have sidestepped rather than superseded conventional practices, creating a new culture of local knowledge sharing that is championed by a core of potentially younger senior managers and embraced by junior staff in their lead, which is often at odds with the bureaucracy in which it is enmeshed. This finding resonates with empirical research on 13 development organisations (not including UNDP) by Ramalingam (2005, p. 19), which found that “knowledge and learning work on the whole lacks widespread acceptance and validity in the face of contrasting organisational cultures and processes.” He claims such work is “threatened by the old order – ‘the way we do things around here’ – and vice versa” which “leads to a continual and widespread issue of contradictions” (pp. 23-24).
5.3.3 Tensions Between Contrasting Organisational Cultures

The challenge of managing tensions between contrasting organisational cultures has fallen to facilitators from the Global Knowledge Services Team. Facilitators operate as gatekeepers of the new culture of local knowledge sharing because nothing passes through the networks without their approval. This may be seen as symptomatic of the entrenched older order, which favours centralised power and control. However, Kim Henderson who manages the team was quick to note, ‘We’re not censoring; we rarely don’t send a message out.’ Indeed, general consensus among interviewees was that gate keeping is essential to protect the new culture of local knowledge sharing. At the most basic level, it ensures the networks do not overload participants with irrelevant information, making participation more of a burden than a benefit. Eric Overvest from Latin America and the Caribbean directly attributed the high quality of network communications to facilitation. He said:

*The global networks have really made a lot of progress. In the beginning they were really people sharing information in a very unstructured way, people boasting I did this project and it was such a success, it was so great, or people were just saying nothing, just sending out messages to the network saying ‘I fully agree with Juan Perez from Brazil’. I’m really glad they have cut down the messages so they don’t send them all to the list anymore. They have really done an excellent job in improving the quality. In the beginning it was not as good. I think people have now learned their lessons. Networks without facilitation are just very, very difficult.*

At a deeper level, gate keeping was seen as crucial to protect the global practice networks from being commandeered by senior staff, which could undermine the relationship of trust between lower-level practitioners who make up the bulk of network members. In this view, facilitators are the guardians of the new culture of local knowledge sharing; they ensure the networks do not succumb to pressure from senior staff to use them to disseminate directives from the top-down. Henderson explained that “there is a lot of pressure from headquarters to use the networks to send corporate messages or to gather corporate reporting so we have to strongly resist that pressure because as soon as you do that, community members get very annoyed and they get put off participating.”

Some interviewees also cited gate keeping as crucial to ensure the practice networks do not replicate hierarchies evident elsewhere in the organisation. Facilitators delete all reference to the professional title of contributors so that network communications only contain their names, organisational units, and locations. Henderson described the strategy as ‘a deliberate policy for the specific reason of moving away from the hierarchy’. However, Juhkam claimed
that the policy had failed to eradicate concerns about power relations, which may be prohibiting some practitioners from speaking freely and openly about sensitive management-related issues affecting their work. He said ‘People don’t feel confident they can just say whatever they want so they want to be able to post queries anonymously in some cases.’

The fact that demand to make anonymous posts has not been met is indicative of the fine line that facilitators must walk between contrasting organisational cultures. The balancing act is also apparent when it comes to strategies for providing multilingual support to junior staff from non-English speaking regions who lack the English proficiency of their more senior colleagues. The Global Knowledge Services team has only been allocated resources to publish consolidated replies in English, yet all of UNDP’s other communications products are published in the three major international languages, namely English, French and Spanish. Henderson was trying to secure funding to translate consolidated replies and e-newsletters into French, Spanish and Russian at the time of writing in order to accommodate practitioners in Francophone Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Central and Eastern Europe. In the meantime, she was utilising the skills of the multilingual team of facilitators to allow members to submit queries and responses in their own language, which they would translate into English before sending them out to the networks.

Most interviewees considered language as a key issue that has limited the ability of mid to low level practitioners from non-English speaking regions to contribute to the global practice networks. Eric Overvest in Spanish-speaking Latin America and the Caribbean said ‘it’s more difficult for us to share our knowledge with other regions.’ Robert Juhkam in Asia and the Pacific suggested that cultural norms may also be inhibiting some staff in that region from contributing as much as staff from more ‘outspoken’ cultures, although he qualified his comments by noting, ‘these are really impressions; I have no evidence to demonstrate this.’ He claimed that many practitioners participate more actively in less service-oriented regional practice networks because they find the comparatively large size of the global practice networks off-putting. He said:

*People may be intimidated by the fact that so many people will read their responses or they might consider their concerns so tiny that they wouldn’t want to put it out on the global networks. Many find greater value from the regional networks in terms of interaction, but in terms of passive participation and reading, they would probably find the resource base of the global networks to be of greater value because you’re exposed to a broader array of possibilities and issues that may be triggered. So you’ll have a lot of passive participants in the global networks who will be receiving but they will not be necessarily interacting in the way that a community is envisioned.*
The role of language in impeding globally-oriented local knowledge sharing is a reoccurring theme in three case studies. Another common theme raised by several interviewees in this case was lack of clarity concerning the benefits of knowledge sharing, despite the incentives explored earlier. Several claimed that some staff ‘still don’t know what knowledge management is all about’. Overvest said ‘Many people see it as another add-on, something additional that they have to do in their work. They don’t recognise it as something that is going to facilitate their work, something that is going to help them to do things better and quicker.’ This echoes findings of empirical studies by King and McGrath (2004, p. 203) and Ramalingam (2005, p. 30), which both stress the ‘add-on’ nature of knowledge management in many donor agencies, which have in many cases failed to build the legitimacy of knowledge sharing initiatives or assist staff in prioritising this kind of work. These issues are almost certainly compounded in organisational units where senior staff oppose the new culture of local knowledge sharing, effectively creating disincentives to participate.

5.3.4 Bridging the Divide

The prevalence of deterrents to the new culture of knowledge sharing already described begs the question, who contributes to the global practice networks? Emmie Wade, a knowledge worker from the Southern Africa Knowledge Services unit, claimed that the most active participants are ‘Europeans who are in the culture of reading and use of IT can respond easily and quickly to queries.’ This reflects Wade’s allegation that ‘international staff contribute more than the national staff.’ To explain, UNDP employs two cadres of professionals, namely international and national officers. A separate scheme of service for national staff is thought to increase local ownership of UNDP programs, while reducing the financial burden associated with employing expatriates (C. N. Murphy 2006, p. 139). Wade’s inference is that the main contributors to the practice networks are expatriates, rather than locally-employed field staff. In other words, they are internationally mobile professionals who are fluent in English and often educated in the West. They tend to be temporarily located in any given country with the expectation that they will move on to another posting in the future.

The perception that international staff contribute to the practice networks more than national staff was strongly contested by two interviewees who both cited the Management Network as an example of a lively (functional) practice network comprised mostly of national staff. While it is possible that the experience varies between networks, it is also possible that Wade’s views are based on trends in Southern Africa where she claimed most junior staff do not participate in the practice networks. Rather, they submit queries to knowledge workers who dip into the global networks for them. One can only hypothesise the reasons for this arrangement range from deterrents already described to inequities in the privilege of
membership favouring international over national staff. Such inequities are rife in many donor agencies with local staff rarely being considered an integral part of the professional team (King & McGrath 2004, pp. 202-203). In such circumstances, which may well extend beyond Southern Africa, the flow of experiential knowledge is likely to be mostly one-way, with junior staff receiving but not necessarily contributing to network communications.

There is little data available to corroborate anecdotal evidence of a possible imbalance in contributions between different cadres of professionals in different regions because monitoring and evaluation is limited to rather ad hoc qualitative questionnaires driven by facilitation teams, with funding constraints restricting automated tracking of network participation. The only quantitative indicators available are based on the total number of subscribers, queries, responses, and consolidated replies per network, as well as aggregate statistics regarding user perceptions of the networks as noted in annual global staff satisfaction surveys. Statistics are available on the origins of queries but not on the origins of replies, indicating that performance metrics focus on the diversity of knowledge recipients, rather than knowledge providers. An internal evaluation of 2004 reveals that queries are fairly evenly distributed between regions, with the Arab States and Latin America and the Caribbean taking an expected back seat due to language constraints (see Figure 10). Quantitative indicators are backed by a substantial amount of qualitative data, which provide compelling accounts of (positive) impact in different regions. Turning these indicators to the supply side of the equation would however be necessary to confirm the finding that UNDP is not tapping the rich contextual knowledge of nationally-appointed staff in some regions.

It is however important to note that network participation is by no means static. Many interviewees claimed lack of awareness had limited the diversity of contributions in the past. Henderson said, ‘Even though it’s been this really big thing within the organisation there were still people that didn’t know about the networks or how to access them’. However, the global practice networks have been tracking growth since 2003. Several interviewees attributed this to the fact they have been granted a more visible presence on the corporate intranet. Others mentioned out-reach campaigns driven by Regional Knowledge Services Teams to raise staff awareness. Perhaps the most important catalyst for increased subscription rates was the directive to hold staff accountable for knowledge sharing in their performance appraisals in the second 2004-2007 multiyear funding cycle (UNDP 2003, p. 16). This is indicative of a drive from the very top of the agency to make the new culture of knowledge sharing the norm. However little is known about how managers have responded to the reshaped appraisal system, or what affect this has had on issues discussed. Formally incentivising knowledge sharing may well foster greater diversity in the experiences shared.
by overturning disincentives arising from alternative managerial directives, but it assumes that staff are otherwise unanimous in their attitudes and aptitudes towards online networking and that this will not detract them from other potentially more productive activities. It also risks inadvertently penalising those who may be reluctant to participate more actively for any one of the reasons explored.

**Figure 10: Distribution of Queries to the Democratic Governance Network**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Queries, By Region</th>
<th>July 2003 –June 2004</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>25 (24%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arab States</td>
<td>7 (7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia-Pacific</td>
<td>21 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe &amp; CIS</td>
<td>19 (18%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America &amp; Caribbean</td>
<td>11 (11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headquarters</td>
<td>17 (16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4 (4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Indicative of trends across all networks.


### 5.4 The Contours of the Knowledge Fortress

As our attention now turns to external trends, the discussion will focus on the extent to which the practice networks draw on local knowledge from Southern stakeholders outside UNDP’s institutional borders. Recall that of the twenty knowledge networks listed in Figure 9, only four are open to external stakeholders. Even in those networks, which tend to be less substantive than the internal networks, the vast majority of external subscribers are certified experts from other UN agencies, think tanks, universities, international NGOs and private consultancies. When questioned why the more substantive global practice networks remain closed to these actors, several interviewees indicated this is part of a broader debate on UNDP’s role within the development community at large, which requires it to choose between two different paths. The first path involves a wholehearted embrace of the new culture of knowledge sharing described earlier, but on a much broader scale. The second path positions the agency as a competitive organisation, favouring the current system of centralised power and control. Eric Overvest who heads the Latin America and Caribbean Knowledge Services Team, elaborated on these alternatives. He said:

> It has a lot to do with who we are, what is our mandate, who are our clients? The first interpretation is that UNDP is a development organisation and should put its knowledge at the disposal of its client countries. We work in partnership for
development – we are there to share our knowledge and work together. The other view is that we should become the McKinsey of development organisations, which has a different underlying assumption that if we want to ‘sell’ knowledge, we should not share it with our competitors.

The goal of former UNDP Administrator, Mark Malloch Brown, who institutionalised the global practice networks in the first 2000-2003 multiyear funding framework was to set the agency on the latter path, whereby its knowledge is seen as a valuable corporate asset that distinguishes UNDP from its competitors (UNDP 1999c). This vision was driven by the stark reality described by Overvest, which is that ‘UNDP needs to mobilise resources in order to exist [...] so our challenge in the end is how to turn our knowledge into ‘business’. This reality is driving the move from knowledge services to knowledge products in Latin America and the Caribbean, which I have argued threatens UNDP’s responsiveness to new insights from the epistemic communities on which it relies for new expertise. However the threat of becoming what Barnard (1999b) has termed a ‘knowledge fortress’ is what prompted Malloch Brown’s successor, Kermal Dervis, to prioritise gradually opening the knowledge networks to allow direct participation by ‘external experts, civil society organisations and institutions’ in the current 2008-2011 multi-year funding framework (UNDP 2007, pp. 7-8).

5.4.1 Old Habits Die Hard

Even before the new directive was issued, the global practice networks actively drew on expert-generated knowledge from outside UNDP. Kim Henderson who manages the Global Knowledge Services Team explained ‘although the networks are intended to be internal networks, we do tap into external sources of knowledge to respond to queries from members because we realise that UNDP doesn’t have the answer to everything.’ It has already been noted that facilitators include third party information on what is already known and published on the topic at hand when compiling consolidated replies. They often forward queries to certified experts who voluntarily substantiate internal contributions upon request as well. In contrast to UNDP’s own policy specialists, Henderson claims ‘these people do it on goodwill, which is really amazing. They seem to be flattered that we want them to respond to a UNDP query and they give us information even though we don’t allow them to be members.’

Yet as much as the practice networks have drawn on expert-generated knowledge, they have excluded practice-based knowledge from outside UNDP’s institutional borders. In other words, they have replicated rather than displaced conventional distinctions concerning the perceived validity of local knowledge inside the agency by differentiating between and privileging global over local knowledge when it comes to external sources (see Figure 11).
Despite strong recognition among interviewees of the value of practice-based knowledge, Emmie Wade from Southern Africa was the only interviewee who argued that UNDP’s failure to draw on local knowledge from external practitioners has weakened UNDP’s programs, citing misguided policies and practices concerning HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment programs as an example. She said:

_What’s happening now is that we’re all speaking the same language but it’s just among ourselves. There is a desperate need to move out of UNDP. We really have to go out there and find people who are doing things that are working and bring that knowledge to UNDP. I think we should bring in our partners to talk about their experience, particularly with HIV/AIDS. Some of our indigenous foodstuffs have not been researched to find out what nutrients they offer. These are foods that people prefer, enjoy, and they’re cheaper and more easily accessible. The mixtures coming from the North are expensive, difficult to access, and often not as healthy. So if a local NGO can concretely tell us that if AIDS patients eat a particular local food this it will boost their immunity and that is a common practice, why can’t we bring it to UNDP and work with that institution?_

These comments allude to the possibility that Wade sympathises with the controversial South African Health Minister, Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, who advocates a diet of garlic, lemon and beetroot instead of anti-retroviral drugs to treat HIV/AIDS patients, which prompted an international panel of world leading AIDS experts to call for her dismissal in (Barrow 2001). The case is indicative of an ongoing debate in that country on the origins and appropriate treatment of the virus. On one side are those that accept the conventional medical wisdom of a causal link between HIV and AIDS and demand greater access to expensive US-patented anti-retroviral drugs. On the other side are ‘dissidents’ (many of whom are senior government officials) who dispute this causal relationship, and advocate inexpensive local immunity boosting therapies to prevent the onset of full-blown AIDS. The dissident perspective represents a unique combination of post-colonial rhetoric with African traditional medicine, which constitutes the main form of primary healthcare in that continent.

Most interviewees who contribute strategically to knowledge management in UNDP suggested that the exclusion of local knowledge from outside the agency is necessary to filter out potentially harmful practices like those advocated by Tshabalala-Msimang to ensure the practice networks maintain their core focus on equipping the country offices to provide relevant and proven knowledge advisory support to the agency’s clients. Despite resistance from some senior managers, program officers are entrusted to use their own judgement to determine the transferability of local knowledge provided by their colleagues. However, the
circle of trust is limited to practitioners in UNDP’s employ. Expanding this circle to practitioners who cannot be held accountable for their knowledge claims could undermine the value of the general query service for junior field staff since it would arguably require greater capacity for critical analysis than can be reasonably expected from them to assess not only the relevance but also the validity of external contributions arising from local knowledge systems in which UNDP lacks expertise. Wade’s position as a knowledge worker suggests her position is more indicative of program officers. According to Glovinsky, ‘their job is to deliver and if they can steal an idea quick and fast, they will.’

5.4.2 The Trade-Off Between Validity and Creativity

Interestingly, e-discussions and consultations on the future direction of the global practice networks have revealed that program officers and other relatively junior practitioners who make up the bulk of members are among the most ardent supporters of keeping them closed. According to Henderson, ‘they tell us they want a safe space to share experiences and discuss policy processes in UNDP so they don’t want us to open them up’. Significantly, the current approach also affords mid and low level program officers a special, albeit contentious, place in UNDP’s knowledge supply chain at the intersection between insider and outsider communities where they have the exclusive capacity to provide rich contextual accounts of what does and does not work in the field. It is therefore unsurprising they are reluctant to relinquish this position by extending that privilege to external practitioners. However, this exclusion has reduced the value of the practice networks for the policy advisors who, along with certified experts, play a crucial role in identifying and bringing new expertise to UNDP.

The global practice networks play a vital role in ensuring the in-house policy advisors remain responsive to local knowledge from the field through e-discussions on issues of concern to members and e-consultations on proposed policy and practice notes. In so doing they ostensibly allow UNDP policy and programs to evolve dynamically in response to its experience on the ground in 166 countries, but the prevalence of deterrents to network participation described earlier suggests that the insights provided are much less comprehensive. Ideally, they come from program officers with experience working with a wide range of state, market and civil society organisations in program countries, each with their own core competencies and unique approaches to development. In reality, however, they are more likely to come from program officers with experience working with a rather small circle of well-established institutions directly involved in UNDP programs.

Thus, as much as the exclusion of external practitioners may be necessary to ensure the credibility of the general query service for program officers whose job is to deliver, it also
threatens to undermine the value of bottom-up knowledge flows for in-house policy advisors to tap creative new insights from innovative practitioners working beyond the auspices of UNDP programs. The need for higher levels of the organisation to become more responsive to local knowledge from frontline development workers outside this rather limited context is what makes the cross-organisational networks to be discussed in the next section so valuable.

5.5 Experiments in Bringing the Outside In

UNDP is experimenting with a number of new forums for cross-organisational knowledge sharing. Most use UNDP-inspired practice networks to support greater integration between different UN agencies in order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of that sprawling and often-unwieldy system of organisations. One of few initiatives to include the participating UN agencies’ local partners and clients is the Solution Exchange knowledge management partnership project.16 Launched in April 2005 by eighteen UN agencies in India, the project uses the UNDP model to support knowledge sharing between decision-makers and frontline development workers in diverse institutional settings, including donor agencies, government offices, research institutes, universities, civil society organisations, and private consultancies. The networks are thematically defined in accordance with the government’s Five Year Plan and the Millennium development Goals. As of December 2007, more than 12,000 people subscribe to at least one network, with over 21,000 subscriptions overall (see Figure 11).

Steve Glovinsky is spearheading the project. He managed UNDP’s Global Knowledge Services team when knowledge management was first introduced to the agency and remained in that position until 2004 when he became frustrated with senior management stonewalling his proposals, including the ambitious “Knowledge Management Roadmap”, which among other things advocated a more liberal approach to knowledge sharing to enable UNDP to become “a hub for development discussions and innovation” (UNDP Knowledge Management Task Force 2004, p. 4). In response, he extricated himself from the alleged ‘internal politics and egos’ of corporate headquarters in New York and relocated to India where he is officially Coordinator and Advisor to the Solution Exchange, and its unofficial ambassador. By basing the project in the field, he claims it was easy to secure funding because the networks benefit the country, rather than the agency. He said, ‘This is for Indian practitioners so when our board ask us ‘are you spending money on yourself or are you spending it on development and on the poor’, we can say ‘this money is going to the poor’.

16 The Solution Exchange is also supported by DFID and SADEV.
Figure 11: Solution Exchange Networks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic Area</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Subscribers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>Addresses challenges to achieving National AIDS Control Program</td>
<td>3,352</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>objectives for treatment and care of persons living with HIV/AIDS and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>preventing the spread of new infections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decentralisation</td>
<td>Focuses on political, functional, administrative and financial</td>
<td>1,938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>decentralisation, including sectoral decentralisation and privatisation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disaster Management</td>
<td>Concerned with preparedness, mitigation, response, recovery and</td>
<td>1,190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>rehabilitation issues with respect to natural and human-induced</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>disasters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Addresses challenges to meeting national and globally mandated</td>
<td>2,049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>goals with respect to improving access to basic education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food and Nutrition</td>
<td>Addresses challenges with meeting the country's food and nutrition</td>
<td>1,765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>security goals - household agricultural production, food-related</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>social safety nets, food safety, and dietary diversification</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Addresses challenges to women's involvement in development -</td>
<td>2,201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>increased access, capacity, and equality in women's social, economic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and political endeavours</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT for Development</td>
<td>Promotes information and communication technologies as an enabler</td>
<td>1,334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>for sustainable development and as an alternative means of livelihood</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>for grassroots communities in India</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternal and Child</td>
<td>Addresses challenges facing public health and nutrition practitioners</td>
<td>2,040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>engaged in reducing infant mortality and maternal mortality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Microfinance</td>
<td>Addresses challenges to providing the poor with financial services for</td>
<td>1,461</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>meeting basic needs, enhancing investment in income generating and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>asset-building activities, and addressing risks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water and Environmental</td>
<td>Addresses water and environmental sanitation challenges in rural and</td>
<td>2,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanitation</td>
<td>urban areas in India - including access, quality, management and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>service delivery</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work and Employment</td>
<td>Addresses challenges faced by practitioners engaged in reducing</td>
<td>1,999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>poverty in India through promoting gainful, high-quality work and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>employment opportunities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


5.5.1 Distinguishing Features of the Solution Exchange

For Glovinsky, the Solution Exchange represents the next stage in UNDP’s evolution as a ‘knowledge organisation’, which is ‘not based on delivering programs’. Rather, it is based on leveraging the UN’s position as an ‘impartial knowledge broker’ between multi-sectoral stakeholders in the development project. It means bringing together otherwise disconnected stakeholders from donor agencies, governments, research institutes, and civil society organisations, who share common interests and concerns so they can assist each other in their daily development work (see Figure 12). These people have different knowledge, experience and ideas to contribute to the realisation of locally-owned development goals, but they are relegated into silos, which the UN is uniquely well positioned to bridge. He said:
The reason these communities haven’t been created before is that there are rigidities between different stakeholders – government is this way, donors are that way, NGOs are that way. And that is the role of the UN, to be a bridge, to bring them together and say you guys all have the same objectives, you work in different organisations but you all want the same thing so you need to work together.

**Figure 12: Multi-sectoral Distribution of Subscribers**

![Multi-sectoral Distribution of Subscribers](image)


**Figure 13: Growth in Subscribers 2005-2007**

![Growth in Subscribers 2005-2007](image)


In reality, numerous cross-organisational communities of practice already link people working on MDG-related themes in India, such as HIV/AIDS. For example, 3,200 people subscribed to the “AIDS India e-forum” on Yahoo Groups in early 2005, prior to the launch of the Solution Exchange. As of August 2009, that community has 6,817 members whereas
the Solution Exchange AIDS Network has 4,168. This suggests that the Solution Exchange has complemented rather than superseded other initiatives, but impressive growth rates indicate that it satisfies a latent demand the others do not (see Figure 13). Glovinsky offered three features that distinguish the Solution Exchange, which help to explain this demand.

The first alleged point of difference is the involvement of government officials who are ‘reticent’ to participate in other predominantly NGO-run initiatives, according to Glovinsky. He was able to leverage the UN’s convening power to secure high-level support from the Indian government for the Solution Exchange. Each network also has an advisory group comprised of representatives from the leading organisations in its field and chaired by one or more UN agency heads. By winning over what he variously termed ‘apex stakeholders’, ‘development influencers’, and ‘the who’s who of development in India’, Glovinsky hoped to alleviate potential resistance to the initiative among government officials. He proudly proclaimed that the Ministry of Education had agreed to put a link to the Education Network on its website, claiming ‘that sends a message right there, because if your boss thinks it’s okay, you’re given a license to contribute’. However, he also admitted that many government officials still felt threatened by the initiative, describing concerns mirroring those of senior staff inside UNDP, with similarly mixed results. Glovinsky explained:

This is the problem of hierarchies and it’s not just the Indian government or any other government - it’s organisations. Some managers say, ‘say anything’ even in the government. Others say ‘check with me first’, and others say ‘get out of my office cause I don’t want to deal with this’.

The second alleged point of difference is the use of mailing lists, which rely on simple email technology rather than complex web-based tools, to support interactions between members. The use of mailing lists has three principal advantages. First, it resolves bandwidth constraints, which may reduce the capacity of frontline development workers to access the web in remote parts of the country affected by the digital divide. Secondly, it is a ‘push’ technology, which means network communication is delivered straight to members’ inboxes, rather than them having to go the extra mile to access it via the web. Thirdly, it provides members with an electronic record of network communications, which they can use in the field. Despite the advantages of mailing lists, many existing communities rely on web-based tools, which according to Glovinsky limit their vibrancy and usefulness. He said:

---

17 Statistics for the AIDS India e-forum retrieved August 20, 2009 from: http://www.health.groups.yahoo.com/groups/AIDS-INDIA/
A lot of the communities all over India - they say yeah we have a community, we set up a website and there’s this little click that says “discussion.” You throw up a question and you look and there’s one or two answers and it’s three years old!

The final and most important point of difference that sets the Solution Exchange apart from other initiatives is its high-level of service-orientation. Each network is anchored in one or more of the participating UN agencies, which subsidise a two-person moderation team to support network communications in much the same way as UNDP’s practice network facilitators. The service offering also mirrors UNDP’s practice networks. It includes: e-discussions on issues of concern to members; e-consultations where decision-makers submit draft policies, programs and projects to members for feedback; and general queries, which provide “knowledge on demand – practical advice, ideas and resources that members can put to immediate use to help them face their individual and collective challenges” (Stockholm Challenge 2007). As of August 2009, over 540 consolidated replies had been generated from all three services, with approximately 20 new ones added to the national portal each month.

5.5.2 Stimulating Bottom-Up Knowledge Flows

Although the unique features of the Solution Exchange help to explain the popularity of the networks, the value of participation is dependent upon the quality of member contributions, since supplementary materials sourced by the moderation team are readily available over the web. Glovinsky conceded it was proving extraordinarily difficult for moderators to get members to share what he described as ‘substantive knowledge’ rather than ‘mere opinions’ because most members are unaccustomed to knowledge sharing of this nature, which is based on ‘a different philosophy, a different business model’ from the one they are used to. Alluding to the same drivers of the new culture of knowledge sharing in UNDP, he claimed that contributors are rewarded for their contributions with opportunities to expand their professional networks through the creation of new relationships of trust, which are good for their reputation, and ultimately for their career. He said:

'It’s easy to share opinions. That’s what you see in all these other communities. You see ‘government should do this’, ‘somebody should do that’, but you never get the other side, which is ‘we had success in this and here’s how we can help you’. That’s knowledge sharing and that’s what we’re after but they’re not used to it. Everybody is still saying ‘should, should, should’ and we’re trying to tease out of them, ‘Where did you get that opinion? How do you know that? What have you written on it?’ In UNDP it’s second nature now. Hopefully these communities will go the same way as people begin to figure out who’s good, who knows things, who to respect, and they
will build a reputation. I think that will overcome a lot of the hesitancies to share knowledge once people realise it’s good for their career because it should be in your interests to contribute, you need to benefit, there should be something in it for you.

The idea that a wide range of local knowledge actors stand to benefit from contributing to the Solution Exchange is compelling, but practitioners from donor and government agencies are unlikely to benefit unless their managers endorse, monitor and evaluate their contributions, which seems unlikely given resistance to the new culture of knowledge sharing from some senior managers in UNDP. In contrast, it is easy to see how professionals from civil society and the private sector might benefit if they offer creative new insights that fill a latent gap in the participating donor or recipient government agencies’ knowledge bases. Glovinsky cited an incident in which a frontline development worker posted a query to the Maternal and Child Health Network regarding the availability of low-cost sanitary pads appropriate for use in rural areas to which an entrepreneur replied with specifications for a machine to manufacture the item well below market price. They subsequently benefited from a government contract to advise companies how to set up the technology for local production.

This suggests the ‘new business philosophy’ that motivates participation in the Solution Exchange stimulates a predominantly bottom-up flow of local knowledge from implementers of development-related programs and projects to decision-makers who determine the overall policy frameworks and resource allocations for those interventions. Its achievements in this area are the main focus of an independent evaluation, which claims the networks have enabled practitioners to influence the design and implementation of major national policies and programs (Premchander & McDermott 2007). They are also the focus of numerous ‘impact stories’ listed on the Solution Exchange website, which emphasise how “Field-workers in very remote areas of India are finding themselves getting the attention of senior policy makers.” The UN Country Team’s unsuccessful application for the prestigious Stockholm Challenge Award in 2007 is also telling. They entered the Solution Exchange in the “Public Administration” category of the competition, with the following project summary:

Simply stated, Solution Exchange helps governments ‘work’ better – to be more effective, efficient and responsive to the needs and aspirations of all of their people, and especially the poor and most vulnerable. It does this by using the medium of the Internet to connect persons in all organisations and across the country who have common interests and concerns, building mutually supportive relationships that demonstrate in a very practical way how much can be achieved when people collaborate freely (Stockholm Challenge 2007).
5.5.3 An Innovation Zone for Decision-Makers

The overarching focus on stimulating bottom-up knowledge flows suggests that the Solution Exchange has the potential to function as a powerful advocacy tool for civil society organisations. However, the Executive Director of a prominent NGO who participated in consultations concerning the proposed direction of the project in 2004 expressed his concern that the networks would inadvertently filter out activist perspectives that challenge the government’s national development framework for achieving the MDGs. This critique is based on the view that the UN is constrained by its close ties to the government, which impedes its ability to function as an impartial knowledge broker as envisioned. It mirrors observations made by C. N. Murphy (2006, p. 348) who argues that UNDP all too frequently alienates activist knowledge in favour of diplomacy. He said:

*We believe in the MDGs and we have been putting together communities of practice ourselves to bring people together to critique the progress, and come up with alternative strategies. But the government might have a very different mindset. The Solution Exchange initiative is a good initiative and the kinds of discussions that are happening there are important; but the UN is constrained by the government because they have to cooperate with the government and they can’t say anything controversial because they can’t jeopardise the government’s five-year plan. So UNDP has to support strategies that are convenient to the government.*

The inference is that the Solution Exchange is designed to improve the effectiveness of development policy and practice within the current framework of ‘decentralised market-led development’ (Schech 2002). Within this context, it serves as an innovation zone for the main decision-makers in development. It allows senior staff from participating donor and recipient government agencies to assess and respond to strategic knowledge gaps in their field by harnessing experiential knowledge from frontline development workers. However, this raises the question posed by Robert Juhkam who heads the Regional Knowledge Services Team in which the Solution Exchange is based, ‘is the focus on the country level too narrow to provide any meaningful new insights?’ He said:

*There’s the challenge that you have a whole lot of Indians interacting with each other on very important themes, but it begs the question are they being enriched by external experiences? To what extent are they being enriched by views from neighbouring countries? Are they being enriched or are they only inward looking, you know Indians looking at Indian problems?*
The perceived need to address this issue is driving the UN to expand the Solution Exchange to other parts of the developing world. Glovinsky is currently assisting other UN Country Teams to replicate the initiative using a purpose-built open source software package that can be adapted for use in diverse country contexts. His blue-sky vision is to create a global network of interlinked national networks, which are recognised as the key knowledge sharing forums for the international development community. In addition to mailing lists, each network will have its own homepage on a national portal, which highlights news of interest to members, including opportunities to collaborate on joint projects, as well as a searchable database of consolidated replies, comprising the accumulated knowledge of the community over time (much like the intranet-based workspaces for UNDP’s practice networks, except these are publicly accessible). A ‘beta-version of the Indian portal went live in July 2008 (http://www.solutionexchange-un.net.in). A global portal is currently under construction to aggregate and index network communication from multiple national portals, creating a global repository of consolidated replies from around the world on which the international development community can draw (http://www.solutionexchange.org).

The system promises to address the major limitation of UNDP’s core knowledge management strategy by giving the policy advisors better access to local knowledge from practitioners working on a wide range of programs and projects across the developing world. However, it also poses new risks for the wider development community, which were less apparent when its strategy focused exclusively on its own staff and certified experts. E-discussions and e-consultations involving different stakeholders with diverse professional norms, goals, and approaches to development is precisely what is required for dialogue that may lead to new understanding. The general query service offering ‘knowledge on demand’ may be somewhat misleading in this context where participants must use their own judgement to assess the relevance of lessons learned from specific contexts. As a form of network communication, however, it too provides opportunities for participants to engage in discussions that may help to clarify potential relevance elsewhere. In contrast, the drive to create a global portal of network communication from diverse country contexts to be accessed over the web could undermine the networks’ contribution to a dialogue between different knowledge actors. Although ostensibly a move towards greater openness, the use of the broadcast model of communication to disseminate contributions runs the risk of conveying a false sense of transferability, which could weaken development performance unless it is accompanied by interactive functionality to enable recipients to discuss lessons learned before applying them to their work. This issue will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.
5.6 Summary of Findings

This case study has explored trends and concerns affecting UNDP’s approach to knowledge management, with a view to uncovering the extent to which it supports greater inclusion and fuller participation by program officers and other relatively junior field staff who are rich in local rather than global knowledge. The most conventional initiative explored consists of regional networks of experts that provide formal knowledge advisory support to the agency’s country offices, delivered dynamically for a fee. The research has also revealed efforts underway to codify expert-generated knowledge into reusable knowledge products tailored to specific terms of reference, which reside on the corporate intranet to be freely accessed and delivered by program officers on demand. Although this is unlikely to affect UNDP’s core focus on expert knowledge that is firmly grounded on regional priorities and realities, I have argued it could reduce its responsiveness to the epistemic communities in which expert knowledge is produced if it was not for the more innovative system of global practice networks. Although the practice networks are primarily internal, they actively draw on contributions from certified experts in the region where the query was lodged, even though they are not allowed to be members. UNDP’s linkages with epistemic communities will be further strengthened when the Administrator’s directive to open the networks to direct participation by external experts is operationalised in the near future.

The case study has explored organisational culture changes engendered by the global practice networks, which have earned praise for elevating the perceived validity of local knowledge based on experience to that of expert-generated knowledge inside UNDP. It has also explored powerful sites of resistance to the global practice networks among the agency’s in-house policy advisors as well as some senior managers. I have argued that the new culture of local knowledge sharing is often at odds with the traditional values of the bureaucracy in which it is enmeshed. Tensions between contrasting organisational cultures have limited the ability of some mid to low-level field staff to use the practice networks to raise and shape issues affecting their work. Despite the efforts of facilitation teams to ensure inclusiveness, anecdotal evidence suggests that contributions may be unevenly distributed between different cadres of professionals in different regions. If confirmed, this would indicate that UNDP is not tapping the rich contextual knowledge from its experience on the ground in 166 countries. Although warranted to provide field staff with a private space to discuss issues affecting their work, I have argued that the exclusion of external practitioners from the practice networks has compounded internal issues by reducing UNDP’s capacity to tap local knowledge from practitioners working beyond the auspices of its own programs.
The final section of the case study explored the Solution Exchange knowledge management partnership project of eighteen UN agencies in India. I argued that initiative is likely to improve UNDP’s responsiveness to local knowledge from frontline development workers in program countries. However it also poses new risks for the wider development community due to its use of the broadcast model of communication to disseminate local knowledge. The initiative complements but is not intended to replace UNDP’s core knowledge management strategy, which is designed to provide its worldwide network of country offices with relevant and proven knowledge from the South. That strategy ensures the knowledge advisory support UNDP provides to its clients takes cognisance of the context of the problem for which a solution is being sought, as well as lessons learned from other countries where similar challenges have been encountered and possibly overcome. The addition of the Solution Exchange creates an environment in which the agency’s policy advisors can produce more innovative policy and practice notes. Managerial opposition notwithstanding, these in turn can be adapted and further shaped by program officers utilising the global practice networks. In this way the feedback loop between expertise and experience is completed by an inclusive approach to knowledge management, which is progressively becoming more outwardly oriented.
Chapter 6

Case Study 2:
Association for Progressive Communications
6.0 The Association for Progressive Communications

This case study explores the Association for Progressive Communications (APC), a knowledge network of 52 predominantly Southern civil society organisations (CSOs). It is arguably the peak civil society representative in multi-stakeholder institutions and processes in the ICT arena. APC describes itself as “an international network of civil society organisations dedicated to empowering and supporting groups and individuals working for peace, human rights, development and protection of the environment through the strategic use of information and communication technologies, including the Internet” (APC 2008). A core function of its work involves implementing donor-funded projects to build the capacity of Southern CSOs to engage in ICT policy and practice. In addition, it conducts its own ICT policy advocacy activities. APC played a leading role in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), which was held jointly by the UN and the International Telecommunications Union in 2003 and 2005. Policy researchers praise APC for contributing to the democratisation of the global governance process, due largely to its ability to work effectively within centralised structures without sacrificing the dynamism of more bottom-up forms of organisation (e.g. Mueller, et al. 2007). Activists criticise it for contributing to the centralisation of civil society perspectives into a managed consensus that did little to address the concerns of developing countries (e.g. Chakravartty 2007).

The power that APC has been capable of garnering on the global stage makes it an interesting case for exploring the role of civil society partnerships and policy dialogues in supporting greater inclusion and fuller participation of Southern stakeholders in aspects of the development project over which they previously had limited influence or control. APC is comprised primarily of Southern CSOs, including grassroots CSOs and loose groups of activists, which are usually excluded from global governance (Mueller, et al. 2007). This distinguishes it from the myriad knowledge networks (and international NGOs) that perform similar roles in other issue areas. While much of the literature explored in Chapter 3, Section 3.3, points to the potential of knowledge networks to strengthen the capacity of grassroots CSOs to engage with the main decision-makers in development (e.g. Chowdhury et al. 2006; Court, et al. 2006; Perkin & Court 2005), APC’s achievements are rarely considered in this context. Most research on civil society participation in the WSIS treats it as an influential Northern player. This case study aims to address this oversight by repositioning APC as a South-South network and shedding light on its approach to knowledge sharing with Southern CSOs both inside and outside of its formal network borders.

To explore these trends in isolation from APC’s history would ignore the question of how a predominantly South-South network came to gain influence in such an unlikely policy area.
APC’s history spans more than 25 years. It was established prior to the emergence of the Internet, before concept of multi-stakeholder governance or ICT policy had evolved. APC played a crucial role in bringing both of these issues to the fore in the 1990s, which is the only period in its history that is well documented. This is partly due to widespread interest in its role as the world’s largest online networking system for NGOs, which was effectively the online home for the global justice movement prior to the commercialisation of the Internet. Understanding of its early role is also due to a concerted effort by APC to document its own history in a ten-year retrospective published in 2000. This research builds upon that literature by highlighting APC’s lesser-known origins and exploring more recent developments. By necessity, it does not explore the multitude of projects in which APC has been involved in the interim period. However, particular attention is paid to its role in the WSIS. This has been the subject of some debate, but is lacking empirical research from the point of view of APC members and partners who were actually involved in (or excluded from) that process. The analysis is not concerned with the outcome of the summit, but with the knowledge sharing processes adopted to facilitate civil society participation.

The case study is presented in four sections. The first two sections are organised chronologically, but this structure is supplemented with a theoretical framework that traces APC’s focus during different phases of its evolution. In conceptualising these phases, I have been inspired by Ronfeldt et al. (1998, pp. 53-55) who distinguish between ‘issue-oriented’ and ‘infrastructure-building’ NGOs in their analysis of civil society support for Mexico’s Zapatista movement. Issue-oriented NGOs focus on specific topics like human rights, health, fair trade, and the environment, whereas infrastructure-building NGOs facilitate networking by issue-oriented NGOs, with little regard for the issue concerning each one. “In a sense, the former correspond to the ‘content’ and the latter to the ‘conduit’ – or the ‘message’ and ‘medium’ respectively – of social activism” (p. 53). Using these categories, I will argue that APC and its predecessors played an important role in infrastructure building by laying the foundations for the emergence of an early form of ‘global civil society’. With the commercialisation of the Internet, APC became issue-oriented in an effort to defend and expand opportunities for online advocacy and activism in the new era. It carved out a niche in the burgeoning ICT4D arena, which is now a thriving sub-sector of the development industry. By the time ICT policy took centre stage at the WSIS, I will argue that APC was uniquely qualified to act as a broker between the traditional custodians of global governance and the increasingly diverse range of CSOs that began clamoring for influence in that area.

18 APC’s Annual Report of 2000 is described as “Not quite an ‘annual report’ [but rather] the first step in a process of APC documenting its history and experience” (APC 2000, p. 4).
To illustrate this trajectory, the case study begins with a brief background on APC’s origins in the first online networking systems for NGOs and activists in the 1980s. The second section explores APC in the early 1990s when despite Northern NGOs dominating its membership base, it undertook pioneering work to extend opportunities for online advocacy and activism to the South. The third section explores APC’s political awakening in the context of the changing Internet landscape of the late 1990s when Southern CSOs emerged as the most influential members in shaping its agenda. It also provides an overview of APC’s programs and the debate over its role in the WSIS in order to provide context for the ensuing analysis of network activity. The final section examines internal and external trends affecting network participation. Rather than the opportunity to share their knowledge with other members *per se*, I argue that the primary benefit of network participation is the opportunity for members to become involved in APC projects and capacity building workshops with CSOs in their region. These opportunities are unevenly distributed, and this is a source of tension. Focussing on internal deliberations concerning APC’s policy agenda with reference to the WSIS, I argue that engagement is uneven, with a clear division apparent between members whose own portfolios include policy-related projects and those whose work focuses purely on the field. Shifting to external trends, I argue that APC actively engaged with CSOs outside its formal network borders during the WSIS, but this was not well recognised by some critics who questioned its legitimacy as a representative of civil society opinions.

The case study is based on documentary analysis and eight in-depth interviews, which took place between August and November 2005. Interviewees include the Executive Director of APC who is based in Johannesburg, as well as representatives of three member organisations in Southern Africa (Johannesburg), South Asia (New Delhi) and Latin America (Lima). They include the Executive Officer of the South African NGO, ‘Women’s Net’ who was Chair of APC’s Executive Board at the time of my interview; the Co-Founder of the South Asian information network, ‘BytesforAll’; and four staff members of the Peruvian NGO, ‘Centro Peruano de Estudios Sociales’ (CEPES), including the Director of the ICT for Development Office and the Technical Coordinator. In addition, the New Technology Program Manager of the Latin American branch of the international NGO ‘Practical Action’ was interviewed to shed light on APC’s approach to the WSIS from an external perspective. Practical Action has partnered with APC on a number of projects in Latin America and is therefore considered part of the broader ‘APC Community’, which is comprised of APC staff, members and project partners. Partners cannot participate in APC’s governing bodies, but they can make recommendations to them.
6.1 Background

APC is the offspring of the first online networking systems for NGOs and activists, which emerged between 1982 and 1987 when online networking was already well underway in some sectors, including the military, academia and to a lesser extent the private sector. At that time the ‘network of networks’ that we now know as the Internet did not exist, nor did its most popular application, the World Wide Web. The systems that served these distinct user groups were technically incompatible, closed and not interconnected as they are today. Most were regionally oriented, providing text-only email and bulletin board services to organisations based in North America or Western Europe. They were able to afford to experiment with computer-based technologies when high costs kept them out of reach for most individuals, even in OECD countries. APC’s predecessors were among the first non-profits to venture into this space. They were the first to apply ICT to the development project by endeavouring to improve the accessibility and affordability of online networking for civil society groups in the developing world.

APC’s most direct forebears include the US-based ‘Institute for Global Communication’ (IGC) and the UK-based ‘GreenNet’. IGC was created in 1987 by the merger of two Californian non-profit email and bulletin board service providers, PeaceNet (established 1985) and EcoNet (established 1982). It hosted the world’s largest online networking system for NGOs and activists, with a subscriber base exceeding 10,000 (Sallin 1994). The vast majority of users were based in North America due to the high cost of international telephone connection charges for users outside that region. GreenNet was created in 1986 by a group of peace and environmental activists in London. It was a non-profit sub-network of a larger system hosted by a commercial provider in former Western Germany, called GeoNet. GeoNet was popular among international NGOs in the early 1980s, but commercial subscription rates made it price prohibitive for smaller less established CSOs, let alone grassroots activists (B. M. Murphy 2000). Subsidised subscription rates made GreenNet more affordable for these actors and its membership base climbed rapidly to 5,000, even though it did not resolve the issue of long-distance telephone charges for users outside Western Europe (Murphy 2000, 2005).19 Elissalde (2000, p. 15) explains how some thirty NGOs in Latin America subscribed to GreenNet in the mid-eighties, but notes, “Whilst it was a great leap forward, it was still

---

19 This figure is based on the total number of NGO subscribers to GeoNet provided by Lane (1990) and the total number of users of its NGO-related bulletin boards as provided by B. N. Murphy (2005). Equivalent figures for GreenNet could not be obtained. Given that subsidised subscription rates made GreenNet more affordable than GeoNet, the total number of users is likely to be higher than stated.
paradoxical that two Colombian organisations should have to connect via London to communicate with each other.”

To address this problem, IGC and GreenNet joined forces in 1987 to create one of the world’s first transatlantic linkups between NGO-owned and controlled online networking systems (B. M. Murphy 2000). The landmark linkup was implemented using Unix-to-UniX Copy Protocol (UUCP), which was selected over other available systems because the software on which it was based was free and could run on personal computers, which were far cheaper than the mainframes used to host email and bulletin board services on other major systems at that time. UUCP also facilitated temporary link-ups between autonomous computer networks using dial-up modem connections, rather than costly leased lines. These features were considered vital by the system founders to facilitate integration with grassroots service providers in the developing world.

With donor support, IGC helped to establish new non-profit networks in Brazil and Nicaragua in the late 1980s. It then began the process of connecting with these and other non-profit service providers that emerged independently in Sweden, Canada and Australia. By late 1989, it had succeeded in integrating seven autonomous networks for email and bulletin board exchange, or ‘computer conferencing’ as it was known on the Unix system. Information placed in one subsequently became available on all others. This meant that subscribers only had to connect to their local network to exchange emails with subscribers of all the other networks and to participate in computer conferences hosted by those networks. A flurry of online networking activity subsequently ensued as NGOs and activists worldwide began to link and coordinate their activities to collaborate on issues of common concern (Bissio 2000).

The seven non-profits behind the new system recognised the significance of the changes their integration was engendering and the need to continue broadening the community of actors benefiting from those changes. They agreed to form an international association to coordinate their collective operations and to establish a basis for shared funding to support the creation of new local networks where the system was not yet operational. Thus APC was born. From the time of its inception in May 1990, APC had the world’s largest online networking system for ‘progressive’ civil society groups dedicated to peace, human rights, environmental preservation and sustainable development (Warkentin 2001). However most were based in North America and Western Europe where the largest member networks were based. IGC possessed approximately one-half of the estimated 25,000 users in the early nineties (Sallin 1994). By 1997, the number of users had doubled to more than 50,000, with strong Southern representation (Warkentin 2001).
6.2 Laying the Foundations for the Rise of Global Civil Society

APC’s founding goal was to provide low-cost email and computer conferencing services to civil society groups in parts of the world where these facilities were not yet available. This was set out in its ‘Membership Guidelines’, which stated that members had to be committed to the growth of the network, based on a one member per country rule, by assisting in the creation of new networks in countries not directly served by existing members. Members paid a quarterly membership fee to fund APC’s expansion strategy, with fees assessed according to the number of paying subscribers per network. This meant APC’s larger Northern members effectively subsidised the creation of many new Southern members. However, they also held the balance of power in determining this course. APC’s governing body, the ‘APC Council’, was made up of one representative per member network. Most decisions were made by consensus, but when consensus could not be reached a two-thirds majority of votes was required, with voting rights allocated according to the number of paying subscribers per network. This contributed to a perception that APC was a predominately Northern ‘network of networks’. This was compounded by the fact that it was registered as a non profit charity in the US and employed one US-based member of staff to work with the APC Council to formulate network policy, monitor compliance, and coordinate fee collection, financial reporting, joint technical development and support (Sallin, 1994).

6.2.1 Casting a Wider Net Across the Developing World

Led by its Northern members, APC provided financial, technical and operational support to more than fifty non-profits in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Eastern Europe to assist them with the provision of affordable email and bulletin board services between 1990 and 1997. The newly created networks were given free or low cost access to a local language version of the Unix software that was used to connect APC’s founding members. This enabled them to become fully integrated into the APC system for email exchange and computer conferencing. Nonetheless, many of the new networks elected to use Fidonet technology in situations where telecommunications infrastructure and phone line quality was poor. Fidonet was a simple low-cost store-and-forward technology that was popular among computer hobbyists in the North (Bush 1992). It was freely available for non-profit use, easy to learn and install, and did not require powerful computer hardware or online message handling so that telephone call duration and charges could be kept to a minimum. It was therefore considered more appropriate than Unix in parts of the world where technical and financial constraints made it difficult to work online for extended periods (Banks 2000).

Many new networks became fully-fledged members of APC, which saw it membership base
expand from seven to 26 between 1990 and 1997 (see Figure 14). However, most of the newly created Fido networks were afforded only ‘affiliate’ or partnership status in APC due to their inability to meet the fairly rigorous requirements for full membership. These included being able to ensure that network operations were stable and available 24 hours a day, a commitment to staff training, user support, and financial sustainability. The policy was intended to ensure high quality network performance. However, a case study of APC conducted by Susanne Sallin (1994) for the Harvard-CIESIN Project on Global Environmental Change Information Policy found that the membership policy was criticised for prohibiting many local networks in Africa from being about to participate in internal decision-making processes affecting APC’s strategic direction.

**Figure 14: Growth in Member Networks 1990-1997**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member Network</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Joined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IGC</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GreenNet</td>
<td>England</td>
<td>1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternex / IBASE</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicarao / CRIES</td>
<td>Nicaragua</td>
<td>1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NordNet</td>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web Networks</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pegasus</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ComLink</td>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GlasNet</td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chasque</td>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equanex</td>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SANGONeT</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wamani</td>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GLUK</td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Histria</td>
<td>Slovenija</td>
<td>1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LaNeta</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colnodo</td>
<td>Columbia</td>
<td>1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Econnect</td>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enda-TM</td>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pangea</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Spider</td>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LaborNet</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JCA-NET</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jinbonet</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>1997</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite excluding many smaller Southern networks from positions of influence, APC’s Northern members spared no effort or expense to integrate them into their global system for email exchange and computer conferencing. IGC (US), GreenNet (UK), Web Networks (Canada), Nordnet (Sweden), and later Comlink (Germany) all created ‘electronic gateways’ to facilitate the automated transfer of email and computer conferences between different systems. Electronic gateways are complex interconnection arrangements that have to be purpose-built to facilitate interoperability by reformatting data packets from the form needed by one system into that needed by the next on the journey to their final destination.20 Thus APC’s gateways converted information coming from the major UUCP networks to a format understood by the Fido networks and vice versa. They were opened every two hours when the Fido networks could dial into their nearest gateway to swap incoming and outgoing email and relevant conference posts. The system was also interoperable for email exchange with some commercial networks, such as GeoNet, and research networks on the Internet proper, such as BitNet, thanks to other gateways provided by Northern members (Frederick 1993).

The benefit of this heterogeneous configuration, comprised of multiple upward and downward linkages between larger and smaller systems, was that it allowed users of technically incompatible computer networks in almost every part of the world to exchange email, and participate in computer conferences for the cost of a local call. While this hardly seems revolutionary in the context of today’s Internet, it was a huge accomplishment at a time when the vast majority of online networking took place within North America and Western Europe. Banks (2000) estimates that somewhere between two and five million messages were sent across APC’s Fido gateways at a cost of about US$0.30 per message between 1990 and 1997. This compared very favourably with the cost of long-distance telephone charges to connect to IGC or GreenNet for users based outside of North America and Western Europe, which ranged in price from US$5-10 per minute. APC’s larger Northern members consequently accepted a significant loss of subscribers and revenue due to the creation of the new networks, which provided a much more affordable means of online networking for thousands of Southern CSOs than they had been able to offer (Banks 2000).21

As a result of this technically and financially inclusive approach, APC broadened its predominately Northern user base into one that was genuinely global in scope. By 1997,

---

20 B. N. Murphy (2000) presents an interesting account of this process through an interview with a Mike Jenson who travelled the world connecting newly established networks to IGC and GreenNet.

21 Users also had to pay a subscription fee to their local APC member or affiliate network, but this was calculated to be the lowest possible amount to sustain their operations. Most charged around US$10 per month, but adjusted this figure to accommodate users who could not afford to pay it (Sallin 1994).
subscribers included a wide range of CSOs from 133 countries. Indeed, the major finding of the case study by Sallin (1994) was that APC provided a “successful institutional model for incorporating a diverse spectrum of users”. While it would be superfluous to mention all those involved, they included representatives from NGOs, research institutes, media agencies, trade unions, human rights groups, activist organisations, faith-based organisations, grassroots organisations, and a handful of government agencies. Some of the more prominent users included Amnesty International, Oxfam, Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, World Wildlife Fund and InterPress, which is the largest newswire service in the South. The user base also included several United Nations offices, which were among the first to recognise APC’s computer conferences as the main tools by which an emergent ‘global civil society’ was becoming informed and getting organised in the early nineties (Bissio 2000; Frederick 1993; Warkentin 2001).

6.2.2 Facilitating Civil Society Politics on Multiple Fronts

APC’s core commitment to its users, as spelt out in its ‘Charter and Bylaws’, was to accommodate them all without prejudice and promote an uncensored flow of information between them (Sallin 1994). Thus the onus was on users to ensure their newfound capacity to communicate freely and openly in an environment unfettered by state or corporate control would build their capacity to achieve their common vision of a more humane, just and egalitarian society. Almost all users seized upon email, which provided a much faster and more cost-effective solution to the problem of information dissemination than fax, telex or post. However, many also engaged in computer conferencing, which provided unprecedented opportunities for them to work together towards common political ends.

APC had over 3,000 computer conferences, with themes ranging from AIDs to Zimbabwe (see Figure 15). Although their subject matter dealt with pressing issues, the conferences were really an early incarnation of the online forums that many people now take for granted in that they allowed users to participate in threaded discussions independently of space and time. However, they were exclusive to APC users – that is, they were only accessible to subscribers of APC’s member and affiliate networks. Some were open to all users, but others were restricted to members of a specific organisation or project. Some were global in orientation, while others had a specific geographical focus. Popular uses included topic-based discussions, virtual workspaces, and platforms for joint action and campaigns (O’Brien 1992). Summing up these functions, Sallin (1994) quotes the Manager of IGC’s EcoNet program, Michael Stein, who states, “The conference allows a group process, an interactive relationship among activist organisations […] It creates a virtual space or virtual community where people can
exchange information, swap news, and provide information resources. It is a technical means to share strategies and work together”

**Figure 15: Typical Computer Conference circa 1990**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>From/To</th>
<th>Lines</th>
<th>Subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>8 28-06</td>
<td>17:18</td>
<td>ILR</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>INTERNATIONAL LABOUR REPORTS 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>4 14-06</td>
<td>09:52</td>
<td>ICEF-BRU</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>INFO: VENEZUELAN BARGAINING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>4 22-06</td>
<td>14:22</td>
<td>CIC</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>CHINA: WORKERS DETAINED — BEIJING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>3 05-07</td>
<td>05:25</td>
<td>AMRC</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>TAIWAN: SOLIDARITY CALL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>5 06-07</td>
<td>08:12</td>
<td>GN</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>EL SALVADOR/LABOR RIGHTS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>4 06-07</td>
<td>15:39</td>
<td>ICEF-BRU</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>INFO: NEW SAFETY NORMS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>83</td>
<td>5 14-06</td>
<td>09:56</td>
<td>ICEF-BRU</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>INFO: BRAZIL SOLVAY STRIKE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86</td>
<td>6 14-06</td>
<td>10:06</td>
<td>ICEF-BRU</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>INFO: UNIONIST MURDERED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87</td>
<td>4 14-06</td>
<td>20:11</td>
<td>ELSSOC</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>HONDURAN TRADE UNIONISTS MURDERED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>88</td>
<td>10 15-06</td>
<td>10:07</td>
<td>KRIC</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>NEW ADDRESS AND PHONE OF KRIC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89</td>
<td>6 15-06</td>
<td>15:59</td>
<td>ICEF-BRU</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>INFO: ILO ENVIRONMENT ROLE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>9 18-06</td>
<td>09:55</td>
<td>AMRC</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1992: SOME RESOURCES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>91</td>
<td>3 22-06</td>
<td>14:30</td>
<td>CIC</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>CHINA: WORKERS DETAINED — CHANGSHA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>95</td>
<td>13 25-06</td>
<td>06:23</td>
<td>AMRC</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>WRITER/EDITOR WANTED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96</td>
<td>7 28-06</td>
<td>10:04</td>
<td>GN</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>INTERNATIONAL CALL-IN SUPPORT PICO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>97</td>
<td>12 29-06</td>
<td>10:36</td>
<td>MALCHEM</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>FLEXI-WAGE SYSTEM.CAN YOU HELP US</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Lane (1990, p. 30).

Most multilateral institutions and governments had yet to embrace email within their own organisations when activists began using APC’s computer conferences to wage what Ronfeldt et al. (1998) have termed ‘social netwars’, or nonviolent, disruptive, social movements that engage activists from far and wide and may have widespread repercussions and policy implications. Some of the social netwars to which APC has been linked include the thwarting of Chinese government censorship during the pro-democracy student demonstrations of 1989 (Frederick 1993); circumventing attempts to blockade traditional media channels during the attempted coup against Gorbachev that triggered the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 (Bissio 2000); providing a communications hub for activists in the former Republic of Yugoslavia during the Balkans War (Banks 2000; Preston 1994); connecting anti-globalisation campaigners in opposition to the North American Free Trade Agreement (O’Brien 2000); linking the African National Congress headquarters in London with anti-apartheid activists in South Africa in the lead up to the first free multi-ethnic elections in 1994

---

22 The figure shows contributions to a computer conference on the topic of ‘labour’. Contributors include international and national NGOs and trade unions from Europe, Asia, and South America.
On occasion, these activities saw APC’s member networks threatened with closure or legal action if they did not remove potentially libellous material from their servers. They often responded to these threats by leveraging their decentralised structure to shift threatened material to another country, putting it out of reach of the relevant authorities. In many cases, ‘mirror’ or replica conferences contained local language summaries to assist in rallying worldwide support for their cause. In an empirical study of the causal relationship between the Internet and global civil society, which includes a case study of APC’s founding member IGC, Warkentin (2001) suggests that these activities were a consequence of the interplay between APC’s inherently democratic approach to infrastructure-building and the “inherently progressive, dynamic and inclusive” ideology of the CSOs that inhabited its user base (Warkentin 2001, p. 5). In this historically relative argument, ‘progressive’ CSOs are seen to be more involved than ‘conservative’ CSOs in using the Internet to create the transnational linkages that help to constitute ‘global civil society’. Ó Siochrú (2003, p. 1) suggests that the early ‘liberating form of global civil society’ emerged from APC’s autonomy from state and market power when governance seemed to be the responsibility of ‘no entity in particular’.

It was during this period that the United Nations recognised the policy implications of online networking by NGOs, which made previously unavailable avenues of political participation possible. This is arguably what prompted it to become a leading proponent of civil society partnerships and policy dialogues in the post Cold War era when it convened a series of global summits, which were the first to involve non state actors in a major way. The UN invited APC to be the official information and communications carrier for all of the summits held prior to the commercialisation of the Internet, including the World Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993, the World Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994, the World Conference on Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995, and the World Conference on Women and Development in Beijing in 1995.24

23 APC continues to defend online content through the ‘Rapid Response Network’, which automatically replicates online content from registered sites on a worldwide network of servers.

24 APC was also the official carrier for a number of smaller less well-attended UN conferences, including the International Conference on Water and the Environment (1992), International Conference on Sustainable Agriculture (1993), World Conference on Small Island Developing States (1994) and the First Conference of the Parties of the UN Climate Change Convention (1995).
Of all the summits, the World Conference on Environment and Development, more commonly known as the Earth Summit, is probably the best remembered. It was the largest gathering of Heads of State in history at the time. It was also the largest face-to-face gathering of NGOs, with some 2,400 civil society representatives allowed to observe the official conference and a further 17,000 taking part in the ‘NGO Global Forum’, which was held in parallel with the official conference (Preston 1994). APC provided onsite email and computer conferencing facilities to both official and alternative summit delegates, allowing them to consult with their constituents and other concerned parties that were unable to attend in person, thereby facilitating broader civil society participation in global governance than had ever before been possible (Frederick 1993; O'Brien 2000; O'Brien & Clement 2000).

The Earth Summit is widely recognised to have put NGOs on the map as powerful new players in international relations (Bissio 2000; Frederick 1993; O’Brien 2000; O’Brien & Clement 2000; Ribeiro 1998; Ronfeldt et al. 1998; Sallin 1994). Ribiero (1996, p. 14) describes it as “the largest stage for the demonstration of the significance of NGOs and electronic networks in contemporary cultural politics.” The major outcome, an action plan known as ‘Agenda 21’ recognised NGOs as valuable partners in the quest for sustainable development and called upon governments to facilitate their participation in national policy processes (UN ECOCOC 1992). In 1996, the UN formalised its own guidelines for a ‘consultative relationship’ with NGOs and committed to “improve practical arrangements on such matters as greater use of modern information and communication technology […] wide and timely dissemination of information on meetings, distribution of documentation, provision of access and transparent, simple and streamlined procedures for the attendance of non-governmental organisations in United Nations meetings, and to facilitate their broad-based participation” (UN ECOSOC 1996). Thus, “not only was the efficiency of the technologies used by civil society recognised, but also the validity of the NGO mechanism to network and build consensus was endorsed, even if those informal mechanisms would never meet the conventional criteria of representation” (Bissio 2000, p. 24).

For its role in bringing about these changes in world politics, APC was awarded Category 1 Consultative Status to the UN Economic and Social Council in 1995, which is the highest status the UN can grant to an NGO. APC was awarded this honour “because of the power it has been capable of garnering (based on its political and technical know-how) in the process of becoming an institution representative of NGO opinions […] and a broker between powerful governmental organisations and supranational agencies of global governance such as the United Nations” (Ribeiro 1998). These features allowed APC to play a leading role in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) discussed in Section 6.3.3. However,
the political complexity of ‘global civil society’ increased dramatically in the interim period as the commercialisation of the Internet made ICT the *de facto* medium for NGO communications and brought an increasingly diverse range of CSOs into the political sphere – particularly in the North. APC’s legitimacy as a representative of NGO opinions was consequently called into question in light of new ideological and political divisions, which made broad-based consensus more elusive than it was when civil society engagement in global governance centred on its users.

### 6.3 Defending Online Advocacy and Activism in the New Era

APC lost its role as the online home for what effectively amounted to the global justice movement in the late nineties when the era of optimism associated with “libertarian imagery of cyberspace as an emancipatory ‘new frontier’” was all but laid to rest (Ó Siochrú 2003, p.1; also Schiller 1999). Commercial interest in the Internet, which had previously been confined to academic use, led the US government to conclude that private ownership would be the best way to meet the needs of the growing number of people seeking to go online. The plan to privatise the Internet was initiated in 1994 and the final restrictions on commercial use were lifted in April 1995 when control was transferred from the US-based National Science Foundation to a handful of private companies (Schiller 1999, p. 12-13). This made other established systems like UUCP redundant in the developed world where there was an explosion of commercial Internet service providers offering faster connection speeds, and more advanced graphical user interfaces at very competitive prices. APC’s Northern members found it difficult to compete with the new networks, and struggled to reposition themselves. In contrast, APC’s Southern members were able to supplement or replace their connectivity services with donor-funded capacity building projects intended to address the ‘digital divide’ in other ways.\(^{25}\) At the turn of the century they emerged as APC’s strongest members in both number and size and assumed the balance of power in determining its new course.

### 6.3.1 APC's Metamorphasis into a Knowledge Network in the ICT Arena

Led by its Southern members, APC responded to the changing Internet landscape by repositioning itself as a knowledge network in the ICT arena, with a strong focus on delivering donor-funded ICT4D projects. This proved to be a relatively smooth transition for

---

\(^{25}\) Warkentin (2001, p. 151) describes how APC’s largest founding member, IGC, shifted to online content provision in this period, but claims “IGC is no longer the dynamic pioneer that it once was”. In contrast, Elissalde (2000, p. 54) describes how South African member, SANGOnET, moved relatively easily from “being a provider of access to becoming a facilitator of information” when confronted with “competitive commercial packages and […] the popularisation of public telecentres.”
APC, which was already recognised as a leader in that burgeoning field, with a unique combination of technical expertise and physical presence in the South that most newcomers lacked. This gave it flexibility to forge a programmatic framework that reflected the increasingly political objectives of its members. Indeed, it might be argued that APC helped to broaden donor priorities from improving Internet accessibility and affordability to building the capacity of Southern CSOs to appropriate ICT for political ends. Although APC had long supported the use of ICT for this purpose, it was among the first media activists to recognise that democratic dialogue could not be assured on the Internet. Fearing the new ‘global commons’ would become subject to the same concentration of ownership and control that had occurred in other mass media, it also became involved in policy advocacy to defend and expand opportunities for online advocacy and activism in the new era (see Dahlberg 2002).

APC’s political awakening is evident from 1997 when it adopted its enduring mission “To empower and support organisations, social movements and individuals in and through the use of information and communication technologies to build strategic communities and initiatives for the purpose of making meaningful contributions to equitable human development, social justice, participatory political processes and environmental sustainability” (APC 2008. By 2000, it had revised its membership guidelines to accept any CSO that supported its new mission for an annual fee commensurate with their annual turnover. It subsequently attracted a steady flow of new members, as well as retaining many older ones. As of December 2008, it had 52 members from 37 countries. The vast majority are Southern CSOs that use ICT to support online networking by grassroots CSOs and the communities with whom they work. They include non-profit Internet service providers, open source software developers, website designers and hosts, telecentre and community network operators, ICT consultancies and ICT policy research institutes, as seen in Figure 16 below.

**Figure 16: Continuing and New APC Members **

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member Organisation</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Joined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continuing Members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IGC</td>
<td>Non-profit website host for just over 250 non-profits</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GreenNet</td>
<td>Non-profit Internet service provider for 1,300 non-profits</td>
<td>England</td>
<td>1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web Networks</td>
<td>Non-profit specialising in planning, designing and hosting websites for non-profits.</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apc.au (ex Pegasus)</td>
<td>Online media arts production and consultancy for media makers and community organisations.</td>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third World Institute (ex Chasque)</td>
<td>International NGO that promotes participation in global decision-making processes by Southern CSOs. Uses ICT to increase their visibility and enable common interest actions.</td>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SANGONet</td>
<td>National NGO that helps NGOs to integrate ICTs into their activities to strengthen their capacity to find long-term</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>1993</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Sustainable Solutions to Local Development Problems

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wamani</td>
<td>National NGO that provides open source software and tools to the non-profit sector in Latin America. It built the regional intranet for human rights watchdog, Amnesty International.</td>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LaNeta</td>
<td>Non-profit Internet service provider for non-profits. Also provides ICT training and technical support, with strong focus on women working with open source software.</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colnodo</td>
<td>Association of NGOs that produces open source software and tools for non profits to collaborate on issues such as human rights, housing, and women’s empowerment.</td>
<td>Columbia</td>
<td>1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Econect</td>
<td>Non-profit Internet service provider for non-profits. Also provides ICT consultancy and training.</td>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enda-TM</td>
<td>Association of community development workers in Africa, Asia and Latin America involved in the search for a participatory methodology with a focus on enhancing South-South cooperation through the strategic use of ICT.</td>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pangea</td>
<td>Non-profit that supports the strategic use of ICT for development and social justice through ICT policy research and training, with strong focus on gender equality.</td>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green Spider</td>
<td>Non-profit that provides web services to environmental, social justice, and anti-globalisation movements in Hungary.</td>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LaborNet</td>
<td>Non-profit that aims to revitalise the labour movement through the provision of online content and interactive forums for information exchange and joint action.</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JCA-NET</td>
<td>Knowledge network of NGOs that provides ICT products and services to NGOs and social movements working for ‘peace, social, environmental justice and human dignity’ in Asia.</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>1997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jinbonet</td>
<td>Non-profit that provides ICT products and services to progressive NGOs in Korea, including connectivity, website hosting, and online networking support.</td>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>1997</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### New Members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Japan Computer Access for Empowerment</td>
<td>Non-profit that provides ICT policy research, consultancy and training services to NGOs in Japan.</td>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BlueLink Information Network</td>
<td>Information network that helps NGOs to communicate and exchange ideas on issues related to the environment and sustainable development in Bulgaria.</td>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strawberry Net</td>
<td>Information network of NGOs that pool their online content and provide interactive forums for NGOs, researchers, and government officials to discuss environmental protection, sustainable development and human rights in Romania.</td>
<td>Romania</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fantsuam Foundation</td>
<td>Local NGO involved in gender and youth-focused ICT4D projects designed to disseminate information and help people to find employment and generate income through the establishment of telecentres and community networks.</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nodo TAU</td>
<td>Association of ICT professionals and social activists that aims to ‘strengthen social action in the fight against poverty’ by helping community-based organisations establish telecentres and community networks in Latin America.</td>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arid Lands Information Network</td>
<td>Information network of grassroots development workers involved in drylands agriculture in East Africa. Major aspect of its work involves disseminating information to the communities with whom they work through telecentres.</td>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rede de Informações para o Terceiro Setor (Information Network)</td>
<td>National NGO that promotes the strategic use of ICTs through the provision of ICT tools, online content, policy research and advocacy campaigns. Also involved in ICT4D.</td>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation Name</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ArabDev</td>
<td>Knowledge network of NGOs in the Arab region that aims to support sustainable community development through the provision of ICT tools and training to local grassroots organisations, including telecentre operators</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centro Peruano de Estudios Sociales (Peruvian Social Studies Centre)</td>
<td>Local NGO that aims to improve living conditions for agrarian communities through the dissemination of information, in which ICT plays a key role. Involved in ICT4D projects to establish and provide technical support to telecentre and wireless community network operators</td>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Education Computer Society</td>
<td>Non-profit that provides ICT training and support infrastructure to poor people in rural areas with a view to improving their ICT literacy. Involved in producing online training materials and hosting workshops.</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation for Media Alternatives</td>
<td>Local NGO that aims to create public debate on development-related issues through media interventions in which ICT plays a key role. Involved in ICT training, online content provision and advocacy campaigns ’asserting the people’s right to communicate’.</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open Forum of Cambodia</td>
<td>National NGO that builds the capacity of CSOs to contribute to macro-level developmental processes through the provision of online content and interactive forums designed to stimulate policy dialogue and debate.</td>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WomensHub</td>
<td>Feminist network, which ’aspires to undertake initiatives to promote greater access to ICT by poor communities struggling to asset their autonomy and empowerment’</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZaMirNet</td>
<td>Non-profit that aims to promote participation in political processes by supporting CSOs and social movements in the strategic application of ICT to solve social problems.</td>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternatives</td>
<td>International NGO that supports community-based initiatives to empower poor and marginalised people in over 35 developing countries. Uses ICT so they can benefit from shared successes through South-South cooperation.</td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BytesforAll</td>
<td>Information network that provides online content and interactive forums for people to discuss and debate ICT solutions to poverty in South Asia.</td>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Aid International</td>
<td>International NGO that is the world’s largest provider of professionally refurbished PCs to non-profits in the South.</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ungana-Afrika</td>
<td>International NGO that aims to improve use of ICT by non-profits in Africa by incubating, implementing and evaluating capacity building programs that mobilise ICT skills and resources. Also provides ICT training.</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’sNet</td>
<td>Feminist organisation that works to advance gender equality through the use of ICT. Provides online content, training materials and consultancy services to women’s organisations to help them engage in effective social activism.</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women of Uganda Network</td>
<td>Knowledge network of 80 women’s organisations that promotes the strategic use of ICT by women to share information and address gender issues collectively.</td>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Regional Centre for Computing</td>
<td>Local NGO that provides ICT training, research and development services to community-based organisations, including telecentre operators.</td>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EsLaRed</td>
<td>Research institute dedicated to bringing ‘scientific, technical and social progress to Latin America and the Caribbean’ through research and development of ICT.</td>
<td>Venezuela</td>
<td>2005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fundación-Redes-y-Desarrollo (Networks and Development Foundation)</strong></td>
<td>International NGO involved in ICT4D projects designed to empower poor people in Latin America to produce local content, and advocacy campaigns designed to protect a diversity of languages, cultures and opinions on the Internet.</td>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institute for Popular Democracy</strong></td>
<td>Non-profit research and advocacy centre, deploying a multi-disciplinary team of activist-scholars who focus on ICT policy advocacy and project work, with emphasis on open source software development for e-government applications.</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Voices for Interactive Choice and Empowerment</strong></td>
<td>Activist organisation that works on issues like food sovereignty and communication rights. It strives to support citizen engagement in macro-level developmental processes by using grassroots activism to generate policy discussion.</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institute for Popular Democracy</strong></td>
<td>Independent research centre, deploying a multi-disciplinary team of activist-scholars who focus on ICT policy research and advocacy, with a strong focus on open source software solutions for e-government applications</td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cooperativa Kinè</strong></td>
<td>Worker’s cooperative that aims to provide opportunities for disadvantaged people to invent and think creatively with the help of ICT. Incubates and implements ICT projects that value the competence of these publics.</td>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Protége QV</strong></td>
<td>Local NGO that promotes the use of ICT in rural communities through ICT4D projects designed to create, train and provide technical support to telecentre operators</td>
<td>Cameroon</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>AZUR Development</strong></td>
<td>National NGO that aims to improve the status of women through the use of ICT, among other things. Founded and coordinates the Community Telecentre Network of Congo.</td>
<td>Republic of Congo</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa</strong></td>
<td>Research institute that aims to build the capacity of CSOs in east and southern Africa to contribute to ICT policy by disseminating information and convening multi-stakeholder forums for policy dialogue and debate</td>
<td>East and Southern Africa</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bangladesh Friendship Education Society</strong></td>
<td>Local NGO that promotes ICT to advance teaching and learning and implements ICT4D projects designed to support local content creation at the grassroots level.</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OneWorld Platform for Southeast Europe Foundation</strong></td>
<td>Information network of CSOs, which pool online content and undertake projects “to impact faster democratic developments and positive social change within civil societies of the region”</td>
<td>Southeast Europe</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Metamorphosis Foundation</strong></td>
<td>Non-profit foundation engaged in ICT policy research, training, online content provision and the development of concrete tools to enable joint action by CSOs.</td>
<td>Macedonia</td>
<td>2007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Open Institute</strong></td>
<td>National NGO that aims to promote citizen engagement in social movements through the provision of online content and forums designed to promote democratic dialogue and debate.</td>
<td>Cambodia</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kenya ICT Action Network</strong></td>
<td>Public policy network that provides a platform for state, civil society and private sector actors to work together to set out a policy framework for ICT enabled growth.</td>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sulá Batsú (Creative Spirit)</strong></td>
<td>Self-managed cooperative that brings together professionals from different fields to contribute to the social appropriation of ICT by community-based organisations in Latin America.</td>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Voices for Interactive Choice and Empowerment</strong></td>
<td>Activist organisation that works on issues like food sovereignty and communication rights. Strives to support citizen engagement in macro-level developmental processes by using grassroots activism to generate policy discussion.</td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>2006</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Compiled from information on the APC website and from member organisations’ websites. Where information was not available in English, I used Babel Fish translations (http://babelfish.yahoo.com/).
APC’s governance structure has been modified to accommodate the diverse needs of its members. They continue to define its priorities through the APC Council, but that body now includes two representatives per member organisation with a view to ensuring gender equity in decision-making processes. The APC Council elects an Executive Board of eight member representatives who work with an expanded team of APC staff to oversee the implementation of programs. APC’s strategic priorities for 2009-2012 are to advocate for affordable Internet access for all; make technology work to sustain the environment; use emerging technologies for social change; build the ‘information commons’; secure and defend Internet rights; and improve Internet governance. To this end, APC has three programs, which implement most of their work through donor-funded projects. They are strategic uses, communications and information policy, and women’s networking support.

6.3.2 Building Civil Society Capacity to Engage in ICT Policy and Practice

In broad terms, APC’s programs are designed to build civil society capacity to engage in ICT policy and practice. The need to address gender inequity is a crosscutting issue that straddles both of these areas. The programs work by involving CSOs in the development of resources to build their capacity. They then make the resources available for broader capacity development by placing them on the web for other CSOs to use in developing new skills. Online forums and capacity building workshops are provided for users to share their knowledge and contribute to the ongoing development and adaptation of the resources to ensure their applicability in diverse organisational and cultural contexts. Initiatives typically involve APC members as project partners and beneficiaries, but they invariably target grassroots CSOs outside APC’s formal network borders. A brief overview of each program is provided below, together with a selection of project highlights. The purpose is to illustrate APC’s inclusive approach to knowledge sharing, which also characterised its approach to policy advocacy during the WSIS. This will be discussed in the next section.

Strategic Uses

Despite the proliferation of CSOs that use the Internet in their daily work, few have appropriated the technology strategically for development and social change, especially in the developing world (Surman & Reilly 2003). APC’s Strategic Use Program aims to address this aspect of the digital divide by building the capacity of Southern CSOs to access and use ICTs to support their mission. Program activities include producing and promoting the use of low

---

26 APC’s income has risen from less than US$700,000 in 2000 (APC 2000, p. 96) to a peak of nearly US$4 million in 2005 (APC 2005, p. 80), settling on US$3.5 million in 2008 (APC 2008, p. 45). Most income comes from project grants and commissioned projects, with some core funding and some consulting income. Membership fees account for less than one percent of total income.
cost tools and connectivity options; ICT training materials; and capacity building workshops for the development and exchange of skills.

A key project has involved the development of a website publishing tool for non-profits called ‘ActionApps’. Developed jointly by APC members, ActionApps is a content management system that offers CSOs no-skills necessary website publishing capacity, as well as the capacity to quickly and easily build campaign sites by pooling their online content. The software is APC’s principal contribution to the open source software movement, which is made up of software developers that collaborate to create and improve applications that anyone can use and adapt. They enjoy strong support in the ICT4D sector because they offer a practical and affordable alternative to proprietary solutions (see Hoes 2006). Accordingly, ActionApps has been popular among Southern CSOs inside and outside APC’s network borders.27 Some have been able to generate income by integrating the program into their website design services. This has resulted in the production of numerous local language versions of the program, which are freely available on the project website (http://www.actionapps.org). The site offers extensive user support, and facilitates knowledge sharing among developers. APC also convenes ‘hack camps’ for developers to come together for brainstorming around future developments. It also hosts capacity building workshops for CSOs to gain hands-on technical training and business guidance for prospective re-sellers.

Another prominent project has involved the development of a multilingual portal called ‘iTrainOnline.org’, which offers ICT training materials to Southern CSOs. A joint initiative of eight international NGOs and donor agencies, APC’s contribution to the project was initially confined to creating an ActionApps-driven portal to host materials produced by other project partners. However it later joined the network of content partners that contribute training materials to the website through its involvement in UNESCO’s Multimedia Training Kit project, which also involves APC members in Africa and Latin America. That project aims to build ICT skills in poor and marginalised communities by offering training modules to telecentre and community network operators. The modules can be used as interchangeable building blocks for capacity building workshops. They include trainer’s notes, presentation slides, printable handouts, and participant evaluation forms. Along with other materials on iTtrainOnline, the modules are available under an open content license so that CSOs can adapt them for local use as best they see fit. They can also contribute their modifications back to the global knowledge pool through the ‘submit resource’ function on the website.

27 A directory of registered ActionApps-driven websites is available at: http://old.apc.org/actionapps/english/general/slices.shtml
Communications and Information Policy

APC’s Communications and Information Policy Program evolved from early in the new century when there was very little focus on ICT policy _per se_, let alone civil society perspectives. Program activities now centre on the production of ICT policy research and training materials, which serve the dual purpose of strengthening research and advocacy skills among project partners, and mobilising civil society engagement in ICT policy.

A flagship initiative in the lead up to the WSIS involved the development of ‘ICT Policy Monitors’ in Africa, Asia and Latin America to offer critical analyses of ICT policies in each region. APC members are among the principal project partners involved in producing the research, which is published on the project websites and circulated via electronic newsletters and mailing lists designed to generate discussion on ICT policy issues. The websites include news, legislation, statistics, issue papers, events and listings of CSOs that are active in ICT policy in each region. They also offer resources organised into themes, such as universal access, communication rights, content and language, gender, intellectual property, Internet governance, media, security and privacy, and software. The specific themes covered were determined by project partners in consultation with other CSOs in their region. In Africa and Latin America, more than 120 CSO representatives from almost all countries participated in capacity building workshops to field test an ICT policy training curriculum. This helped to identify their interest in ICT policy and strengthen the linkages between them to support their engagement in regional preparatory meetings for the WSIS.

In the post-WSIS period, the ICT Policy Monitors have been largely superseded by the ‘Global Information Society Watch’ project, which is a joint initiative of APC and a Netherlands-based international NGO. This has been introduced to be “a space for collaborative monitoring of implementation of international (and national) commitments made by governments towards the creation of an inclusive information society”. The project draws on national ICT policy research from a growing network of CSOs involved in monitoring progress towards implementation of the WSIS action plan, with a view to holding governments accountable to their commitments. The major output is an annual report on “the state of the information society from the perspective of civil society” which tracks developments at the global, regional and national levels. It is freely available on the project website ([http://www.giswatch.org](http://www.giswatch.org)) which also includes a forum to discuss the report.

---

28 The African website is in English and French at: africa.rights.apc.org; the Asian site is in English at: asia.rights.apc.org; the Latin American and Caribbean site is in Spanish at: lac.derechos.apc.org.

29 The website is in English only, but draws on numerous national ICT Policy Monitors, which provide more substantive information in relevant local languages.
**Women’s Networking Support**

The Women’s Networking Support Program (WNSP) is both an APC program and a knowledge network of approximately 175 women from the APC Community who are committed to using ICT to strengthen women’s rights agendas, particularly in the South. The program promotes gender equity in the design, implementation, access and use of ICT and in the policy decisions that regulate them. As such, it straddles the other program areas.

A flagship project has involved the development of a Gender Evaluation Methodology (GEM) for assessing ICT initiatives from a gender perspective. The GEM manual is freely available in five languages on the project website ([http://www.apcwomen.org/gem](http://www.apcwomen.org/gem)). The site also provides an interactive forum for practitioners to share lessons learned from implementing the tool and contribute to its customisation. A consultancy service is also available for CSOs wanting to introduce gender perspectives to their ICT evaluation processes. Facilitators are drawn from the hundreds of predominately Southern CSOs that have participated in capacity building workshops to learn how to adapt and apply the tool to their work. These include over 30 APC members and partners that were involved in field-testing the methodology in 2002-4. Participant feedback was so positive that donors extended their support for capacity building workshops to 2008, thereby broadening the network of CSOs able to generate income by offering GEM evaluations on a consultancy basis. More recently, WNSP has been contracted to train recipients of two global ICT4D seed grant programs to incorporate the GEM into their project design and final reports, suggesting that this expansion is set to continue.

Another flagship project is a multilingual web portal, ‘GenderIT.org’. This aims to create greater awareness of gender concerns in ICT policy. In a model similar to the ICT Policy Monitor projects, it offers detailed gender critical analyses of ICT policies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Research is organised into themes, including economic empowerment, education, health, violence against women, women in armed conflict, cultural diversity and language, communication rights, universal access, software and governance. In addition to incorporating mailing lists to generate discussion around these topics, the website also includes a blog called ‘Feminist Talk’, which is used to keep women’s movements informed of WNSP’s policy advocacy activities. During the WSIS, it was the site’s most popular feature. It remains a focal point for women’s rights and ICT policy advocates seeking to monitor progress on implementation of the WSIS action plan from a gender perspective.
4.3.3 Campaigning for an Inclusive Information Society

APC was one of the first civil society actors to become involved in ICT policy. Its early activities focused on raising civil society awareness of ICT policy issues and lobbying decision-makers to democratise nascent ICT policy venues to facilitate civil society participation. For example, it worked to expose government regulation of the Internet prior to the enactment of the first anti-privacy legislation in 2000, which legalised state interception of private email and the monitoring of individuals’ online activities in the UK. That same year, it demanded the right for civil society to be represented on the Board of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN), a ‘not-for-profit public-benefit corporation’ created in 1998 to take over many of the regulative tasks previously carried out by the US government. APC was instrumental in helping to forge the Civil Society Internet Forum, a loose coalition of NGOs, which pledged to work for the democratisation of the Internet and Internet governance by lobbying ICANN. Although dominated by Internet industry heavyweights, ICANN now lists the principle of multi-stakeholder governance among its core values thanks partly to APC’s efforts (see ICANN 2009).

By the time ICT policy took centre stage with the announcement of the WSIS, APC was one of few civil society actors with practical experience in that area. The WSIS was a two-phase summit that culminated in two conferences held in Geneva in December 2003 and in Tunis in November 2005. It put ICT on the global policy agenda for the first time, positioning new technologies within broader debates on social and economic development. It was also the first UN summit to involve non-state actors as active participants in the Intergovernmental Plenary, rather than relegating them to observer status or alternative summit venues. Some scholars attribute this to the need to strengthen the legitimacy of global governance processes in light of the Seattle protests in 1999 by “taking into account the views of those organisations that mediate between the ‘bottoms’ and the ‘ups’” (Cammaerts 2005, pp. 2-3). Most attribute it to the technical nature of the subject matter, which required non-state expertise.

---

30 APC’s advocacy activities fall under the remit of both the communications and information policy and the women’s networking support program, but they are discussed in general terms here.

31 Similar legislation was enacted in New Zealand, Zimbabwe, Malaysia, Russia and Singapore. It became commonplace after the terrorist attacks of September 2001, which prompted many governments to prioritise security over civil liberties. The US Patriot Act enabled the government to access communication records by ‘generalising suspicion’ for the first time. Commercial Internet Service Providers, such as AT&T, facilitated Internet surveillance accordingly.

32 This view seems to be confirmed by the fact the WSIS did not set a precedent for other UN processes. The UN Conference on Climate Change that was held in Copenhagen in December 2009 is a
declared aim was for state, market and civil society actors "to develop a common vision and understanding of the Information Society, to better understand its scope and dimensions and to draw up a strategic plan of action for successfully adapting to the new society" (ITU 2003).

APC played an instrumental role in mobilising civil society participation in the WSIS through its role as a founding partner of the ‘Campaign for Communication Rights in the Information Society’ (CRIS). Such campaigns are usually defined as ‘transnational advocacy networks’, or “those relevant actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services” (Keck & Sikkink 1998, p. 2). The CRIS campaign was launched in October 2001 by a consortium of media activists known as the ‘Platform for Communication Rights’, which formed in 1996 in response to the increased concentration of ownership and control of the media, including the Internet. Members emphasise “the need to defend and deepen an open public space for debate and actions that build critical understanding of the ethics of communication, democratic policy development, and equitable and effective access.” They agree “to work for the Right to Communication to be recognised and guaranteed as fundamental to securing Human Rights founded on principles of genuine participation, social justice, plurality and diversity and which reflect gender, cultural and regional perspectives” (Platform for Communication Rights 1996).

The WSIS provided the first opportunity for the Platform for Communication Rights to rally international support for its cause, picking up where developing country governments left off in the 1970s and 80s in the battle for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) (Calabrese 2004; Mueller, et al. 2007; Padovani 2005; Thomas 2006). Mueller et al. (2007, p. 274) claim it “viewed the absence of popular, ‘on-the-ground’ support as responsible for the failure of the NWICO initiatives two decades earlier and consciously thought of itself as the vanguard of an international social movement that might overcome those obstacles by bringing together popular movements.” To this end, they argue it used “the ideology of communication rights” as “a free floating norm” or “framing tactic” to bring together liberals, neo-Marxists, feminists and social democrats to ensure human rights and social issues were confronted at the WSIS (p. 291). By glossing over differences, they argue that “CRIS seemed to be animated by two simple objectives: 1) a desire to mobilise the kind case in point. 1052 private sector and civil society actors were admitted to sessions of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change as ‘observers’ only (UNFCCC 2009).

33 Founding members include APC, Inter-Press Service, AMARC (World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters), the International Women’s Tribune Centre, and the now defunct Videazimut – a coalition of about 75 individuals and organisations from 35 countries in all continents.
of transnational activist networks and NGOs with which it was familiar and compatible, and 2) a desire to ensure that those networks and NGOs would be heard in WSIS deliberations. Its plans thus emphasised opportunities for mobilisation and structures for self-organisation and self-expression, but avoided almost completely the problem of creating mechanisms for legitimate representation and collective decision-making” (p. 286).

The role of CRIS organisers in determining the modalities for civil society participation in the WSIS has been well documented. At the first preparatory meeting in July 2002, they formed a ‘Civil Society Plenary’, “a completely open physical and virtual assembly, which nominally held the role of “the ultimate civil society authority in the WSIS process” (Mueller et al. 2007, p. 282). This was augmented by self-formed regional and thematic caucuses, which produced statements on behalf of civil society. These structures gained their legitimacy from their openness and transparency to anyone with an interest in participating and in possession of an e-mail address (Cogburn 2005). Another body ‘imposed’ on civil society at the second preparatory meeting lacked the same qualities. The controversial ‘Civil Society Bureau’ was intended to be a formal body to interface with the WSIS Secretariat and Government Bureau. It was hailed by UN administrators for enabling civil society to participate in WSIS meetings more or less as peers to states, but it was viewed by CRIS organisers as a means to bypass the informal structures (see Ó Siochrú 2005). They pressed to limit its authority and partly succeeded in that goal, with the responsibility for the production of statements remaining with the caucuses, but control over tangible resources, such as meeting rooms and entry passes into plenary sessions, going to the Bureau. “There was a thus major disjunction between “bottom-up” civil society, with its organically evolved structures formed in response to the entrepreneurial efforts of the advocacy network led by CRIS, and ‘top-down’ civil society, the structure created and recognised by the UN bureaucracy” (Mueller et al. 2007, p. 284).

In an empirical analysis of the informal civil society structures in WSIS 1, Cogburn (2004, p. 22) explains that nearly all decisions were made by consensus to ensure “the ideological issues that hold [a broad diversity of interest groups] together are adequately represented by statements emanating in the name of civil society”. He explains how “geographically distributed knowledge work” was facilitated by these groups using little more than email lists hosted by APC members due to their “high level of collaboration readiness”, as signified by high levels of trust and goodwill among participants (p. 35). However, he also cites tensions arising from the fact that very few could afford to attend WSIS meetings in person, let alone

34 See for example, special issues of Information and Communication Technologies and International Development (No. 3-4, 2004), Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies (No. 3, 2004), Global Media and Communication (No. 3, 2005), and Media Development (No. 3, 2004).
the actual conference. A limited number of predominantly Northern professionals from UN accredited NGOs thus became their self-selected representatives in formal policymaking venues. Mueller et al. (2007, p. 264) argue that the informal structures “did not come to grips with the structural and political problems posed by the need to institutionalise participation by non-state actors in international policy making.” They argue “This model of decentralised, voluntarist caucuses held together by email lists and consensual decision making in an open plenary was workable only insofar as participation was confined to a small and ideologically compatible group of transnational advocacy groups. As soon as these structures were confronted with larger-scale participation and real ideological and political differences, they proved unwieldy or broke down” (p. 284).

These issues came to a head at the first preparatory meeting for WSIS 2 in June 2004. CRIS and its supporters contested the controversial choice of Tunisia as the host country for the conference due to the government’s overt suppression of political dissent. In particular, they contested the Tunisian government’s decision to ban a planned civil society meeting in which a local human rights activist was poised to present. Their protests prompted a large number of pro-government NGOs to infiltrate the civil society camp, which subsequently lost much of the unity that had sustained cooperation between participants during in WSIS 1. APC’s Karen Banks (2005, p. 87) who chaired the Civil Society Plenary at the time described the meeting as “characterised by difference, division, and questions of identity and representation”. She criticised the way the WSIS Secretariat allowed undemocratic regimes to exclude some civil society groups while permitting the accreditation of “a well-organised, pro-government civil society lobby from Tunisia that has continuously suppressed any references to human rights abuses by the Tunisian government and successfully exacerbated friction among civil society, particularly along North-South lines, by skilfully playing the race card” (p. 86).

The question of legitimacy subsequently became a central point of contention within civil society at large, with many opposing the centralisation of increasingly divided civil society voices in the WSIS process.35 Mueller et al. (2007) argue that the absence of formal decision-making mechanisms ground away at the legitimacy of the informal civil society structures. In a postcolonial critique, Chakravartty (2007, p. 307) suggests the crisis was indicative of the limitations of an “institutionally bounded version of ‘official’ civil society” as a universal category for ‘democracy from below’. She argues the CRIS campaign was embedded within

---

35 The central point of contention was between progressive and conservative civil society groups. The former resented the inclusion of pro-government and pro-industry lobby groups in the civil society camp (Ó Siochrú 2003; 2004). The latter included liberal individualists like the World Press Freedom Committee, which are “pathologically opposed to the notion of communication rights” (Thomas 2006).
this framework in which the state is positioned on top versus civil society below, which derives from idealised liberal democracies in the North. She claims this vertical topography of power does not apply in much of the developing world where establishing the global terms for a more equitable information society is widely seen to rest with the state. By emphasising human rights, she argues CRIS provided fodder for developed countries to criticise developing countries, while neglecting the redistributive concerns that are most important to them, such as financing access to ICT and revising the intellectual property rights regime. Explanations for CRIS’ lack of influence in these areas are legion. They range from analyses of geopolitical and economic power disparities to the lack of participation by Southern CSOs. Cogburn (2004) argues the answers are most likely a combination of these factors. He states, “What we do know is that simply participating in these policy formation processes does not automatically lead to impact or effective participation” (p. 16).

Against this backdrop, APC moved from what might broadly be characterised as a utopian to a reformist approach to policy advocacy. Many CRIS organisers felt betrayed by the lack of impact of civil society discourses on WSIS 1 and withdrew from WSIS 2. They criticised the official declaration and action plan adopted for being too limited, and the process for not being as inclusive as it claimed (see Ó Siochrá 2004). Some of the more radical campaign supporters began congregating around the ‘Incommunicado project’, which was conceived as an alternative space for civil society groups that opposed “an organisational incorporation of grassroots or subaltern agendas into the managed consensus being built around the dynamic of an ‘international civil (information) society’” (Zehle & Livink 2005). In contrast, APC (2003, pp. 5-6) hailed WSIS 1 as “a watershed in the process of public participation in the ICT4D debate, and in ICT policies more generally. […] The multi-stakeholder nature of the WSIS, flawed as it was in practice, established an important principle and created a space for networking and collaboration between very diverse individuals and institutions from government, civil society and business at national level. For APC this means that we have a strong basis from which to ensure that in our ICT policy work the value of global networking and the inclusion of civil society contributes to empowerment and positive change where it can really make a difference – at the local level”.

In an empirical study of civil society perspectives of WSIS 1, (Cammaerts 2005, p. 20) reveals that general opinions mirrored those of the CRIS partners described above, with “some fiercely critical, describing the WSIS participatory rhetoric as window-dressing, a ‘fig-

leaf” to legitimise a process that did not have the citizens in mind for whom it is intended, others hopeful, proud of what has already been achieved, with a realist and reformist attitude to social change.” Firmly positioned in the latter camp, APC’s approach to WSIS 2 was characterised by more pointed efforts to articulate independent policy positions reflecting the needs and concerns of its members and close partners. An independent evaluation of the Communication and Information Policy program explains this shift in terms of “facilitating participation of others to paying more attention to position rather than process” (Budlender 2006, p. 18). This is evident from a subtle adjustment to the program goal in 2004. The original goal was to “Build more inclusive ICT decision-making processes by facilitating civil society engagement through building their capacity and supporting advocacy at national and international levels”, but it was modified to “Build more inclusive ICT decision-making processes by facilitating civil society engagement through the improvement of its participants’ capacity and supporting advocacy at national and international levels” (APC 2004, p. 14; 2005, p. 11 emphasis added).

In preparation for WSIS 2, APC was invited to participate in two UN-convened multi-stakeholder panels devoted to exploring issues on the conference agenda: the UN Task Force on Financial Mechanisms, which focused on financing access to ICT in the South; and the Working Group on Internet Governance, which focused on how the Internet should be managed. APC’s inclusion in these spaces was indicative of the “high esteem and profile gained by APC during WSIS 2003” (Budlender 2006, p. 20). However its experience sheds light on the political complexity of its new focus on ‘position’ rather than ‘process’, which occasionally pits it against other civil society groups that have also earned the ‘right’ to represent civil society in these spaces. For example, APC struggled along with other civil society participants in the Task Force on Financial Mechanisms to challenge the prevailing wisdom espoused by most state and market actors in the North that all that is needed to close the digital divide is the liberalisation of ICT policy environments in the South to facilitate foreign investment. It argued the Internet should be built on public interest principles to ensure affordable access for all, affirming the importance of competition, while emphasising the need for governance and incentives to aid in the creation of non-profit service providers in areas where markets have failed. APC attributed the fact that its position was not widely accepted to “a climate characterised by one-dimensional views: market fundamentalism from state and market actors; and anti-business, anti-liberalisation from CSOs” (APC 2005, p. 5).

By the conclusion of WSIS 2, APC was once again in agreement with the vast majority of CSOs that the concrete outcomes were unremarkable. However, it celebrated the decision adopted by governments to establish a new public policy network, the Internet Governance
Forum (IGF), as a means of continuing global policy dialogue between the state, market and civil society actors that had participated in the WSIS process on matters relating to the ongoing development of the Internet. APC has been able to play a prominent role in the IGF largely due to the breadth of its mandate and technical prowess, which distinguishes it from most other CSOs in the ICT arena. Mueller et al. (2007, p. 291-2) explain, “APC’s network of affiliated organisations involves and incorporates actors from nearly all communication-information policy issues, and its network contains an unusual degree of technical knowledge. […] unlike other CRIS-related groups they did not ignore or avoid Internet governance because of the unfamiliar and technical nature of the institutions and issues, but became involved in ICANN civil society fairly early on. Thus, when the WSIS debates shifted toward Internet governance APC alone was well prepared to handle it.”

These features have made APC an influential player in the hotly contested realm of ‘official’ civil society in the post-WSIS period. Its involvement is underpinned by the assumption that multi-stakeholder institutions and processes promote participatory learning, problem solving, and the potential for collective action. However it is also underpinned by the assumption that substantive gains will only be made at the local level. Indeed, this is the most significant outcome of the WSIS from APC’s perspective because it has galvanized civil society interest in ICT policy, particularly in the South. Thus, it argues that the outcomes “impact more in the virtual areas of networking, and political debate than in the area of concrete decisions. Wider political debate, and the extensive multi-dimensional networking and relationship building produced by a four-year process are significant, and could potentially set all kinds of changes and actions in motion” (APC 2006, pp. 9-10).

Many communications policy researchers explicitly or implicitly praise APC for creating synergies between transnational and national advocacy networks, which they cite as evidence of politics from above and below simultaneously sowing the seeds of a global movement on ICT policy issues (Calabrese 2004; Mueller, et al. 2007; Padovani 2005; Thomas 2006). This they argue is changing the climate for policymaking in both the developed and developing worlds. In contrast, Chakravartty (2007, p. 304-5) argues that APC’s “separation of ‘inside’ versus ‘outside’ institutional arenas, or working from both the ‘top’ and the ‘bottom’” takes for granted that CSOs are more representative of the public interest than governments. She says, “This model of local “empowerment” aims to improve expertise in technical areas and is surely a benefit for a range of Southern organisations having to adapt to the new development prioritisation of ICTs in the context of the WSIS. Nevertheless, [she argues] that we need to question the pedagogic role of CSOs with the assumption that more training and resources for local organisations in the area of ICTs will inevitably lead to greater public interest
intervention modelled after Northern campaigns. This paternalistic understanding of the role of civil society organisations in shaping policy takes for granted the vertical topography of power, which pits state institutions (on top) against CSOs (from below) both in the transnational and national arenas” (p. 305).

Both analyses assume that APC is an internally coherent organisation that offers an essentially top-down model of support for ICT policy advocacy, aimed at fostering participation by CSOs in the formal political world to counterbalance state and market power. This ignores the inherently political nature of the environment in which APC operates as a knowledge network of a broad range of Southern CSOs with diverse priorities and needs. This heterogeneity is reflected in its non-prescriptive approach to capacity building discussed earlier, which aims to address obstacles to online networking by an equally broad range of Southern civil society groups, with a view to helping them to meet their own development goals, however defined. Through these activities, APC nurtures civil society politics on multiple fronts. It is wrong to assume that it is entirely policy driven or that it promotes a single model for change. A more pressing concern in my opinion is the extent to which APC has addressed the priorities of its predominately Southern members and how their priorities intersect with Southern CSOs outside its formal network borders. The remainder of this case study draws on qualitative insights from key stakeholders in Africa, Asia and Latin America to shed practical light on this question.

6.4 Pulls and Pushes, Cross-Flows and Currents

For the most part, APC is unified by the shared political objectives of its members, but it is not immune from internal tensions, which inevitably arise when autonomous organisations come together in support of common goals. Indeed, internal tensions are arguably heightened in knowledge networks like APC, which function as delivery mechanisms for donor-funded projects. This feature saw the number of APC staff grow from just one in the early 1990s to a team of twenty in 2008. APC staff are responsible for program implementation, but they are unable to implement an agenda independently of members. Knowledge networks that aim to increase the access and impact of Southern voices in public policy debates need to be member owned and driven to avoid becoming beholden to donor-driven agendas (Stone 2005). However, decentralised decision-making produces tensions, not only between members, but also between members and staff who must action their priorities with little independent funding. APC’s Executive Director, Anriette Esterhuysen described the complexities of managing APC’s operations in this environment, which is characterised by ‘all kinds of pulls and pushes, cross-flows and currents’. She said:
APC is both a network and an organisation. So it’s a network – the members set the strategy, but it’s also an organisation that implements the vision as defined by the members through programs. So it’s very dynamic, but there are all kinds of pulls and pushes, cross-flows and currents. It can be quite difficult to maintain it because one of APC’s greatest strengths is also what makes it very challenging and that is that the members have a very high degree of ownership. They feel very entitled in the sense that it is a network so accountability has to be very strong from what the programs are doing to what the members believe and need and want.

Several interviewees described internal tensions arising from what might be termed staff pragmatism’ and ‘member idealism’. Esterhuysen provided an anecdote that exemplified these tensions well when she recounted a debate between APC staff and members over the best way to use an institutional strengthening grant to upgrade the Intranet to incorporate online payment and financial reporting, as well as more robust internal communications functionality. Some staff were of the opinion that proprietary software would have provided the most practical and cost effective solution to APC’s needs, but many members were unwilling to consider proprietary solutions because they felt it would undermine their commitment to the open source software movement. Expressing her frustration with the rigidity of that outlook, Esterhuysen said:

In terms of our priorities, we strongly support open source, but if the open source movement is going to become so doctrinaire and prescriptive in condemning anyone who uses any proprietary software then I think that defeats the purpose because the real power of open source is that it undermines monopoly by offering users of technology choice. So if that choice element is eliminated, I think that is problematic.

APC had not settled on a strategy for the Intranet upgrade at the time of my field study, but staff were building an inventory of possible solutions for the new system, which went live in conjunction with a website overhaul in June 2008. New internal communications functionality may have alleviated some of the tensions between APC staff and members, which several interviewees attributed to the lack of an integrated workspace to support network-wide communications. The old Intranet served primarily as a document repository. A private ‘wiki’, or collaborative website that allows users to create and edit online content, provided an integrated workspace for APC staff who are not co-located, but work virtually from their home countries spanning most parts of the world. However there was no equivalent space for APC staff and members to engage with each other virtually, other than in their

---

37 The Intranet is accessible via a private gateway on the APC website (http://www.apc.org).
capacity as project partners. Staff used a combination of online chat and ‘Voice over IP’ technology to conduct weekly meetings. They used the same tools to meet with the Executive Board (eight elected representatives of the APC Council) once a month, but their engagement with the APC Council (two representatives per member organisation) was limited to sporadic mailing lists and face-to-face conferences held once every two years when most of the network’s strategic planning takes place.

The new Intranet has the potential to bridge the communications gap between APC staff and members by offering new online forums for knowledge sharing. For the most part, however, the emphasis is on assisting members to engage with each other outside the auspices of APC projects. This follows from the fact that members are highly segmented along programmatic lines, with the vast majority of knowledge sharing occurring within project teams that involve CSOs both inside and outside of APC’s formal network borders and aggregate around the regional level. Esterhuysen described network integration as a key management priority, and this is reflected in the new system design, which aims to promote more generalised networking activity. She said:

Integration has always been one of my key goals. It’s really hard to measure how lively the network is at the moment because it’s become so segmented where you have the members that are interested in policy talking to one another, the ones that are working in strategic use talking to one another, and not a lot of just generalised networking activity. But it’s hard to keep the network organic and flowing because different members want different things.

Only time will tell if the new system has the desired effect, given that segmentation is intentioned by the diverse priorities of members. Additional impediments to generalised networking activity mirror those explored in the previous case study on UNDP. They arise from the fact that members work in around 15 different languages. The official working language of APC is English, but English-speaking members are in the minority. “There are many members that really struggle with English” according to Esterhuysen who stated, “It’s really an issue for our workspaces and our decision-making spaces, but how do you deal with it?” In the past, APC offered simultaneous English-Spanish translation at biennial face-to-face meetings to cater for the large number of Spanish-speaking CSOs in Latin America. However, it later abandoned that practice ‘because it advantages the Spanish speakers and does not necessarily disadvantage, but certainly excludes, it’s almost a double exclusion then for the non-English, non-Spanish speakers’ Esterhuysen explained. Summing up the resultant conundrum, she said, “If you work in English you exclude people, but what can you do? We can’t afford to work in all the languages that are in the APC.’
6.4.1 The Unequal Benefits of Participation

Interestingly, the need to promote more generalised networking activity was not considered a priority by any of the member representatives interviewed. They described the main benefit of participation not in terms of the opportunity to engage in knowledge sharing with other members *per se*, but the opportunity to become involved in APC projects and capacity building workshops as a means to forge new connections with other CSOs in country or region. In other words, they sought new business opportunities to pursue their mission in collaboration with other CSOs in their language domain. Most members were interested in participating in projects to facilitate access to ICT tools, but some were also interested in participating in policy-related projects. Most donor funding for projects in both areas is not specific to members, but expects the inclusion of non-members to ensure that project partners are the most qualified for the job. Most members have extensive experience developing ICT tools and dominate APC projects in that area, but fewer have experience in ICT policy. Several interviewees implied that the inclusion of non-members in policy-related projects is consequently a source of tension for some members with an interest in gaining experience in the policy arena who feel they should be given preference to participate. One said:

*There are some members who feel very strongly that APC should spend a lot more time soliciting APC member participation in the policy related projects because many members are so caught up in implementation that not as many that would like to be involved in policy are necessarily involved in it.*

It would however be erroneous to assume that APC’s policy-related projects are dominated by well-established NGOs with extensive experience in that area. APC has provided an important gateway for many smaller CSOs to gain relevant experience in service delivery. Most notably, it secured seed funding for twelve members to create national ICT Policy Monitor websites in 2004-6, and many have since become recognised experts in that field.38 These opportunities have tended to privilege members that are well connected in regions lacking strong APC presence, with a view to leveraging their networks to mobilise civil society participation in ICT policy. Like APC, many are virtual organisations that lack physical offices. For example, the South Asian information network BytesforAll was contracted to develop the Asian ICT Policy Monitor in 2005 and was later granted seed funding to develop the Bangladesh and Pakistan ICT Policy Monitors, which have since become focal points for the growing number of CSOs now working on ICT policy issues in

---

38 A list of APC members that received seed funding to set up national ICT Policy Monitor websites is available at: [http://www.rights.apc.org/policy_sites_list.shtml](http://www.rights.apc.org/policy_sites_list.shtml).
those countries. Partha Pratim-Sarker who is the co-founder of BytesforAll and represents that organisation on the APC Council indicated that its unique position as one of the few APC members in South Asia with strong connections in the ICT4D sector almost certainly surpassed its non-existent ICT policy expertise as the key determinant of its ability to partner with APC on those projects. He said:

*From a business perspective it is interesting for us because APC doesn’t have that much presence in South Asia and BytesforAll is very active in South Asia so we brought in the value of our network in that region. So now we can partner with APC on different projects focusing on South Asia. Many international organisations don’t want us to be a member because they think we don’t have any established policies, something like that. But when people know that we are working with APC, it opens up doors of opportunities to work with other organisations in our region. It definitely gives us a competitive edge in terms of doing work with them. [...] Policy is a new area for us, which we’ve been encouraged to participate in. We’re getting more and more interested in policy issues because, in the end, it is an important foundation for many other things. But before we joined APC, we were more active in other areas.*

Several interviewees claimed that location is also a crucial determinant of members’ abilities to participate in APC’s capacity building workshops. These involve CSOs in field-testing and adapting resources produced by project partners to ensure their relevance in diverse organisational and cultural contexts, while also equipping them to join the network of practitioners capable of applying them to their work. Natasha Primo who was Executive Director of the South African feminist network, Women’sNet, and Chair of APC’s Executive Board at the time of my interview explained that most donor funding for capacity building workshops is specified in terms of region, with the vast majority going to Africa. This is a key source of tension for members in other regions. She said:

*There is a lot more money for capacity development activities in Africa than say for example Latin America, so African members might be a lot more satisfied with APC’s performance than Latin American members might be. So there’s unevenness in the network in terms of member perceptions about how APC is faring.*

Variations in the regional distribution of workshops have important implications for members in their role as project partners. In this context, several member representatives portrayed these events as crucial to build new connections with other CSOs, with a view to working towards common goals. Maicu Alvarado who is the Director of the ICT for Development Office for Peruvian NGO, CEPES, claimed they allow members to spread their ‘*convictions*’. 
He said, ‘the politics of APC is very democratic. It isn’t so much about empowering the small number of organisations within the network, but extending the members’ knowledge to everybody.’ This statement has obvious implications for members seeking to mobilise support for advocacy campaigns, but Alvarado was actually referring to the opportunity to further the open source software movement, thereby highlighting the multiple ways in which APC continues to nurture civil society politics. He explained how CEPES had secured funding to host a capacity building workshop for wireless community network operators in Latin America due to its role as a partner on an APC project. The purpose was to train participants how to use a modified version of the ActionApps software, which CEPES had developed for use in an independent project in the Huaral Valley of Peru. He explained ‘That’s important because it will allow the farmers to obtain information from other systems that use the same tools not only here in Peru but also in other countries in our region.’ He further stated:

We have really found APC to be an organisation through which we can spread our convictions about this issue. APC has helped us to make many new connections with other APC members in our region and other Peruvian organisations that are also interested in using ICT for local development in rural areas. We are making the software we developed available to those organisations and we calling them here to share our experience so they can study our application of the ActionApps. Those spaces have been created by APC and it is very interesting for us because it has given us some common tools. So we are now speaking the same language.

The value of capacity building workshops was also emphasised by APC’s Executive Director Anriette Esterhuysen who claimed that places are in high demand, with applications often exceeding availability. She stressed that APC’s approach to broader capacity development, which focuses on placing ICT resources, stems from the tendency for most donor-funding for capacity building projects to be allocated towards disseminating reusable knowledge products, rather than creating ‘participatory learning spaces’. APC has sought to counter this preference by providing interactive forums on almost all of its project websites to facilitate knowledge sharing among CSOs around issues of common concern. However, Esterhuysen implied that this approach privileges more established NGOs that already have experience using ICTs for development and social change. In contrast, she claimed that capacity building workshops are essential to support the development and exchange of skills among grassroots CSOs that lack the same experience in order to help them identify ways to leverage ICT to link and coordinate their activities in pursuit of common goals. She said:

We feel very unhappy in fact about what’s happening in the whole training and capacity building field because donors are investing far less in it than they did.
There’s just such a great need not just for materials but also for participative learning spaces, for workshops, for onsite support, for follow up workshops. Materials on their own really only meet the need of a very specific type of user community. It’s so easy to put materials on the Internet and assume people are going to download them and use them that there’s been quite a move away from donors supporting face-to-face training to looking more at self-instructional materials and online distribution and I’m not sure how effective those are on their own.

These issues suggest that APC is facing an uphill battle to address its members’ priorities, which are broadly reflected in its programmatic structure. In particular, it has struggled to assist those seeking to become more involved in ICT policy due to the peculiarities of donor funding for ICT capacity building projects. This appears to privilege well-established or well-connected CSOs as project partners and favours using ICT to disseminate self-instructional training materials to target beneficiaries rather than providing spaces for them to engage in mutual learning. This criticism echoes the core limitation of the Solution Exchange initiative explored in the previous case study, which seeks to codify local knowledge based on practice into reusable knowledge products. Without the opportunity for recipients to engage with the information or deliberate how it might be used in different contexts, the potential for learning is limited. In this case, participatory spaces for knowledge sharing are seen as crucial to enable joint action and campaigns by grassroots CSOs. APC has sought to create numerous online spaces of this nature, but face-to-face interactions are seen as an essential ingredient for grassroots CSOs seeking to appropriate ICT for development and to influence the policy frameworks that govern their use.

### 6.4.2 The Price of Solidarity

Constraints on internal communication deriving from linguistic constraints rather than over reliance on ICT undoubtedly affected the ability of some members to contribute to APC’s policy agenda during the WSIS. Several member representatives claimed that contributions to email lists devoted to WSIS-related matters followed from resources, with members involved in policy-related projects unsurprisingly among the most active contributors. Among the least active contributors were members whose own work focuses primarily on facilitating access to ICT tools. In this camp, a little recognised division was apparent between CSOs who sought to become more involved in the formal political world and those who did not. Among those who did not, one questioned the opportunity cost of APC’s involvement in the WSIS due to the perceived lack of impact on people directly facing development challenges where they implied resources would be better spent. However, they did not convey this position to the
network, deeming the effort required to do so as outweighing the potential impact on APC’s agenda, which was widely supported by other members. S/he said:

_We are not convinced that international meetings are very effective in terms of getting governments of developed countries to do something positive for us. [...] I think a lot of time is spent discussing issues at the intergovernmental level. I think these are spaces where you cannot win anything, discussing with governmental representatives of developed countries like the US. I don’t know what we can do sitting at a table with those people. I think that we have to spend time in an efficient way because we have so many things to do here. Maybe we have to stop wasting time, spending money to cover people to go to different countries. [...] I don’t know if we totally agree with the way in which APC is facing the problem._

For the vast majority of members with an expressed interest in ICT policy, APC was seen to provide a valuable link to the global governance process where many could otherwise only dream of making their voices heard. However several interviewees admitted that internal discussions concerning WSIS-related matters were not without tensions, mostly stemming from the same concerns explored in Section 4.3.3 whereby relatively few members could afford to attend WSIS meetings in person. APC established a travel policy fund for its partners in the ICT Policy Monitor projects to attend regional preparatory meetings so they could learn, network and build visibility for their own areas of interest, but this left many other members wanting. Like the informal structures that APC was so instrumental in creating to mobilise civil society participation in WSIS 1, interviewees nonetheless claimed that internal discussions were characterised by high levels of trust and goodwill, which is crucial for building consensus. Summing up this sentiment, Natasha Primo from Women’sNet said:

_There’s never a seamless integration of everybody into APC because there are member organisations that have slightly different agendas. So maybe not everyone will be happy with APC’s position. It’s either not strong enough or it’s too strong, but at least we can all talk around an issue and come to some sort of agreement. I don’t recall any one process where APC has taken a position that was sort of diametrically opposed or substantially opposed to what a member organisation has taken._

There is of course a possibility that dissenting views were not expressed in these discussions due to the general climate of congeniality, which theoretically gave all members the opportunity to have their say, but was underwritten by the assumption that consensus-based positions would be reached. Carlos Saldarriaga who is the Technical Coordinator for CEPES and represents that organisation on the APC Council lamented the fact that he had not been
able to contribute more actively due to other more pressing demands on his time. However, he expressed uncertainty about the impact of disagreement in an environment that was clearly intended to facilitate the development of consensual knowledge. He said:

_I am not participating in the discussions. I read the messages though. I agree with some points and I don’t agree with others. But I don’t know what will be the reaction if I tell other members ‘I don’t agree with you.’ I don’t know because I haven’t done that yet, but I will. I think it’s important for us to be more involved in those debates._

Uncertainty of this nature may have motivated some members seeking policy-related project experience to engage in a form of self-censorship to avoid antagonising prospective project partners. Whilst its impact on the diversity of contributions to the discussions cannot therefore be discounted, Partha Pratim Sarker from BytesforAll who was a novice in policy development at the outset of the WSIS process suggested that concern about disagreement was unfounded. On the contrary, he implied that APC staff respect members for their local knowledge of ICT policy issues that are of most concern to people in their locality and thus welcome conflict as an opportunity to forge positions that will be persuasive to governments. Their challenge when engaging in global policy debates is to ensure that the views expressed by members from diverse country contexts are adequately reflected in position statements, which are sent to APC Councillors for endorsement. He said:

_**My feeling is that APC is very accommodating in terms taking the views of different members into account. If there is divergence in policy discussions, that divergence is well accommodated so it’s not a problem. APC respects us a lot in terms of taking a view from South Asia because they know we are from South Asia, so we know better than them what is happening here and what would be the best outcome for our region. So if there are areas where I disagree, I can negotiate and explain my position. We really don’t have that much divergence, but the practice is so participatory to accommodate any divergence if it did occur.**_

A more pressing concern for most members was the extent of the divergences in the impact of APC’s role in the WSIS in their particular locality. In line with trends described in Section 4.3.3, APC’s Executive Director, Anriette Euysterson, described the key outcome of the WSIS as opening up new spaces for CSOs to engage in constructive lobbying around ICT policy issues at the local level. She attributed this to partnerships formed by civil society and government representatives at WSIS meetings, which had resulted in numerous new venues for formal policy dialogue around ICT issues at the regional and national levels. She
attributed the fact that these ‘positive spin off effects’ were highly uneven to variations in civil society’s ‘follow through’. She said:

\[I \textit{think the quality of the difference or the impact depends on the extent to which people are leveraging their presence in the global spaces to follow through at the national level. I think that’s why APC has been such a powerful actor in this process because we are able to do that. Many of the people that we have brought to Geneva from our members and close partners are now quite actively involved at the national level. Where that will go is a different story but at least we’ve opened up some of the spaces at national level as a result of WSIS.}\]

The only member representative interviewed that attended the WSIS conference in Geneva is Natasha Primo from Women’s Net, which has since become involved in ICT policy processes in South Africa. She claimed that opportunities to participate in these spaces had flowed more or less directly from the WSIS, stating ‘our own capacity to lobby around ICT issues definitely increased because of our participation at the international level’. This has obvious implications for APC members that could not afford to attend WSIS meetings in person, but suggests that the connections forged by those fortunate enough to attend has set a precedent for multi-stakeholder consultations around ICT policy issues in some countries. While the capacity of CSOs to lobby governments does not depend on these spaces, they are indicative of increased receptivity among decision-makers to engage with civil society proposals (Carden 2009; Chowdhury, et al. 2006). Primo thus described what was arguably the optimal outcome of the WSIS for APC members with an interest in ICT policy. She said:

\[There’s much greater realisation at the national level about the value of a discussion around ICTs, which there was much less of before the WSIS. So there’s more of an environment to begin to do constructive lobbying and advocacy where someone actually listens rather than talking into the wind.\]

Without discounting substantive achievements of this nature, APC’s involvement in the formal political world has been met with mixed responses by its members. Its participation in the WSIS did not enjoy consistently strong support. Nor did its contribution to that process reflect the sum total of local knowledge, experience and ideas from its members with an expressed interest in ICT policy. Rather, it reflected the needs and concerns of members with both the means and the confidence to steer online discussions in an environment that was by all accounts characterised by high levels of trust and good will. APC’s role in the WSIS has also produced extremely mixed results for members, based on a combination of its delegates’ capacities to build enduring relationships with policymakers and on the decision-making
regime in different countries. The ‘best case scenario’ described above also calls attention to the question of legitimacy that APC was forced to confront at the WSIS.

6.4.3 The Struggle for Legitimacy & Representation

APC was at the heart of ‘official civil society’ when the question of legitimacy became a central point of contention within civil society at large. Recall that one thread in the critique espoused by Leftist Groups that began questioning the hidden costs of invitations to sit at the negotiation table alongside state and market actors after WSIS 1, was that civil society participation was used to legitimise an illegitimate process. APC’s Executive Director, Anriette Esterhuysen, was confronted with this argument when she chaired a session on ‘NGO Accountability’ at the first conference of the Incommunicado project held in Amsterdam in 2005. Her response echoes the policy literature, which recognises that policymaking takes place within communities of people who know and trust each other, and interact to create or contest shared knowledge on policy (e.g. Stone 2005; Carden 2009). In this view, CSOs have more to gain by critiquing policy proposals from inside these communities rather than lobbying decision-makers from outside them. Recalling the exchange, she said:

Some of the core themes and the sentiments of most of the participants were that UN processes are illegitimate, that the WSIS is an illegitimate process and therefore that networks and organisations who chose to use that forum are suspect. What I felt I heard was quite a defeatist type of critique saying that civil society organisations are easily incorporated and their presence in decision-making spaces legitimises those spaces and doesn’t contribute to any kind of change. That’s a critique that we’ve been quite conscious of – does our participation in these spaces legitimise them? The answer is yes to some extent. It is useful for the UN to say we had this civil society organisation at the table when this decision was made. They do use that, and they use it in quite a cheap way quite often. But we would still, even reflecting on that very critically, maintain that we can ultimately have more impact by working within policy processes than by staying outside them. [...] We also feel that ICT policy processes are quite open, it’s still quite new and unformed so we feel it’s actually quite risky to stay outside.

The other thread in the critique is part of a broader debate on the legitimacy of CSOs as representatives of the public interest in the formal political sphere. Recall that many activists view ‘old world politics’ as inherently corrupt. In their view, the only legitimate representatives of the public interest are informal networks and social movements that engage
in disruptive activities to challenge state and market power. For many policy researchers, the key challenge is for CSOs to stimulate inclusive practices that they then carry into the formal political sphere. Several interviewees argued that the former position ‘unintentionally borders on a right wing critique’. One said, ‘they make similar arguments to what governments say when they try to keep human rights groups out of policymaking’. In line with the latter camp, they variously likened legitimacy to being ‘participatory, open and transparent’ and ‘in touch with local realities’. Esterhuysen said:

For all their flaws civil society organisations bring more diversity of perspectives and opinions to discussion spaces and decision making spaces, policy and otherwise. And therefore we think it is important to facilitate their participation. If there are issues of legitimacy or lack of them being in touch with their local realities, setting themselves up as representing grassroots communities or citizens when in fact they’re not – in a sense that’s another issue. It is an issue, it’s an ongoing discourse and an ongoing issue, where do civil society organisations in South Africa stand as to what’s happening in South Africa and there’s no one answer to that because it’s different for every organisation and different for every sector.

Certainly APC sought to represent the local realities of its members and close partners at the WSIS. Despite the limitations of internal policy deliberations already explored, its transparency and accountability to them were never in doubt. Indeed, APC’s aspirations for transparency and accountability arguably extended well beyond its formal network borders to other CRIS campaigners in WSIS 1. That was an impossible task that left it battered and bruised. Unsatisfied with the impact of civil society discourses on the outcomes, many CRIS campaigners criticised APC for not only choosing to stick with the process, but for participating in new UN-convened Task Forces’ within an already exclusive process. The legacy of that fallout was evident from many interviewees’ concern that APC was perceived as an influential Northern player falsely presenting itself as representative of bottom up civil society, a phenomenon Esterhuysen termed ‘attributed representivity’. She said:

We have been criticised a lot I think because we’ve been very visible in policy advocacy work and we’ve been getting a lot of negative feedback from others in the WSIS civil society space saying that we are this big international NGO that claims representivity. It’s been quite depressing in a way. But it has led us to realise how treacherous this whole terrain is and how easily a perception can be created that you claim representivity even if you don’t.
The withdrawal of CRIS campaigners coupled with APC’s ascendency to the most senior echelons of ‘official civil society’ arguably conspired to create this picture as discussions moved towards Internet governance in preparation for WSIS 2. In reality, when formulating its positions, APC remained very open to local knowledge, experience and ideas from its vast network of project partners, capacity building workshop participants, and contributors to online discussion forums on the ICT policy Monitor websites. It also remained an active participant in the informal civil society structures it helped to create. Miguel Saravia from Practical Action Latin America, which is not an APC member but is among its project partners, explained how APC’s receptivity and willingness to share lessons learned provided a valuable link to the global governance process for many Southern CSOs outside its formal network borders that were unable to attend the conferences in person. He said:

*APC has the opportunity to be engaged in larger processes. It is part of all of the processes of the World Summit of the Information Society and we aren’t. We haven’t the resources to do that. So if we can influence APC about our ideas; if we can say something and APC took these ideas into their own agenda, for us that is the reason we are partnering with them. Access to spaces to debate our positions; to share with them; to learn from them; and the possibility to partner with other organisations – these are the main benefits of our partnership with APC.*

APC’s high degree of openness by no means implies that it engaged with external CSOs on equal terms or that it was consistently viewed a trusted partner by them. To illustrate, a critical error of judgement by uncharacteristically ill-informed APC staff in 2000 has left an indelible scar on APC’s relationship with some CSOs in Latin America. The crisis occurred when the Executive Board approved a decision by APC Staff to approach the National Endowment for Democracy for a grant to support its early ICT policy advocacy activities. The National Endowment for Democracy is a quasi-governmental agency in the US, which is criticised for funding US-allied political interest groups to destabilise Leftist insurgencies and governments (Blum 2006). Several Latin American members opposed the grant on the grounds that it would appear as an indirect endorsement of its activities in their region. They left APC in protest, even though the APC Council agreed to return the grant. As testament to APC’s transparency, this incident is noted in its annual report (APC 2001, p. 72). One interviewee suggested it was indicative of little recognised tensions within the civil society camp during WSIS 1, despite its ostensible cohesiveness. S/he said:

*When you take a look at the civil society members in the WSIS, you discover that there are a lot of tensions, a lot of different interests, involved. You have many conflicts between different organisations and it’s very difficult to understand what is*
happening under the official issues. There are tensions and some relationships have been damaged. But when a task has to be done the task is done. We still work together. This is the fact. Sometimes things are slower because of these fears, but we eventually come together.

These trends underscore the complexity of formal politics for civil society, which struggled to come to terms with the need to entrust a few representatives to speak on behalf of a broad range of interest groups during WSIS 1. As an ardent supporter of bottom-up forms of self-organisation, APC was effectively accused of not ‘walking the talk’ as it consolidated its role in official civil society during WSIS 2. For critics, APC was part of a professionalised elite acting on behalf of a larger constituency with which its ties were marginal. In reality, APC was very open to local knowledge from grassroots CSOs outside its formal network borders. However its relations with its partners tended to be characterised by an extreme version of what Esterhuysen termed ‘pushes, pulls, cross flows and currents’ to describe internal dynamics. To quote Natasha Primo from Women’s Net, in this environment, the best APC could do was ‘engage with other civil society organisations around issues that are pertinent to members and try to work around those issues. That’s really the most it can claim.’ With concerns about legitimacy nonetheless likely to filter down to members that elect to pursue formal avenues for change at the local level, it seems apt to end on the note that “proximity and affinity to power do not, by necessity translate into policy influence” (Stone 2005, p. 13).

6.5 Summary of Findings

This case study explored the Association for Progressive Communications, a knowledge network of 52 predominantly Southern CSOs, which is arguably the peak civil society representative in multi-stakeholder institutions and processes in the ICT arena. I attributed APC’s capacity to flourish and gain influence in such an unlikely area to the peculiarities of its trajectory and the emergence of new development discourse concerning the value of civil society partnerships and policy dialogues for improving public policy. I traced APC’s origins to the pre-Internet era and the predominantly Northern NGO-owned and controlled online networking systems for what effectively amounted to the global justice movement in the 1980s and 1990s. It was during this period that the policy and activist literature converged in the ‘cyber-libertarian’ belief that ICT was leading to the emergence of a new liberating form of global civil society that would become powerful enough to counterbalance nation states in shaping the world from the bottom-up. I suggested that this analysis was partly a consequence of the interplay between APC’s democratic approach to infrastructure building and the politically progressive ideologies of the CSOs that inhabited its user base in this period.
The case study also explored APC’s metamorphosis into a knowledge network in the late 1990s when the cyber-libertarian era of optimism was all but laid to rest with the commercialisation of the Internet. Southern CSOs emerged as APC’s strongest members in both number and size in this period and assumed the balance of power in determining its new course. I argued that they leveraged APC’s reputation, technical expertise, and strong Southern representation to forge a programmatic framework that reflects their political objectives in the ICT arena. These revolve around building civil society capacity to appropriate ICT for development and social change through the provision of ICT tools intended to nurture civil society politics on multiple fronts. Although APC had long supported the use of ICT for this purpose, it was among the first media activists to recognise that democratic dialogue could not be assured on the new public access Internet. It subsequently began undertaking policy advocacy activities geared towards democratising nascent ICT policymaking venues and now plays a prominent role in those forums on the global stage.

I have argued that APC is for the most part united by the political objectives of its members, but tensions inevitably arise when autonomous organisations come together in support of common goals. These tensions appear to be heightened in APC due to its strong focus on service delivery. I have argued that the primary benefit of network participation for Southern CSOs is the opportunity to become involved in donor funded projects and capacity building workshops as a means to generate income and to collaborate with other CSOs in their country or region. These opportunities are unevenly distributed and this has produced variations in their perceptions as to how APC is faring. I suggested that internal tensions are partly the result of the peculiarities of donor funding for capacity building projects, which tend to privilege more established NGOs as project partners and favour using ICT to disseminate information rather than involve CSOs in participatory learning spaces. In this environment, APC has done well to secure seed funding for a handful of less traditional Southern CSOs to build ICT policy research and advocacy skills, but demand for funding persists. APC also has an impressive record in hosting capacity building workshops so that grassroots CSOs have the opportunity to appropriate ICT for their own political ends and to influence the policy frameworks that govern their use, but funding for this work is similarly constrained.

Following on from these trends, I have argued that APC has a highly inclusive approach to knowledge sharing with Southern CSOs both inside and outside of its formal network borders. However the vast majority of interactions take place within project teams where participants are united by their common interests and speak the same language. Some members seek to go beyond project-oriented interactions to advance their interest in ICT policy on the global stage by contributing to internal deliberations concerning APC’s policy
advocacy activities. Focusing specifically on the WSIS, I showed that not all members contribute to these discussions, with those involved in policy-related projects among the most active contributors. I also provided evidence to show that APC’s role at the WSIS did not enjoy consistently strong support from members who are the least active contributors to policy development. They are the ones whose own work focuses primarily on facilitating access to ICT tools. In examining external dynamics, I argued that APC remained very open to local knowledge from its vast network of partners, but this was not well recognised by critics who perceived its ascendency into the senior echelons of official civil society as somehow compromising its legitimacy. In line with Mueller et al. (2007, p. 264), I argued that their dismissal of APC’s success despite their overall disappointment with the lack of impact of civil society discourses on the outcomes of the WSIS is indicative of the failure by many CSOs to come to terms with the ‘structural and political problems posed by the need to institutionalise participation by non-state actors in international policymaking’.

From this perspective, the recent history of APC illustrates how a dynamic knowledge network with a small professional staff can effectively utilise ICT to receive, debate and distil local knowledge to influence the way in which emerging technologies are implemented and governed. Their strength relies on their professionalism and technical expertise but they must continually struggle for legitimacy among supporters and detractors particularly through their participation in formal policymaking venues as they attempt to balance competing donor, community and polemicist expectations. APC’s ability to gain influence as a predominantly South-South network in this environment is impressive. However its experience at the WSIS provides a valuable illustration of the complex knowledge politics in which Southern CSOs are enmeshed in seeking to improve the flow of local knowledge to the main decision-makers in development when their capacity to engage with decision-makers directly rests precisely on their ability to form an organisationally cohesive and politically united front. To this end, the importance for knowledge networks to create inclusive spaces for knowledge exchange and negotiation with external CSOs could not be more highly stressed. However tensions between these spaces, and the top-down forms of self-organisation required to voice civil society concerns in the formal political sphere make the production of consensus-based knowledge an endless dilemma for these actors, with no guarantee of policy impact.
Chapter 7

Case Study 3: Open Knowledge Network
7.0 Open Knowledge Network

This case study explores the Open Knowledge Network, a high-profile ‘ICT for development’ (ICT4D) project that was operational from December 2003 to October 2007. OKN described itself as “a human network, which uses information and communication technologies to allow poor and marginalised people in developing countries to create and exchange locally relevant content in their own languages” (OKN 2006). The overarching assumption that drove the project was that “local content development is closely tied to human development, and the ultimate aim of OKN [was] the empowerment of local communities.” This assumption builds on ideas put forward by a long line of communications rights scholars who argue the global communications imbalance is one of the most dependency inducing asymmetries between rich and poor countries and that ‘voice’ is a critical precondition for human development and social change (see Pasquali 2005). Being part of this tradition set OKN apart from the plethora of community networks that have been established since the late 1990s to support poverty reduction through the provision of external information. Although OKN shared the same overarching goal as most other community networks to provide poor and marginalised people with access to developmentally useful knowledge, it sought to do this by enabling them to create and exchange local content.

This starting point makes OKN an interesting case for exploring the potential of ICT4D projects to support greater inclusion and fuller participation of Southern stakeholders in aspects of the development project over which they previously had limited influence or control. While much of the literature explored in Chapter 3, Section 3.4, exalts this aspiration (e.g. Gandy 2002; Mansell 2002; McElhinney 2005; Tacchi, et al. 2009; Tachhi 2006; Van der Velden 2002b, 2004a), there are very few examples of globally oriented community networks that aim to put it into practice. With new projects reportedly seeking to emulate the concept, this case study aims to address the gap in the literature by contributing insight from this highly novel yet ultimately unsustainable initiative, which explicitly recognised the local knowledge, experience and ideas of poor and marginalised communities as a valuable resource in the fight against world poverty. As with previous case studies, the focus here is on OKN’s capacity to move this understanding into practice. The extent to which the initiative amplified local knowledge both inside and outside of its community of origin – and crucially to what ends – is critically explored with a view to uncovering tensions and constraints, which impeded it from empowering target beneficiaries as envisioned.

The case study is limited to consideration of OKN’s core efforts to support local content exchange through the creation of a global network of 15 community-based organisations, which supplied locally-relevant development information to poor and marginalised
communities through more than 200 telecentres across the developing world. It relied on peer-to-peer file sharing technology to allow member organisations and their ‘clients’ to create, exchange, and publish digital content on a multi-lingual web portal, but it also incorporated non-digital channels such as radio, newsletters, and notice boards to disseminate information in participating communities. The case study does not consider the affiliated ‘OKN Mobile’ project in Kenya, which became a separate commercial venture known as ‘Kazi 100’ in November 2005. That company uses mobile phone technology to deliver health and employment information to paying customers at the base of the pyramid via simple text messages. It delivers a predominantly one-way supply of information to beneficiaries and was therefore considered less pertinent to this research than OKN’s main activities, which sought to transform beneficiaries from content recipients into content providers.

The case study is divided into three main sections. The first explores the origins and goals of the project in order to contextualise the ensuing analysis of network activity. Focussing on internal trends, the second section explores the limitations of using ICT to promote local content exchange within poor and marginalised communities, despite it being by far the most dominant network activity. I will argue that the benefits of network participation were skewed in favour of content providers, rather than recipients. Further, they were contingent upon human-centred, rather than techno-centric network components, namely ‘community reporters’ who were employed to assist beneficiaries in local content production. The final section explores external factors that impeded local content exchange between different communities in the global network. Here, I will argue that most people mistrusted local content from communities with whom they lacked strong cultural ties. Further, there was no incentive for them to share valuable local knowledge with communities facing similar challenges elsewhere. Rather than interpreting these constraints as justification for OKN’s insularity, I will argue that they raise important questions about the appropriateness of reciprocity as the principal terms under which poor and marginalised people are asked to use ICT to contribute their knowledge, experience and ideas to the development project.

The case study is based on documentary analysis, ten in-depth interviews, and two focus groups, which were conducted between August and September 2005 when OKN was still operational. Four interviewees played leading roles in overseeing the project. They include the Global Coordinator who was based in London, the African Program Coordinator (Johannesburg), South Asian Program Coordinator (New Delhi), and Latin America Program Development Coordinator (Rio de Janeiro). Another four interviewees represented organisational members in Southern Africa and South Asia, including the Zimbabwean NGO, ‘Southern Alliance for Indigenous Resources’; the Indian NGO, ‘Datamation Foundation’;
and Indian social enterprises, ‘Drishtree’ and ‘TARAhaat’. In Latin America where OKN was striving to become operational, a representative from the regional arm of an international NGO that had applied for donor funding to join the project was interviewed. The final interviewee was the ‘community reporter’ for the SAFIRE-supported telecentre in the resettlement scheme of Nyamazura, Mutare, which serves a subsistence farming community some 200 kilometres southwest of Harare. A focus group was held with 16 women from a Muslim minority community served by the Datamation Foundation-supported telecentre in the high-density urban slum of Seelampur in northeast New Delhi. The second focus group was held with the manager and five individual users of a telecentre in Boza Aucallama, a remote farming community some 100 kilometres north of Lima, Peru. Participants provided insights from their experience using a more conventional community network, which were then extrapolated to OKN.

7.1 Background

OKN grew out of a number of inter-governmental bodies that were established in 2000 to make a concerted effort to close the digital divide, which was high on the global policy agenda at the time. The principal response of donor agencies prior to that was to strengthen the digital readiness of developing countries to get people ‘connected’ by increasing the accessibility and affordability of the Internet. This was typically attempted by making telecommunications links, Internet service providers and telecentres available where these facilities were thinly spread or absent. APC’s infrastructure-building activities in the 1990s are a typical example of this approach. With the new century came a turning point in the evolution of ICT4D projects, with donors paying more attention to the content and services the Internet could deliver (Roman & Colle, p. 86). Like most community networks spurred by the new focus on content, OKN was designed to support economic development through the provision of developmentally useful knowledge, but the way in which it sought to meet this challenge set it apart from the mainstream and ultimately sounded its death-knell when the donor-funded period came to an end.

The origins of OKN can be traced to the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland in 2000 when political leaders launched the Global Digital Divide Task Force, which was the first public policy network established to address ‘the challenge of bridging the global digital divide’. The Task Force developed a framework for action, which was submitted to the G8 Kyushu-Okinawa Summit in September of the same year. This prompted the G8 Heads of State to launch their own Digital Opportunity Task Force in a cooperative effort to identify concrete ways ‘to bridge the international information and knowledge divide’. It was the first attempt by the G8 to create an open forum for public
policy deliberation that was not limited to government and business representatives from member states, but included government, business and civil society representatives from member and non-member states alike. The approach was driven by new trends in global governance already explored, and the subsequent need to secure the views of developing countries as to how major bilateral donors could develop an action plan to extend digital opportunities to the South.

The Digital Opportunity Task Force, or ‘DOT Force’, as it was commonly known, presented its conclusions in a seminal report, “Digital Opportunities for All: Meeting the Challenge”, which was submitted to the G8 Genoa Summit of June 2001 (DOT Force 2001). The report reflected the dominant development rationality discussed in Chapter 3 whereby the international community placed enormous hope on the Internet to trigger and sustain economic growth in developing countries by enabling them to transform themselves into knowledge economies. It included a nine-point framework for action, known as the ‘Genoa Plan of Action’, which predictably focused on improving Internet accessibility and affordability in the South, presenting that technology as a “conduit for the spread of modernisation” (Shade 2003, p. 115). Action point eight was however exceptional in that it called for a “national and international effort to support local content and applications creation”, arguing that developing countries need to become producers, not merely consumers of online content (DOT Force 2001, p. 19). This made the DOT Force the first institution dominated by Northern donors to acknowledge that efforts to improve connectivity would be meaningless for the poor who would find little information of relevance to their lives and almost nothing in their own languages in the absence of a complementary investment in local content creation. The message was clear: connectivity is important, but content is king.

7.1.1 The Architects: The DOT Force Working Group on Local Content

The focus on local content is largely attributable to the DOT Force Working Group on Local Content, which was one of 43 groups to work on the plan. Most members went on to form the eight teams responsible for implementing the framework for action when the G8 established teams across all of the priority areas in October 2001. The Working Group was chaired by OneWorld International, an international NGO based in the UK, which was the first development organisation to embrace the Internet as an alternative media platform for Southern CSOs when the technology was still in its infancy in 1995 (Surman & Reilly 2003). The Working Group also included the International Institute for Communication and Development (a Dutch government foundation), the International Development Research Centre (a Canadian government foundation), DFID (the UK bilateral donor agency), CIDA (the Canadian bilateral donor agency), Accenture (a private sector multinational), The
Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard Law School (an American university-based research centre), and future high-profile member of OKN, the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (a prominent Indian NGO).

OneWorld’s leadership role is significant because it shaped OKN’s trajectory, which differed markedly from other high profile ICT4D projects, such as the Development Gateway which was also being implemented around this time to address what many critics describe as ‘perceived knowledge deficiencies’ at the industry level in the South (e.g. Jha, et al. 2004; McFarlane 2006; Mehta 1999, 2001; Samoff & Stromquist 2001; Schech 2002; Thompson 2004; Van der Velden 2002a, 2002b; Wilks 2001). This criticism is based on the Development Gateway’s original design as a centralised portal that drew on the Bank’s vast internal knowledge resources while manually filtering contributions from other stakeholders through the World Bank’s office in New York.39 In contrast, OneWorld hosts a decentralised portal that aggregates information from a decentralised network of more than 1,000 Southern CSOs, which agree to pool their online content and publish it under the OneWorld Banner in order to address what they perceive as the under-representation of Southern voices in the mainstream media’s portrayal of development-related issues (Surman & Reilly 2003).

The conflict between OneWorld’s participatory philosophy and the World Bank’s more technocratic approach first became apparent between February 2000 and August 2001 when the World Bank conducted a series of multi-stakeholder consultations concerning the planned direction of its proposal for the Development Gateway. According to Jha et al (2004 p. 4), many civil society participants were concerned about “the likelihood that such an initiative, started and supported by the World Bank, would filter through a Northern lens and thus bias the knowledge disseminated.” OneWorld was a particularly vocal critic during the consultations. It even submitted a proposal to the World Bank for an alternative network configuration based on peer-to-peer file sharing technology, which Maja van der Velden (2003, p. 12) who has produced several comparative research papers on the Development Gateway and OKN describes as “a deep democratisation of Internet-based technology” because there is no centralised editorial control over the type of knowledge that is shared (also see Van der Velden 2005a, 2006).

Although the World Bank rejected the proposal, it resurfaced as the basis of OneWorld’s contribution to the DOT Force Working Group on Local Content, which explored how CSOs in developing countries could leverage the Internet to create and exchange local content for

39 The World Bank has since provided funding to support the creation of nearly 50 interlinked country portals, which are independently operated by its developing country partners.
six months from October 2001 to March 2002, with financial support from DfID. OneWorld found a more receptive audience for the proposal in this forum, which shared its overarching concern that Southern voices were being crowded out by the ever-increasing flow of online content from the North. But rather than targeting CSOs that already had some sort of online presence, they sought to target grassroots CSOs and their ‘clients’ from poor and marginalised communities that were yet to make their voices heard on the web. The goal was to build the capacity of organisations that provided poor people with developmentally useful knowledge by enabling them to exchange and publish information on a multi-lingual web portal. The vision entailed connecting them to their own independent networks of telecentres so that their clients could browse the information offline using a purpose-built software application that would be customised for their needs. More importantly for the purposes of this research, they would also be able to contribute information to the global network, thus transforming them from knowledge recipients into knowledge providers.

The International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD) provided the rationale for the proposal when it undertook the first ever survey of what it referred to as ‘local content providers’, but are also known as ‘intermediaries’. They collect information from a wide range of sources, including but not limited to the Internet, and disseminate it in poor and marginalised communities via traditional communications channels (see J. James 2004). IICD conducted case studies of 26 pioneering NGOs, governmental agencies and social enterprises that were leading existing efforts to provide developmentally useful knowledge to poor people in this way. It concluded that “most local content providers tend to push external content towards local people”. With few exceptions, “they do not strengthen the pull of local content from local people” (Ballantyne 2002, p. 3). In other words, they mainly provide access to other people’s knowledge and perspectives, which they translate, adapt and repackage for local consumption. The report provided a strong case for OKN, arguing “Such an ambitious effort has an important mobilising or catalysing role, providing a critical mass and drive that many local initiatives can cluster around and feed off in a symbiotic way” (p. 18). The overarching assumption was that OKN would continue to push global knowledge towards poor and marginalised communities through its organisational members, but it would also strengthen the pull of local knowledge from them through the telecentres.

OneWorld developed a prototype software application to back the proposal, which was piloted in Southern India in collaboration with the Information Village project of the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) in March 2002. The project was chosen as the location for the pilot not only because MSSRF was a member of the Working Group on Local Content, but also because it is recognised as having one of the most outstanding digital
inclusion projects in the world, which OneWorld was seeking to emulate and build upon. With funding from the International Development Research Centre, which was also a member of the Working Group, MSSRF had set up telecentres in ten coastal villages near Pondicherry in 1998. The telecentres lack Internet connectivity, but MSSRF uses an innovative combination of wired and wireless technologies to connect them to a central hub in the nearby town of Villianur that does have Internet access. It employs a dedicated team of ‘knowledge workers’ at the hub to source needs-based information from a wide range of sources, including but not limited to the web. They also review information contributed by villagers before circulating the material through the community network and linked community media channels, including radio. This ensures that the content offering is comprised of both top-down and bottom-up sources. The project won the prestigious Stockholm Challenge in 2002 and has been widely praised by scholars and journalists alike (e.g. Dugger 2000; Kanungo 2004; Thamizoli & Balasubramanian 2001). It is perhaps most well known for issuing life saving weather forecasts to local fisherman, which alerted them of the South Asian tsunami in the absence of official warnings in December 2004 (see Muthalaly 2005).

During the month-long pilot, OneWorld adapted its prototype to ensure that it would scale to organisations with different set-ups in other parts of the developing world and facilitate exchanges between them and the communities they supported, even if their telecentres lacked Internet access. The resultant system was designed to transform organisational members and telecentres into ‘hubs’ and ‘access points’ respectively on a peer-to-peer file sharing network, with each hub employing knowledge workers to supply and edit information to and from the access points in its language area. Knowledge workers would be required to tag each item with metadata identifying everything from the author to the target audience in order to facilitate exchanges between them. The metadata schema also included a short summary in English, which would serve as an intermediary language between the hubs so that knowledge

40 As of 2007, the project included 17 hubs, known as ‘village resource centres’ and 96 telecentres, known as ‘village knowledge centres’. These are supported by a national hub, which has partnered with a wide range of intermediaries to equip knowledge workers to “develop locale-specific demand-driven content […] through systematic collection of secondary data and well-planned needs assessment” (MSSRF 2007, pp. 142-3).

41 A notable adjustment included making the software compatible with WorldSpace Satellite Radio so that telecentres lacking Internet access could send and receive digital content from their hub using short inexpensive bursts of connectivity provided by satellite radio. Based on proprietary technology, WorldSpace Satellite Radio uses two satellites in Africa and Asia to broadcast more than 100 channels of audio content, but each WorldSpace receiver is equipped with a data port that allows it to be used as a wireless modem that can download data at rates of up to 128kbps.
workers could determine whether or not items were relevant to their clients before requesting full translations if necessary. The set up also included a global syndication centre to provide a central index of the global content pool, and publish information on the web.

With this rather complex digital platform in place, Accenture explored business models that could help to make OKN financially sustainable. This involved hypothesising on a viable solution since the viability of MSSRF’s acclaimed, but much more contained Information Village project would be in doubt if donors ever withdrew their support (see Lakshmy 2006; Punathambekar 2005). The chosen model sought to encourage a market for local information at the base of the pyramid, “while maintaining the principle that knowledge for development should wherever possible be free at the point of use in poor communities” (Armstrong, et al. 2002 p. 3). Thus, the focus was on nurturing the ‘entrepreneurial spirit’ of telecentre operators by allowing them to profit from value-added services that drew on OKN’s content offering, which they would be required to pay their hub a small fee to maintain. Information would be free for people to browse directly via the OKN software, but telecentre operators would be able to adapt and repackage it for distribution via alternative communications channels for the purpose of generating income. For example, they could syndicate content to radio and television broadcasters and earn revenue from advertisements placed in information distributed freely via community notice boards and newsletters. More importantly, the underlying assumption was that OKN would drive interest in the telecentres’ for-profit services, such as printing and computer training courses (pp. 54, 81-4).

The final contribution came from the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard Law School, which explored licensing systems for managing intellectual property rights in accordance with the business model. This meant conceiving of a legal framework that would allow information to be freely circulated within the global network and over the web without exposing the hubs to the same intellectual property rights law violations, which have caused other peer-to-peer networks, such as Napster and KaZaA, to fold in recent years. A realistic assumption was made that contributors could unknowingly or otherwise circulate information that was copyright protected. In addition to developing a legal framework to mitigate the effects of any such violation, the focus was on ensuring the content offering was limited to secondary information sourced from the public domain, and therefore free from proprietary claims or available under open content licenses, and to original information that would be made available under a special ‘open knowledge license’, which was designed to protect the intellectual property from misappropriation, while allowing it to be adapted, repackaged, and in some cases sold by telecentre operators (Armstrong, et al. 2002 pp. 54, 100-4).
7.1.2 The Goal: To Unlock Economic Opportunity in the South

What eventually emerged from six months of intense research and consultation was the DOT Force proposal for OKN entitled “Unlocking Economic Opportunity in the South through Local Content” (Armstrong et al. 2002). As the title implies, the proposal prioritised economic growth over other development outcomes. Apart from the economic benefits it assumed telecentre operators would derive as both a direct and indirect result of their expanded service offering which would have flow-on effects in the local economy, the emphasis was on the economic and social benefits their clients would derive from OKN in their capacity as content recipients. In this context, the architects of the project claimed OKN could provide beneficiaries with “life-changing knowledge on everything from family health to agriculture, from education to small business opportunities” (p. 4). However, they made special mention of the wealth-generating prospects of the content offering in a none-too-subtle bid to win donor support. For example, they alleged poor farmers would be able to save time and money by accessing information on market prices, thereby helping them to decide what is best to produce and where to sell their products to get the best price; meanwhile information on sustainable agriculture gleaned from across the developing world would help them to increase their yields and protect themselves against hard times (p. 6).

The proposal was less specific when it came to the benefits people would derive from contributing their knowledge to OKN, but it did acknowledge they would need to see “clear economic advantage” to do so (pp. 6, 83-84). It even proposed incentivising local content creation on this basis by allowing people to license their intellectual property to hubs and/or telecentre operators who could use it to bolster their capacity to syndicate content to other media outlets; making them eligible to win prizes for contributing the most useful information; and allowing them to take a cut of any revenues earned by OKN from any third-party commercial use of their intellectual property, such as from a patent or book contract. However, these suggestions were vague, particularly with regard to the latter provision where the authors simply stated “we were not able to pursue this aspect beyond alerting the knowledge workers in the hub to this possibility, with the thought that they would reserve such items to be dealt with in a special way in cooperation with the original authors” (p. 83).

The proposal was equally vague when it came to assessing OKN’s impact, claiming performance would be qualified in terms of progress made towards the Millennium Development Goals. This implies economic growth was just one of many benefits the project architects thought OKN might bring beneficiaries in their capacity as both content recipients and content providers. Other comments are more explicit, revealing a holistic view of human development at the heart of the proposal, which suggests that the authors privileged social
over economic outcomes, despite rhetoric to the contrary. Take for example the following statement, “The most direct changes to come as a result of the OKN are likely to be felt by individuals, groups and organisations in the networked communities: tangibly in the provision of well-managed information on relevant issues and from a trusted source, new skills and, in many cases, capital assets; and more subtly through changing awareness, behaviour and power relations. In the long term, perhaps the most powerful impact of the OKN will be its contribution to shifting power relations within communities and between them and the organisations working with them” (p. 111). The implication is that the architects of the project were hedging their bets when it came to probable development outcomes of their novel experiment in globally oriented local content exchange.

7.1.3 Formulation to Implementation: The proposal becomes a reality

The proposal was submitted to the G8 Kananaskis Summit in June 2002 at which time the DOT Force was dissolved and responsibility for implementation was passed to other bodies in the international community, including the newly created United Nations ICT Taskforce. In its final report card, the DOT Force stressed that the original working groups should be able to continue their work with support from major bilateral donors (DOT Dorce 2002). This directive made it relatively easy for OneWorld International to secure continued funding from DFID to implement the proposal through its ‘Catalysing Access to ICT in Africa’ program (CATIA), with additional support from Industry Canada. In October 2002, OKN became one of nine projects in the CATIA program, entitled ‘Catalysing the Creation and Exchange of Local Content’. Initially confined to Africa, funding was extended to OneWorld South Asia to commence complementary project activities in that region in November 2003.

The project was formally launched with much fanfare at the first World Summit on the Information Society in December 2003, as part of a ‘Local Voices’ event organised by the UN ICT Taskforce. Such events were in keeping with OKN’s high-profile status within the ICT4D community, which enabled OneWorld to secure interest from prospective organisational members that were leading existing to provide locally relevant knowledge for development to poor and marginalised communities through ICT. Applications were also accepted from CSOs with experience in other mediums, which partnered with independent telecentre operators to bring the ICT4D experience that was required to join the project. Other prerequisites for prospective hub partners included 24/7 Internet access, a commitment to participatory development, and at least one staff member who was capable of performing the role of knowledge worker, which required a background in community development and strong research, writing, editing and translation skills, including competency in written English, as well as the local languages spoken by the communities served by their telecentres.
In total, 15 organisations were recruited to function as hubs in the global network, and they in turn recruited over 200 predominantly rural, but also urban and semi-urban telecentres to function as access points for poor and marginalised communities in Africa and South Asia over the course of the project. Hubs included grassroots CSOs and governmental agencies with a strong developmental focus, as well as private companies that combined social values with commercial business practices. In Africa, OKN had hubs and access points in Kenya, Mali, Mozambique, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe. In South Asia, it had hubs and access points in India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. It failed to progress beyond the business development phase in Latin America, despite deploying a Program Development Coordinator to the region who succeeded in generating interest from several CSOs, which submitted joint project proposals to DfID, but did not receive donor backing (see Figure 17).

Upon being accepted into the project, hubs embarked on a six-month trial, working with the program coordinator and other hubs in their region to develop and install a local language version of the OKN software on designated computers in their offices and those of their access points, and train knowledge workers in its use. OKN also provided the hubs with funding to cover the salary of one dedicated ‘community reporter’ per access point to assist their clients in local content production. In addition to appointing and training community reporters, hubs were required to undertake outreach programs to generate interest in OKN among target beneficiaries, and to conduct a baseline assessment of their information needs. On successful completion of the trial, they were expected to function as hubs in the global network for at least 18 months, but funding commitments ended after just 12 months, leaving them on their own for at least six months, with a view to ensuring financial sustainability.

Despite this provision, financial sustainability proved too great a challenge and OKN effectively ceased operations when the donor-funded period came to an end. Hubs were unable to justify, let alone charge their access points to cover the costs of maintaining the global network because they did not experience a discernable increase in revenue as either a direct or indirect result of their expanded service offering. OKN consequently dissolved when the hubs had fulfilled their obligations to the project and were no longer compelled to use the

---

42 African hubs formed a new legal entity called ‘OKN Africa’ in March 2005, with OneWorld International continuing to play a coordination role. In South Asia, the project fell under the remit of OneWorld South Asia, which is already a distinct legal entity from OneWorld International in the UK, thus reducing the impetus for the same development to take place to ensure local ownership of the project in that region.
technical infrastructure provided to support local content exchange in October 2007. As a corollary, the multi-lingual web portal became inactive, and the project website disappeared the following month. In this sense, OKN differed little from the plethora of telecentre projects that have fallen by the wayside in the absence of donor support. It was conceived in 2001, received funding commitments in 2002, became functional in 2003 and ceased operations in 2007. The remainder of this case study draws on qualitative insights from project stakeholders in Africa, South Asia and Latin America to explore reasons for OKN’s failure to empower beneficiaries as envisioned.

Figure 17: OKN Hubs and Access Points

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hubs</th>
<th>Access Points</th>
<th>Sector / Experience</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AfriAfya</td>
<td>Kenya (7)</td>
<td>Consortium of seven NGOs and the Ministry of Health, which has established a local network of telecentres to provide poor and marginalised communities with improved access to relevant and up-to-date health information.</td>
<td>Kiswahili, English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arid Lands Information Network (ALIN)</td>
<td>Kenya (8), Tanzania (3)</td>
<td>An NGO that aims to improve development practices in Eastern Africa by offering online information on drylands agriculture; Partnered with government agencies and NGOs that had set up telecentres in Kenya and Tanzania to join OKN</td>
<td>Kiswahili, English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamana / Afribone</td>
<td>Mali (8)</td>
<td>Private company that publishes needs-based information across a variety of media, including radio. Partnered with a commercial ISP to bring telecentre capabilities to eight community radio stations as part of UNESCO’s Community Multimedia Centre project.</td>
<td>Bamana, French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centro de Informática, Universidade Eduardo Mondlane</td>
<td>Mozambique (4)</td>
<td>An autonomous non-profit within the Eduardo Mondlane University whose purpose is to spearhead the introduction of new ICT in the university and the community at large; Involved in piloting telecentres that integrate community radio broadcasting capabilities in its role as national coordinator of UNESCO’s Community Multimedia Centre project.</td>
<td>Portuguese</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENDA CyberPOP SchoolNet</td>
<td>Senegal (10)</td>
<td>Partnership between an international NGO and a commercial ISP, which joined forces to establish ten privately-run telecentres in urban and peri-urban areas of Dakar in order to join OKN.</td>
<td>Wolof, French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uganda (5)</td>
<td>NGO that partners with educational content providers to enhance teaching and learning opportunities in schools through the introduction of new ICT.</td>
<td>Luganda, English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Alliance for Indigenous Resources</td>
<td>Zimbabwe (5)</td>
<td>NGO that assists rural communities to improve their livelihood options through sustainable natural resource management programs; Partnered with other community-based organisations to establish five telecentres in order to join OKN.</td>
<td>Shona, Ndebele, English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. S.</td>
<td>India (10)</td>
<td>Prominent NGO focused on promoting sustainable development in</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

43 Some telecentres still use the OKN software to allow people to browse and enter local content, but they no longer do so as part of the global network that is the focus of this case study.

44 The portal can still be accessed via a promotional website for the OKN software: [http://www.ekduniyagransagar.net:8080/enRICH/](http://www.ekduniyagransagar.net:8080/enRICH/). The project website ([http://openknowledge.net](http://openknowledge.net)), no longer exists, but content can still be viewed at: [http://web.archive.org/web/*/openknowledge.net](http://web.archive.org/web/*/openknowledge.net), thanks to ‘Internet Archive’, which offers permanent access to historical collections in digital format, including archived web pages ([http://www.webarchive.org](http://www.webarchive.org)).
Even before it folded there was an overwhelming sense of disappointment attached to OKN, with several interviewees describing it as a highly ‘ambitious’ and ‘idealistic’ endeavour that had failed to meet the information needs of participating communities, which was by far their overriding concern. Interviewees were divided in their opinions concerning strategies that might enable OKN to achieve this goal in the future, but they were unanimous about the direction in which they thought it should evolve, which focused on strengthening local content exchange within the communities, thereby negating the need for linkages between them or the wider world. Tori Holmes who served as the Latin America Program
Development Coordinator was philosophical about the modified focus. She suggested the original vision of creating an online repository of local knowledge with relevance across the developing world had simply taken a backseat to more pressing concerns at the local level, which is part and parcel of the move from project formulation to implementation in the development context. She said:

*I think it is an extremely ambitious program. It emerged on the stage of ICT for development with quite a lot of fanfare, quite a lot of hype, partly because it came out of the DOT Force. Obviously as it’s become a reality, it’s gone through a process of transformation, of grounding, which has brought different possibilities, different challenges. The vision means different things in different places and it means different things when it’s actually implemented. I don’t think there’s anything wrong with saying it’s ambitious and idealistic. I think it wants to be idealistic. I think you have to be idealistic to be inspirational, but the vision of international knowledge sharing is one that hasn’t become a reality yet. It hasn’t been a priority because of the challenges we are still facing at the local level. But I think that’s what happens with a big program – there are so many things you’ve got to test; you want to go ahead and do everything but you have to slow down and modify your goals.*

Network activity confirmed the modified focus, with the vast majority of content originating from and failing to move beyond participating communities. South Asia Program Coordinator, Dr Bashameerhamad Shadrach, explained ‘What is happening now is the ability to promote local content exchange within a community – like 20 villages sharing their content in a kind of homogeneous setting. It’s not yet beyond that’. This reveals a central tension that operated across OKN, namely the global aspirations of what effectively comprised a series of interconnected, but otherwise isolated community networks that facilitated local content exchange by people living in narrow geographical settings. OKN’s constituent community networks typically served people living within a 15-20-kilometre radius of each access point. In densely populated urban areas, this could include up to 60,000 people. In sparsely populated rural areas, it could include 10,000 people spread over as many as 30 villages. Drawing on a metaphor that is ironically used in the IT world to describe the automation of inefficient processes rather than leveraging technology to improve the way things are done (see Covington 2005), Global Coordinator, Pete Cranston, described 80-90 percent of OKN’s work as ‘paving the cow trails’ that already link people at this level. He said:

*To my mind, the most effective development projects follow the local cow trails. There are cow trails between villages; they’re physical and they’re mental; they’re community-based and they’re relationship-based, and there are cow trails between*
villages and the wider world outside. In a way part of this is simply acknowledging that knowledge and learning travels. This has always happened, but by using new ICT you can make much more efficient and effective use of the local cow trails. So you’re providing people with better equipment to travel on the trails and to carry the things they want to pass back and forth. Most of it is simply learning that four villages away that you would never have been able to communicate with, they are doing something slightly different, which is ever so interesting because they in turn are in contact with another community, which is much further away than you. So 80 to 90 percent of our work is oiling the wheels of everyday transactions. Ludicrous metaphor – it’s oiling the local cow trails.

From this perspective, OKN added a new dimension to the existing communications ecology in participating communities by enabling people to use ICT to share what Africa Program Coordinator, Dr Peter Benjamin, described as ‘very local information, almost like what you’d find in a local newspaper or newsletter around what’s going on in the area’. The content offering typically included classifieds, market prices, weather forecasts, events and announcements, remedies, recipes and cooking tips. According to Cranston, ‘an awful lot of it is just quotidian – it’s what’s for sale here, somebody’s wedding there, and somebody else’s fish pickle recipe’. Interviewees differed in their opinions concerning the value of this type of information, but they all agreed that it failed to meet the communities’ needs. This finding was corroborated by focus group participants in South Asia and Latin America, as well as the community reporter in Southern Africa, who all listed information on health, education, agriculture, and government services as most valuable to help them improve their lives. The result, according to Shadrach, was that, ‘OKN hasn’t provided for the knowledge needs of the communities we are working with. That is proving to be an enormous challenge because what is being produced is not meeting anywhere near 100 percent of their needs.’

7.2.1 The Gap Between Supply and Demand

At first glance, the gap between the supply and demand for information appears ironic since OKN placed strong emphasis on training the hubs in the use of ethnographic action research to ensure they could assess and respond to the knowledge needs of participating

---

45 In the urban slum of Seelampur, focus group participants expressed strong interest in information on health, education, government services, and legal matters. In the rural Huaral Valley, focus group participants indicated that agrarian information was in greatest demand. In rural Nyamazura, people sought information on health, agriculture and education, according to the community reporter.
communities. However, similar types of analyses already constituted an integral part of the independent operations of most of the hubs, which had a strong vested interest in ensuring their independent service offerings remained responsive to their clients’ needs, whether they were CSOs, government agencies or social enterprises. Several hub representatives described this type of work as ‘an ongoing process.’ One said, ‘We just keep exploring and collecting data so we can see what the major gaps and issues are and the sort of information that can help. So we conduct research, find the need, develop the information, and deliver it to the people who need it.’ Another said, ‘It helps us to know the level at which we should be developing and packaging information so it will be relevant to our clients.’

This indicates that OKN’s failure was not the result of the hubs’ undoubtedly varied capacities to respond to their clients needs, but rather that they chose not to channel the bulk of their support through that system. Most hubs were already engaged in providing locally relevant development knowledge to participating communities via ICT before they joined the project. In many cases, this was their core ‘business’ activity. For those that were new to the ICT4D arena, OKN provided a catalyst to explore a new medium. But for those that were already active in this space, it provided little more than a redundant set of ‘pipes’ between them and their clients. In either case, most hubs continued to rely on pre-existing communications channels for reaching the communities. For example, Datamation Foundation delivered information via cable television, CD-ROM, community noticeboards, onsite clinicians and guest speakers. SAFIRE equipped its access points with traditional library facilities, with one stocking DVDs so people could watch audio-visual programs over the single computer that had a built-in DVD player. It also used drama to raise awareness of nutrition and HIV/AIDS. Meanwhile, social enterprises, Drishtee and TARAhaat provided e-services to paying customers, with a strong focus on e-governance and e-learning.

Redundancies between OKN and the hubs pre-existing communications channels and independent service offerings thus produced a central tension between OKN’s overarching goal to empower beneficiaries in their capacity as content recipients and its core focus on empowering them through ‘voice’. To achieve its goal, OKN would have had to put the communities’ knowledge needs at the fore, but in the absence of a steady flow of contributions from the hubs, it inadvertently put their knowledge resources at the fore instead. The relationship between these dynamics is not well considered in the literature. Proponents of digital inclusion projects invariably stress the need to use ICT to empower poor and

---

46 OKN collaborated with UNESCO’s Community Multimedia Centre project to train hubs involved in both projects to use an ethnographic action research methodology developed by Don Slater and Jo Tacchi (2004) for the UNESCO project.
marginalised people to create local content (e.g. Skuse, et al. 2007; Slater & Tacchi 2004; Tacchi 2005, 2006; Tacchi, et al. 2009; Watkins & Nair 2008). However little attention has been devoted to the question posed by Tacchi (2006, p. 7) “When people are given a voice through new ICTs, who will listen?” For the most part, there is an assumed demand for local content in its community of origin. Evidently this was not the case in OKN. Several participants in the focus group held at Datamation Foundation’s access point in Seelampur said they often contributed information to OKN which they ‘do not find particularly useful, but hope will be of use to others’. Alice Mugore who was the community reporter at SAFIRE’s access point in Nyamazura noted similar trends.47 She said:

Most of the ladies come to me with recipes which they want to share with others. But it is not really one of the things they want from others. So many women give me information on cooking, but the information they need first and foremost is on health then agriculture and education.

Program Coordinators voiced different opinions concerning strategies for bridging the gap between supply and demand by increasing the flow of external information through OKN. Their proposals ranged from building the capacity of the hubs to ‘push’ more information through the system as intended, ignoring apparent redundancies between their pre-existing communications channels and independent service offerings, to a rather bold plan to leverage OKN’s open source architecture to syndicate content from organisations outside the global network.48 Those in favour of the latter approach were unanimous that the key challenge was to find an appropriate balance between global and local content providers. However, African Program Coordinator, Dr Peter Benjamin, was one of only two interviewees who acknowledged that finding the right balance would effectively mean testing the assumption on which OKN was founded, namely that there is a need support digital content creation by CSOs and their clients from poor and marginalised communities that have yet to make their voices heard on the web. He said:

[...] that hypothesis will only be accepted if OKN is entwined with an understanding of what percentage of local content meets local needs or whether people really want access to the Internet and one way or another of making that information available offline. What we are trying to provide is information that is of greatest use to the

47 Knowledge workers and community reporters were known as ‘documentalists and ‘documentalist field assistants’ respectively in Zimbabwe due to the political connotations of the original terms.

48 The idea was to create offline databases of relevant information residing on the organisations’ websites so that the communities could browse it offline using the OKN software.
people in the communities that we are working with. It’s only going to be a small percentage of the information that we can produce through local contact so a lot will need to come from existing websites. So it’s almost like our ultimate vision is for the OKN to meet information needs and our task is to find out what is really asked for, what really enables action and interest in the communities we are working with.

Rather than tackling this complex issue head on, program coordinators focused their attention on pulling local content along the local cow trails. Most hub representatives interviewed made a point of emphasising the added value of this activity over their core business, but one stated, “People always go where the money is so it’s difficult to tell how much they really appreciate this kind of work.” Others drew on ideas put forward in the IICD reports, which provided the original rationale for OKN, cautioning that “such a network will absolutely require that the local content efforts of the local communities are creative, dynamic and productive” to ensure the content offering does not “undermine or overwhelm local cultural heritage”, but rather provides “opportunities for local people to interact and communicate with each other, expressing their own ideas, knowledge and culture in their own languages” (Ballantyne 2002, pp. 3, 1). Despite recognition of the need to test this proposition in light of OKN’s goal by at least one key player, it appeared to blind-sight others who viewed the need to strengthen local content exchange not as a means to an end, but rather as an end in itself, as the following comments from another key player reveal:

There’s a lot of support needed to get a reasonable amount of content flowing into the network from users so in order to enrich the content offering, it’s logical to think about getting content from other sources, but it’s a difficult one. You have to be careful because the idea has always been to put the emphasis on building their capacity to share knowledge and to create their own content and not rely on external top-down sources so you don’t want to make it a platform for things coming down.

The unfortunate implication of these trends was an overly insular and supply-driven content offering for which there was little latent demand, let alone a viable market. Telecentre operators did not generate new income by syndicating local content to other media outlets; nor did they profit from noticeably increased demand for other services, although some donor-aided telecentres were inspired by their private sector counterparts to begin charging for computer training courses, which may have helped them to secure their own financial sustainability. The end result was that the original vision of economic growth spurred by the entrepreneurship of telecentre operators never reached fruition. Indeed, apart from a few isolated incidents where some traditional healers profited from promoting their local business,
the project had markedly little economic impact on the communities.\textsuperscript{49} This made it impossible for the hubs to financially sustain the global network when the donor-funded period came to an end.

\section*{7.2.2 The Social Benefits of Local Content Creation}

Despite its failure to unlock economic opportunity as envisioned, OKN was by no means devoid of developmental value. It is just that its primary contribution was social, rather than the financial transformation the project architects had aspired to enable. Drawing on the concept of ‘social capital’ popularised by Putnam (1995), several interviewees described local content exchange as ‘quintessentially a social capital event’. “Social capital refers to connections among individuals and trustworthiness that arise from them” (Putnam 2000, p. 19). Local content exchange was seen to build social capital by strengthening social networks based on trust. Focus group participants in Seelampur confirmed this perception, with one woman explaining ‘most of the information is produced by coming together and talking; just participating in discussions is a way of contributing.’ By strengthening and in some cases reconfiguring existing social networks, Global Coordinator, Pete Cranston, claimed OKN ‘strengthened the communities’ understanding of each other’s strengths, knowledge of what they do and do not possess as skills, and their ability to respond to crisis situations because they know and trust each other.’

Several interviewees cited social outcomes of this nature to justify their claim that local content exchange should fall into a basket of activities that donors accept do not have to be financially self-sustaining to the same extent as other activities, which can be adequately supplied by private markets. Cranston who was of this view suggested that OKN warranted ongoing donor support for its contribution to adult education, which is an important component of a more holistic vision of human development than underpins most ICT4D projects that tend to privilege economic over social outcomes. Cranston’s comments, which are relayed at some length below, indicate that the business model put forward in the DOT Force proposal pandered to this preference despite recognition that the primary benefit of local content exchange is social not economic development. He said:

\begin{quote}
OKN was trying to ride two horses at the same time. On the one hand you’ve got the horse of economic development. At the centre of that is something long known but regularly re-discovered by donors, which is if you give entrepreneurs money, the odds
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{49} The only such incident that was cited by several research participants occurred in Nyamazura, Zimbabwe where a traditional healer reportedly earned US$90 per month selling remedies to farmers, thanks to her contributions to OKN, which secured her professional reputation (SAFIRE 2006, p. 19).
of them finding a way to repay your original loan and earn an income for themselves and their community is quite high. It’s an entrepreneurial model and that was the basis of what Accenture was proposing as our business model. On the other hand, you’ve got the horse of social development, which is much more an investment in community transformation by improving the overall quality of life. Local content lends itself very easily and comfortably to the social development approach, but it’s incredibly hard to marry to the entrepreneurial approach. To the extent that OKN and local content is really in the domain of adult public education – enabling people to share their knowledge, to publish things, and giving them the confidence to do it in their own language – it’s very similar to that sort of approach, so the concept of sustainability is really irrelevant. It doesn’t lend itself to that principle. But that’s why sustainability remains a challenge. By and large donors expect anything to do with technology to be associated with the entrepreneurial model so OKN tried to do that at the same time as doing social development and it’s terribly hard trying to ride both horses at the same time. But if we’re not careful we’ll end up like so many telecentre projects, which go under the moment the donor pulls the plug.

Regardless of the view one takes in this debate, the call for donor funding to support the social development approach arguably becomes moot when applied to OKN due to the negligible impact of the global network over the sum of its constituent parts. Positive social outcomes were contingent upon human centred, rather than techno-centric network components, namely ‘community reporters’, which African Program Coordinator, Dr Peter Benjamin, described as, ‘central to what we’re doing; it’s where the rubber meets the road; it’s where action will happen that will enable or inhibit change in the communities, which is the overall aim of the work we are trying to do.’ Community reporters did not rate a mention in the DOT Force proposal, but they were indispensable to OKN’s capacity to generate local content. One hub representative explained that their community reporters had been given targets of 100 articles per month ‘to justify funds we get from OKN’. The way community reporters approached this difficult task varied, but most visited people in their homes and joined in discussions with visitors to the access points to gather information which they recorded in logbooks, wrote up as articles, and sent to knowledge workers at their hub for review. People could also approach community reporters directly, but empirical evidence presented in the final evaluation of the CATIA program indicates that very little information was voluntarily contributed without their prompting (i-team 2006, p. 40).

Recognising the centrality of their role, program coordinators encouraged the hubs to appoint local people as community reporters. Benjamin explained, ‘The people we are looking for are
trusted and involved; they are already networked in the community and understand the social and cultural dynamics’. However, they could only recommend this course of action; they could not impose rules that would undermine local ownership of the project. Recruitment practices consequently varied between the hubs, largely on account of their own varied linkages to participating communities, which were evident even though selection criteria specified a strong commitment to participatory development as mandatory for joining the project. Of the hub representatives interviewed, those from CSOs placed noticeably more emphasis on the need for strong community linkages than those from private companies. Nevertheless, Drishtee and TARAhaat both appointed local people as community reporters, but their strategy appeared to be driven more by the bottom line than a philosophical stance on the issue. In contrast, Datamation Foundation and SAFIRE share a profound commitment to participatory development, but their recruitment practices varied. Datamation appointed local people, whereas SAFIRE appointed community development workers.

Contrary to expectations about the impact of these approaches, which arguably derive from the popular assumption that community participation is key to the success of telecentre projects, both strategies appear to have aided in positive social change. Development workers who succeeded in earning the trust of at least some local people seemed better equipped to generate articles that shed light on sensitive local issues that might otherwise have remained shielded from public view, functioning in much the same way as conventional journalists. Alice Mugore, the community reporter in Nyamazura who was, by her own admission, not well connected in the community prior to assuming her position, proudly told me how she had managed to persuade several young people to discuss culturally ‘taboo topics’ such as domestic violence and child abuse, but lamented her inability to get them to broach the topic of sexually transmitted diseases, despite desperate need for candour brought about by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. In contrast, where there was an attempt to target marginalised groups, local people were able to leverage their position to advance their own life opportunities. The role was clearly lauded as a career steppingstone by young women in Seelampur, with three girls present in the focus group discussion having taken on the role in a volunteer capacity with a view to expanding their employment prospects in the future. This is really quite remarkable given that the Maulana, the religious leader of the community, originally banned women from using the telecentre, which is located in an Islamic school for young men.

Another little recognised factor that played a crucial role in shaping social outcomes was the effect of the community reporters’ gender on their ability to engage with people of the opposite sex. While other factors such as ethnicity, religion and caste may have also restricted their mobility and social connections, gender was a more ubiquitous concern due to the sheer
prevalence of social and cultural norms, which made it inappropriate for women to interact, let alone share sensitive information, with men outside their immediate families. Hubs were encouraged to pursue gender equity when appointing community reporters, but the effect of their gender on network participation was overlooked. Thus, SAFIRE’s decision to appoint a man as the community reporter in Mutambara, which is located in the Chimanimani district of Manicaland, meant that ‘women are not free to share with him, so we cannot tap the basic underlying local knowledge that we want from the women’, according to Roselinie Murota who was the knowledge worker for SAFIRE. Similarly, Datamation Foundation’s decision to appoint young women to the position in Seelampur made it ‘a very big challenge for these girls to represent the needs of the entire community’ according to Sarita Sharma, an action researcher and board member of Datamation Foundation who is actively involved in assessing the impact of the centre on local women (see Sharma 2006). She explained that the centre has to hold separate sessions for boys and girls on account of strict social codes restricting their interactions, which is why only women were present in the focus group discussion.

The implication of these trends is that regardless of the approach adopted, some local people were inadvertently excluded from the social networks that were enlisted to contribute to local content production. Whether they were included or excluded from these networks depended largely on the individual attributes of community reporters, and on the social and cultural norms of the communities. Although they failed to recognise the impact of these constraints on network participation, independent auditors did stress that “equipment is not enough” in the final evaluation, which stated, “the local access points may have OKN software but it is the local communications ecology that influences its success” (i-team 2006, p. 65). Several interviewees made similar observations, but their concerns were invariably expressed in terms of opportunities for people to access the content offering, rather than contribute to its production. The tendency to conceptualise exclusion in this way arguably stemmed from the overarching goal of the project to empower people in their capacity as content recipients, which in my opinion focused on the wrong end of the stick given OKN’s core focus on empowering people through voice.

7.2.3 Efforts to Improve Inclusiveness Focus on the Wrong End of the Stick

Many interviewees were concerned that OKN had inadvertently excluded people from network participation by failing to take cognisance of the local communications ecology in the communities where traditional communications channels, particularly community radio, is far more accessible to a greater proportion of the population than ICT (see Girard 2003; J. James 2004). The architects of the project had assumed that beneficiaries would browse the content offering using a local language version of the OKN software installed on computers at
their local access point. The only variation to this mode of access was based on the assumption that telecentre operators would repackage the most useful information for distribution via alternative communication channels on a profit-driven basis, which never eventuated due to the shortcomings of the content offering already explored. The caveat was nevertheless indicative of early recognition that OKN would be unable to reach the communities if it relied on computer-based technologies alone (see Ballantyne 2002).

Focus group participants recounted numerous reasons why poor people often find it difficult to access information via computer-based technologies, even if they live within reasonable walking distance of a telecentre that offers free access to digital content they believe could help them to improve their lives. Reasons range from the perceived opportunity cost of visiting the telecentre over other more pressing activities to a common perception that computers are only for ‘elites’. The community reporter in Nyamazura said ‘people who work in the fields see computers as a tool for the learned’ due to the high illiteracy rates among that segment of society. In contrast, a young farmer who participated in the focus group discussion held in the Huaral Valley distinguished between different generations of farmers, attributing such concerns to the elderly. He said:

*I use the centre because I am starting to manage the family farm so I am looking for information about our plantations, new seeds and farming practices. Many older farmers are afraid of the technology so it’s important for their children to use the tools of the centre to improve the way we run the business.*

Insights of this nature prompted donor-appointed evaluators to criticise OKN for being overly techno-centric in the mid-term review of mid 2005.50 The timing of the review coincided with the impending release of a new software application called ‘Open eNICH’, which OneWorld South Asia and UNESCO’s India office commissioned the Indian National Informatics Centre to develop for use in OKN and UNESCO’s Community Multimedia Centre project. The program resembles the original OKN software in that it allows telecentres to store digital content in a customisable local language ‘community portal’, but it facilitates integration with audio and video files.51 Hubs with radio broadcasting capabilities were able to use it to

50 I requested but was unable to gain access to this document.

51 Open eNRICH also facilitates integration with multiple sources of information, not just a single ‘hub’. This means telecentres can use it to store digital content from any number of intermediaries that agree to make it available on their file servers or as offline databases. Importantly, this implies the existence of a formal content sharing arrangement as per the OKN model, without which the focus is on providing a flexible content management system with wide ranging character script support. Where
promote greater convergence between new and old ICT by disseminating digital content over the radio. OKN also assisted the hubs to produce hardcopy newsletters of the content offering, which were freely available through their access points from late 2005. In many cases, community reporters supplemented this with printouts of the most recent items in the database, which they distributed on their visitation rounds and posted on noticeboards located in or near the access points. Summing up these changes to the way local content was circulated, South Asia Program Coordinator, Dr Bashameerhamad Shadrach, said:

_We have moved more than a little away from the original vision of peer-to-peer communication among the communities in OKN. We believe of course in peer-to-peer communication, but we believe it may not necessarily happen only on the Internet, or computer mediated technologies. We believe that we should also bring in radio, newsletters and other local media._

As significant as these reforms were for improving access to the content offering, they ignored the proverbial elephant in the room, namely the lack of demand for the information provided. Thus, it appears that the benefits of network participation were skewed in favour of local content providers. This was corroborated by focus group participants in Seelampur who criticised OKN for failing to meet their knowledge needs, but emphasised the deep sense of satisfaction they experienced from having their contributions published. Several women recounted how they had published articles on topics ranging from the whereabouts of a missing child to instructions for how to boil milk and prevent it from spoiling, which made them feel ‘happy’ and ‘excited’. The community reporter in Nyamazura said, ‘Most people are just proud to share what they know. They get excited when they see their stories published. Whenever you distribute copies back to them, they always say, ‘look this is my story’. However, she conceded ‘some people do it for status’, which suggests that OKN created hierarchies between people who were included and excluded from the social networks that were called upon to contribute to content production. This resonates with empirical research by Slater and Tacchi (2004), which found opportunities to use new ICT – whether direct or by association – enable people to advance their social status, which causes tensions and fissures, particularly when social advantage challenges rather than reproduces inequality.

For the most part, however, digital inclusion mirrors existing inequalities unless there is a specific attempt to target the most marginalised.

---

financial and technical resources permit working online, it may be used to store digital content sourced from the web. Where Internet access is lacking, it can be used to store locally generated content, including audio and video files. It is available as a free and open source software application. As of March 2007, it had been downloaded 500 times (Shenoy 2007).
The only conceivable way to ensure a more equitable distribution of positive social outcomes in this environment would have been to increase the number and diversity of people willing and able to perform the role of community reporters. In this respect, the new software was a positive step because it promised to open digital content production to people lacking literacy skills. However, this assumes the existence of alternative competencies, as well as ready access to digital recorders and cameras, which was far from the case. It also assumes that bridging the shortfall is a priority for people whose basic needs have yet to be met, which should arguably be subject to further research given the prevalence of more accessible local media. In the words of one hub representative, ‘This is key because you might empower them socially but true empowerment comes down to money.’ Another was more cynical. They said:

*Are we servicing the donor agency or the end client? At the moment, I don’t think the focus is right. You need to make it look good for the person who is giving you money, but how much difference are you really making down there? Sometimes it gets lost in the process. I’m not killing it. I’m not saying local content isn’t important. It is 100 percent important, but I think there are much more effective modes of communication than new ICT for local information dispersion.*

### 7.3 The Unrealised Potential of The Road Less Travelled

As our attention shifts to external trends, the remainder of the discussion focuses on the extent to which OKN amplified local content outside its community of origin and to what ends. Recall that the project architects devoted considerable resources to building the world’s first globally oriented community network, which allowed participating communities to create, exchange and publish local content on a multi-lingual web portal. Common sentiment among interviewees was that OKN’s global dimensions were over emphasised and under utilised. Many claimed the architects of the project spent too much time and money building the complex technical infrastructure needed to make local content available outside its community of origin at the expense of the more worthwhile objective of pulling local content along the local cow trails, the limitations of which have already been explored. The perceived need to switch focus was the main thrust of mid-term review, prompting program coordinators to put OKN’s global aspirations on hold in lieu of what were widely seen to be more pressing concerns at the local level. Reflecting on this shift in priorities, Global Coordinator, Pete Cranston, stated:

*We certainly made mistakes in the early phases of OKN, what large project doesn’t? One of the mistakes we made is that we focussed far too much on the global element and didn’t spend enough time thinking about the realities of the local level*
conversation. That also meant in terms of the technical development we were doing, we spent too much time thinking about a system that could scale from local community connections through to a global connection, which cost us quite a lot of money, and it was quite a complex system so it caused difficulties for people on the ground. So in response to the evaluation from donors, we have shifted focus quite clearly. Global linkages are no longer on the frontline; they are on the backburner.

OKN consequently did very little experimentation in terms of moving local content between participating communities. Most exchanges of this nature were limited to small clusters of communities supported by a single hub. They were invariably located in the same country, often in the same district, and usually within fairly close proximity to their hub or one of its local offices. Community reporters could use email or low-tech technologies, such as compact and floppy disks, to send articles to knowledge workers who would edit them before sending appropriate selections back for local dissemination. This implies that knowledge workers moderated the exchanges that took place between the communities they supported directly, but this process, which was described by African Program Coordinator, Dr Peter Benjamin, as ‘quality control’ was relatively uncontentious. Knowledge workers usually had a close working relationship with community reporters and a thorough understanding of their clients’ needs, which allowed them to target information accordingly.

Moving local content between communities that were supported by different hubs was more complicated. At the simplest level, hubs had to be connected to the Internet to make content available on their fileservers. Although all of the hubs had Internet access, their connections were often volatile. At a deeper level, hubs functioned as gatekeepers between their access points and the wider world around them, and they exercised this power in different ways. Program coordinators encouraged the hubs to store ‘valuable’ content on their fileservers, according to Benjamin who explained, ‘we basically told the hubs any information that is of value we would be very glad to have flow through the full system, but it is in their editorial control what they want to send and what stays just locally’. This put the onus on knowledge workers to assess the relevance of local content in diverse cultural contexts with which they were unfamiliar. This was a responsibility that many sought to avoid through a blanket inclusion or exclusion of information, with little regard for filtering. This meant that some hubs effectively withdrew from the global network, while others populated their fileservers with content that was irrelevant outside its community of origin. As a result, the global content pool, which was accessible over the web, did not constitute the sum total of articles produced by OKN’s constituent community networks. Nor did it consist of a targeted
selection of items with particularly wide relevance. Rather, it reflected the varied circumstances and editorial practices of the hubs.

7.3.1 ‘Foreign Local Content’ gets Lost in Translation

Notwithstanding differing editorial practices, most interviewees claimed the main factor that limited local content exchange between different communities in the global network was the absence of an efficient and effective translation system. Unlike the initiatives explored in previous case studies, OKN sought to enable participants in different language domains to share local knowledge in their own local languages. It did this by integrating wide ranging character script support into the software used to enter, browse and publish local content on the web. To facilitate exchanges, knowledge workers were required to provide English language summaries of the contents of their fileervers so that other knowledge workers could request full translations of items they considered relevant to their clients, which they in turn would translate into the local languages spoken by their clients before sending them to their access points for local dissemination. For this onerous system to function effectively, knowledge workers had to be fluent in English as well as the local language(s) spoken by the communities they supported. Unsurprisingly, hubs found it difficult to attract and retain people with these skills, as the Latin American Program Development Coordinator, Tori Holmes, explained. She said

As soon as it all started, we realised that international content sharing is going to come later because there’s lots of complications with it apart from the obvious, language. One of the issues is the sustainability and costs associated with the knowledge worker resource. On top of all the other functions of knowledge workers, we expect them to have the language skills to do identification of things that are in need of translation and to do the translation, which is just incredibly difficult.

Aside from lacking the necessary skills, there was also very little incentive for knowledge workers to perform translations for each other as intended. Most had to juggle their responsibilities to OKN with other project commitments, which inevitably took precedence when the hubs stopped receiving funding to sustain the cost of their involvement for the final six-months of their contract. Compounding this issue, very few knowledge workers maintained contact outside of the limited opportunities OKN could afford to provide for them to come together for capacity building workshops. In the absence of strong personal connections, most failed to respond to requests for translations from distant colleagues according Roselinie Murota, the knowledge worker from SAFIRE. She said:
There isn’t much communication and meeting between knowledge workers. No one values it. So when you receive an email from someone, it’s easy to push it away. You don’t know them, so what? So that’s sort of the attitude we are facing. If you send something for translation, it never comes back. You need to follow up and when you follow up with somebody you don’t know, some people just don’t care. They don’t feel obligated to perform those translations. It just creates more work for them.

This meant that that most of the, albeit limited, exchanges that took place between different communities in the global network were limited to those that spoke the same language and shared strong cultural ties. Most interviewees were of the opinion that this coincided well with strategies for maximising the value of the content offering for beneficiaries. In other words, the value of what might be termed ‘foreign local content’ is contingent upon the strength of the cultural ties between content providers and recipients; the stronger the ties, the greater the value of the exchange. Several claimed beneficiaries only valued foreign local content from other communities in their country using this rationale. For example, Roselinie Murota from SAFIRE said ‘In most of our access points, people prefer getting information from their counterparts, local information from Zimbabwe.’ Some claimed beneficiaries also valued foreign local content from communities in the same region, but they invariably stressed the importance of cultural ties in this context. For example, Sarita Sharma from Datamation Foundation said the predominantly Muslim community of Seelampur ‘would love to have content from neighbouring Pakistan because there are a lot of cultural similarities so they could really benefit from each other.’

The vast majority of interviewees were reluctant to speculate about the value of foreign local content from communities based in different regions, but most were of the opinion that the project architects had unrealistic expectations in this area. One said, ‘The proposal really was very ambitious. It was not written with a great understanding of development issues. Nobody would have said we could connect local knowledge from Africa to Asia in the first 18 months if they really understood the issues involved.’ Another dismissed the value of global exchanges outright, arguing that the information that could be acquired would have little relevance on the ground. In this view, the idea of creating a global repository of local knowledge from poor and marginalised communities across the developing world is an inherently top-down, supply-driven idea, which should only even be contemplated once the communities’ basic information needs have been met. They said:

For me this is a hypothesis that still needs to be proven. Our experience shows that first of all people want to get connected with the more linear communities, with local organisations, to fill their own needs, and then when they are empowered they can
start to think about connecting with other communities in the same country, in the
same region. After that, when they get something from this exchange, maybe it is a
possibility to see what the world knows about potato growing, for example. Again, I
guess the promise to have the possibility to share local knowledge with Africa, Asia
and Latin America is very nice and very attractive for some donors, but for the
community, if I said to a community here, let’s join OKN so you can share knowledge
with communities in Africa, they are going to say why do I need to?

Many focus group participants expressed interest in foreign local content, irrespective of
culture ties. One surmised, ‘It would provide us with an important opportunity to learn.’ The
community reporter in Nyamazura said ‘With local information, a lot of the things they know
already – they actually want ideas from other countries.’ However, most interviewees
maintained that beneficiaries were reluctant to apply ideas from other cultural communities
whose local knowledge differed substantially from their own. In most cases, the information
was so locally or culturally specific that it was irrelevant. Astrological advice concerning
auspicious times for getting married, which was popular in Seelampur had little resonance
with villagers in Nyamazura for example. In the few cases where the information was relevant
to local problems, most people mistrusted it. Roselinie Mutare who was the knowledge
worker for SAFIRE explained the impact of these trends in Zimbabwe. She said:

Local people from the communities that we are working in don’t really trust
information that’s coming from outside. They trust local information from their peers
in Zimbabwe more. So in as much as we are trying to make a global village, we
haven’t reached the stage where people really appreciate what is coming from other
countries, let alone adopting some of the things they read on the OKN page.

These trends underscore the fundamental weakness of the broadcast model of communication
for disseminating local knowledge, rather than providing spaces for different knowledge
actors to discuss valuable ideas that have not yet proven to work beyond a specific locality.
The danger of adopting this model at the industry level was flagged in the in the first case
study on UNDP in relation to the drive by the Solution Exchange to create a global portal of
network communications from across the developing world. Neither approach allows content
recipients to establish new relationships of trust and reciprocity with knowledge providers. To
illustrate where trust was lacking, the community reporter in Nyamazura, described a popular
response to an article contributed to the global content pool by a community in neighbouring
Tanzania, which was one of few articles from outside Zimbabwe that she translated into the
local language (Shona), printed and distributed to villagers on her visitation rounds. The
article contained instructions for how to use fermented cow urine as an organic pesticide,
which is a traditional pest management strategy among small-hold bean farming communities in northern Tanzania, but it was entirely novel to the people of Nyamazura. She said:

This story from Tanzania on cow urine was very popular. They really liked it because they didn’t know about it. They are keen to know about other people’s experiences, but they trust local information more. They liked the story on cow urine, but they doubted it. They all said ‘I have never used cow urine for this purpose’. I haven’t come across anyone who tried it, but one did promise to do so. If it was local information, that wouldn’t be a problem.

Although it is impossible to state whether fermented cow urine would have the desired effect on the mostly tobacco, maize and yam crops in Nyamazura, research indicates that traditional pest management strategies hold promise for transferability in Africa, provided they are adapted for different production systems (Ampofo et al. 2004). Thus, the anecdote reveals that scepticism towards valuable local knowledge that has been stripped from the people who hold it and from the context in which it was created does stimulate the sort of dialogue between different knowledge actors that is needed for new understandings to emerge. It also reveals that at least one person was willing to test the solution on their crops. Further comments from Roselinie Murota also highlight the role of ‘risk-takers’ in experimenting with foreign local content, whereas most people need to be convinced of the utility of the ideas contained therein before adopting new practices for themselves. She said:

It is important for the communities to share their experiences because there are certain things they don’t know how to solve which other people have also come across and are also trying to solve. But with information from outside, it’s not just instant. There are the risk takers who just plunge into an idea, but most people need to see how it could benefit them before deciding to adopt.

The implication is that poor and marginalised communities that lack strong cultural ties are likely to gain little more than novelty value from foreign local content in the absence of entrepreneurs who may be willing to experiment with abstract ideas, creatively adapting and combining them with their own local knowledge in an effort to solve local problems. If successful, they may well go on to champion new practices within their community, where they have potential to impact the local economy. However, given the inherent risks associated with this activity, the move to put OKN’s global aspirations on hold appears justified since it would seem highly inappropriate for donors to foster entrepreneurship through the provision of anything other than trusted and proven knowledge for development when pushing external
information towards the poor. That interviewees did not cite a single incident whereby beneficiaries benefited from foreign local content also points to the wisdom of the decision.

### 7.3.2 What’s in it for the Poor?

A potentially more productive use of the global network would have been to foster the entrepreneurial spirit of participating communities in their capacity as creative content providers. The architects of the project put forward several tentative suggestions by which “communities with local expertise could make money both locally and regionally by selling it” (Armstrong et al. 2002, p. 6; also see pp. 83-4). However their suggestions were never pursued due to the appointment of community reporters, which allowed the issue of incentives to be sidestepped. With their intervention, many hubs made a steady flow of articles available on their file servers, but most contained what interviewees described as ‘quotidian local information’ with little relevance outside its community of origin. Far from being indicative of knowledge deficiencies, however, several interviewees argued that the limitations of the content offering was indicative of the lack of incentive for people to place valuable local knowledge in the public domain. One asked, ‘What is the value proposition for the guy in the street? What does he get for sharing his knowledge in this way?’

Hub representatives from the private sector stressed that poor people are among the most ‘creative’ and ‘industrious’ in the world. They are constantly developing new solutions to local problems and naturally seek to be compensated for their efforts. In this view, ideas that are relevant for development are not devoid of commercial value. On the contrary, they may have considerable commercial value now that mainstream corporations are turning their attention to the three-billion-plus market at the bottom of the pyramid. Drawing on theories advocated by Prahalad (2004) and Hart (2005) who argue that poor people are not only value-demanding consumers, but also value-creating entrepreneurs, Rakesh Khanna who is the Chief Operating Officer of the Indian social enterprise, TARAhaat, likened the new business environment to a ‘paradigm shift’ in which poor people are increasingly being afforded mainstream market opportunities to profit from their knowledge, innovation and creative skills whereas in the past they were the subjects of dependency inducing aid programs. He argued that social enterprises that already cater to markets at the bottom of the pyramid are becoming ‘the new gurus’ to mainstream corporate interests seeking a slice of the action, with a responsibility to ensure that they strengthen local innovation rather than imposing external solutions that render poor people dependent once more.

These ideas are increasingly gaining currency in the international development community, even among donor agencies that conventionally emphasise public over private sector
initiatives for tackling world poverty (e.g. UNDP 2008). For proponents, the challenge is to follow the lead of ‘the new gurus’ by adopting what Emerson (2003) has termed a ‘blended value proposition’ which does not conform with conventional distinctions concerning social and market-oriented business practices, but seamlessly combines elements of both. In many ways this is what the architects of the project set out to do when they proposed stimulating a market for local content at the base of the pyramid by nurturing the entrepreneurial spirit of telecentre operators. That strategy stemmed from the overarching goal of the project to empower beneficiaries as content recipients, which arguably distracted project implementers from OKN’s potential to empower beneficiaries as value-creating entrepreneurs. Alternative ICT4D initiatives, which have adopted a blended value proposition to empower poor and marginalised people to generate much-needed income from their knowledge, innovation and creative skills by connecting them to investors and/or consumers over the web are described in Figure 19 below in order to illustrate the limitations of OKN’s approach.

Figure 18: Alternative ICT4D Projects

Most ICT4D initiatives that aim to pursue opportunities for poor and marginalised people to profit from their knowledge, innovation and creative skills focus on stimulating markets for local products among ‘ethical consumers’ in the North. For example, NGOs that function as alternative trade organisations try to build international brand recognition for local products through the establishment of cooperatives, authenticity trademarks and fair trade schemes, which cut out the middle-man by selling directly to consumers over the web. For example, The Craft Network of Cambodia connects a nationwide network of small-to-medium sized silk producers to international markets through an e-business portal and physical showroom in Phnom Penh (http://www.craftnetwork-cambodia.com). It requires local producers to pay a membership fee and charges commissions on product sales, with a view to ensuring the financial sustainability of its export promotion activities. Hutchinson (2007, p. 101) explains that “Whilst this may seem a contradiction to the benefits of disintermediation, without this new channel, the Cambodian firms would continue to be marginalised from international markets.” The project has been replicated in Indonesia, but its online evolution has been hampered by the lack of secure e-commerce facilities in that country.

Initiatives that focus on stimulating markets for local products at the base of the pyramid tend to involve micro-finance institutions that loan small amounts of money to entrepreneurs to build businesses selling local products and services in their own community. A novel expression of this approach is the US-based NGO, Kiva, which hosts the world’s first peer-to-peer micro-lending network (www.kiva.org). It allows local entrepreneurs to post lend requests and business plans through a global network of micro-finance institutions. Anyone who is connected to the Internet can view these with a view to building their ‘investment portfolio’ using Kiva’s e-commerce facilities. Loans are made to entrepreneurs in US$25 increments and pooled to finance loans that range from a few hundred to several thousand dollars. Investors receive regular email updates alerting them when
payment instalments have been made and when the loan has been repaid in full or defaulted. Since its launch in late 2005, Kiva has raised over US$75 million from over 500,000 non-profit investors who have funded over 180,000 entrepreneurs in 44 developing countries (Leidtke 2009). It survives on donations, but has not ruled out shifting to a commercial model where it would take a cut of profit-seeking investors’ returns. This reflects broader trends in the microfinance industry, which is increasingly moving into the mainstream of the banking world as commercial investors realise that making a lot of tiny loans can be a lucrative endeavour (Frank 2008).

Most CSOs have been reluctant to assist poor people to sell their knowledge in the so-called ‘market for ideas’, even though many are not opposed to using intellectual property rights mechanisms, such as trademarks, to market local products internationally. The Honeybee Network is a noteworthy exception. It was established in 1999 by the Indian NGO, ‘The Society for Research and Initiatives for Sustainable Technologies’ to assist ‘knowledge-rich, economically poor people’ to commercialise grassroots innovations using a combination of methods, including the granting of patents. It allows socially minded, profit-seeking investors to browse more than 70,000 ‘grassroots innovations and innovative traditional practices’ from communities across rural India over the web (www.honeybee.org). In 2004, it teamed up with Drishtee to allow people to contribute to the database through its nationwide network of over 6,000 telecentre franchises, providing finders fees to telecentre operators to find and record the information. The initiative is backed by the National Innovation Foundation of the Indian Government, which established the ‘Grassroots Innovations Augmentation Network’ in 2001 to incubate the best ideas through one of two methods (http://www.gian.org/). The venture capital route links contributors to a worldwide network of prospective investors and technical experts that can help them to take their ideas to market. The technology transfer method helps them to patent and license their intellectual property, but can also be structured to include joint ventures or benefit sharing arrangements. The goal is to make India “truly self-reliant and a leader in sustainable technologies” (www.nif.org.in).

7.3.3 The Compulsion to Protect Local Knowledge

OKN had enormous potential to emulate the ICT4D initiatives described above by leveraging its online presence to nurture new connections between participating communities and what might be termed socially minded investors and/or consumers in their language domain who could view their contributions via the multi-lingual web portal. Rather than embracing online users as a potential source of opportunities for beneficiaries to profit from their knowledge in this way, Van der Velden (2006, p. 561) explains that OKN adopted “a regulatory ecology” that sought to “constrain the regulating power of powerful ‘foreign’ market interests” while promoting “‘positive’ social norms towards peer-to-peer knowledge sharing” through “techno-legal instruments” such as open content licenses (also see Van der Velden 2004; 2005). In other words, it sought to promote free and open knowledge sharing by participating communities, while protecting their knowledge from potential misappropriation by business
interests outside the global network.

OKN’s licensing system was designed to capture the ‘copyleft’ spirit of most Creative Commons licences, which do not yet cover the legal jurisdictions where the project was operational, apart from India (Creative Commons 2009). Such licences aim to foster innovation by placing knowledge in the public domain, while giving authors some level of control over how their work is used. They allow recipients to copy, adapt and distribute original work, but not to use it for commercial purposes. If a recipient does seek to use the work for commercial purposes, they are required to negotiate a separate license with the author. As such, they leave the door open for authors to profit from third party use of their knowledge, but they assume this is not high on their agenda. The potential ‘business benefits’ of this approach were well illustrated in the other case studies where participants had a strong interest in having their knowledge recognised. In the absence of opportunities to forge new connections with recipients, contributors stood to loose more than they stood to gain by placing valuable local knowledge in the public domain in this context. This was apparent from the project’s defensive stance towards online users, which is evidenced by comments from the Global Coordinator who explained ‘the principle embedded in the system’. He said:

*We use a statement, which says that by agreeing to publish the item the person is saying as far as they know it’s original; they found it; it’s their knowledge. So it’s staking a claim to a piece of knowledge in its simplest sense. I think that is quite strong as a principle within OKN and it hasn’t always been the case in other similar types of ventures. It’s always possible that someone will contribute information on a use of the Neem that no one has discovered yet which turns out to be the answer to global warming.*\(^{52}\) The person that develops it has at least got the claim attested with the date that they were the ones that produced it, which in as much as that would ever stand up in different legal jurisdictions against Chrysler I would have no idea, but at least we’re hanging onto the principle that they can lay claim to their knowledge.

Concern about the potential for misappropriation was amplified when it came to traditional knowledge due to the inadequacies of the current intellectual property rights regime for protecting this type of resource, which may be defined as the accumulated collective wisdom of an indigenous or cultural community over time. Existing intellectual property rights laws reflect the Western tradition of individual ownership, which is incongruous with traditional knowledge (Brown 2003). Corporations have been granted the legal status of individuals to

\(^{52}\) Neem is a mahogany tree native to tropical and semi-tropical regions of India, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Malaysia and Pakistan.
allow them to protect their intellectual property, but no such provision exists for communities. Vandana Shiva (2001, p. 18) is a vocal critic of this system, which she has labelled ‘an instrument of colonisation’ because it allows multinational corporations based in the North to privatise traditional knowledge and resources in the South. The World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) is working with governments and community groups to try to resolve this issue by establishing new intellectual property rights laws that supplement but do not replace existing legislation in member states by recognising community ownership of traditional knowledge and resources and assisting in the distribution of benefits arising from their commercial use. Proposed provisions offer *sui generis* protection, allowing rights and interests to be vested directly in communities in accordance with customary law, or in government authorities, provided that the proceeds are applied to cultural heritage or social welfare programs (WIPO 2001, pp. 17-18)

In the meantime, there is much debate among indigenous and cultural communities as to how traditional knowledge should be shared. Some have restricted access, with a view to securing *sui generis* rights in the future in a strategy known as ‘defensive protection’. Others have deliberately placed their knowledge in the public domain in order to prevent the granting of patents in a strategy known as ‘positive protection’. Still others are uncomfortable applying the concept of intellectual property to their knowledge per se. They argue that traditional knowledge is part of the ‘global commons’, not withstanding customary laws related to its spiritual or guardianship nature which may prohibit some sharing (Story et al. 2006). Appropriately, OKN did not espouse a course of action on this issue, but it did equip communities with the tools required to pursue any one of the strategies described by recognising community ownership. Far from foolproof, the idea was that the person who contributed traditional knowledge to the system was acknowledged, but the community was recognised as the rightful owner. Global Coordinator, Pete Cranston described the provision as ‘…doing what we can. We haven’t ignored the issue. We’ve put in place a basic principle, the foundation stone, in enabling communities to stake claim to their knowledge, but it’s by no means sufficient.’ The provision enabled some communities to use OKN to document their traditional knowledge, but according to African Program Coordinator, Peter Benjamin, ‘Most of the information people do not want to make public because once that content is contributed to the global servers the issue of ownership becomes problematic’.

**7.3.4 Finding the Right Balancing Between Public and Private Gain**

Recognising the limitations of OKN’s licensing system for protecting traditional knowledge, several hub representatives claimed that financial considerations play an important role for many communities in setting the terms and conditions for its disclosure. Although traditional
knowledge is a collective resource, customary law may dictate that it is held by village chiefs or elders; men may be richer than women on some topics and vice versa; while young people may be excluded altogether. In some cases, it may be culturally inappropriate for individual custodians to relinquish their monopoly by disclosing traditional knowledge in their own community, let alone beyond this. In other cases, they may be unwilling to do so, particularly if they earn their living by selling traditional knowledge, as per the example of traditional healers who were among the few people to benefit financially from using OKN to advertise their business. The knowledge worker for SAFIRE, which is actively involved in documenting traditional knowledge on sustainable farming practices in Zimbabwe, explained how these issues affect people’s willingness to share. She said:

*If the communities could benefit financially from their traditional knowledge by linking them with investors it would be great, but it is so difficult because most people want to keep the information to themselves. So we haven’t reached a stage where the communities benefit as a whole because people always want more for themselves.*

Financial considerations also play an important role for many people in setting the terms and conditions for the disclosure of their individual knowledge. Nitin Gachhayat who is the Co-Founder and Head of Strategy and Special Projects for the Indian social enterprise Drishtee recounted an incident whereby a farmer who had ingeniously halved his workload by adapting a conventional hand-cranked pesticide spray pump to incorporate two nozzles contributed the details of his invention to the Honey Bee Network (see Figure 19), but not to OKN, even though both facilities were available through his local telecentre, suggesting that the prospect of being able to profit from his knowledge was paramount in his decision to share it. The community reporter in Nyamazura described a similar incident where a man asked to be paid for his knowledge. ‘He said, probably someone will get this information and they will make a lot of money out of it, so can you please give me something for it’. However she stressed ‘there are very few incidents. Most people are willing to contribute and I haven’t had any worries because I haven’t come across anything which I think could be misused.’

These comments suggest that the social norms towards peer-to-peer knowledge sharing that OKN aspired to enable in participating communities did not extend to valuable local knowledge with the potential to help people facing similar challenges elsewhere. Social norms towards peer-to-peer knowledge sharing may be understood in relation to trust and reciprocity in networks. OKN’s achievements in strengthening reciprocity and trust in the social networks that contributed to local content production have already been noted. Its failure to nurture new relationships of this nature between the communities and the wider world around them nonetheless underscores the lack of value of the global network layer over
the sum of its constituent parts. One interviewee suggested that local people recognised this fundamental limitation, but became accustomed to the demands of the project as they gained experience using OKN to share local information over time. They said:

In the beginning people were saying they wanted to be paid for their knowledge. If I give you my story, what do I get in return? We had to have several meetings with them and we had to explain, we are not generating any stories at the moment, but we have managed to download information from the established hubs and those people are not claiming anything from you. They are giving you that information for free. So when the process started, we didn’t have much of that, but now people are happy to share their knowledge and we really feel they are benefiting a lot.

In advocating an alternative approach that leveraged the global network layer to seize opportunities for beneficiaries to profit from their knowledge, it is important to state that my intention is not to advocate the market economy as a silver bullet to poverty. Rather, I view the opportunity to generate income as a fundamental driver and critical component of human development. Why should the poor be excluded from opportunities to profit from their knowledge precisely at a time when rich people are putting up barriers of ownership as high and as fast as they can? Within the communities, opinions on the ethics of using knowledge for private rather than public gain would no doubt have varied, particularly in the contentious field of traditional knowledge. But OKN had sufficient flexibility to accommodate both preferences, assuming consensual positions could be reached. With the intervention of community reporters, OKN could have nurtured peer-to-peer knowledge sharing within the communities, while pursuing the commercialisation of local knowledge they deemed commercially valuable by helping them to forge new connections with external stakeholders in their language domain over the web. In failing to leverage the global network layer to provide more flexible terms under which people could share their knowledge, OKN inadvertently undervalued the wealth-generating prospects of grassroots innovation and, as a corollary, its own potential to unlock economic opportunity in the South through ICT.

7.4 Summary of Findings
This case study has explored trends and concerns affecting OKN, a high profile ICT4D project, which sought to meet the knowledge needs of poor and marginalised people through the creation of a complex global community network, which allowed community-based organisations and their clients from poor and marginalised communities across the developing world to create, exchange and publish digital content on a multi-lingual web portal. I have argued that the project was motivated by a top-down sense of what should be done to counter
the dearth of locally relevant content on the web, rather than a strong sense of need from the intended beneficiaries of the project. Unforeseen redundancies between OKN and the pre-existing communication channels and independent service offerings of member organisations meant that there was little incentive for them to channel information through the global network. This meant that the vast majority of information originated from and ultimately failed to move beyond participating communities, which resulted in an overly insular and supply-driven content offering for which there was little latent demand.

Despite its failure to unlock economic opportunity in the communities by stimulating a market for local content as envisioned, I have argued that OKN had social significance for people who contributed to content production. It built social capital by strengthening their membership in existing social networks based on reciprocity and trust, and advanced their social status through familiarity with or positive disposition towards ICT. However, these positive social outcomes were contingent on human-centred rather than techno-centric network components, namely community reporters who visited people in their homes and joined in discussions with visitors to the access points to gather information. Thus, I have argued that OKN’s efforts to improve impact by broadening the communications channels used to disseminate local content diverted attention away from more pressing concerns regarding the distribution of opportunities for people to contribute to content production. Whether or not people were able to engage in this activity depended largely on the individual attributes of community reporters and on social and cultural norms that restricted their mobility and social connections.

The case study also explored tensions and constraints that limited local content exchange between different communities in the global network. The lack of an efficient translation system meant that most exchanges of this nature took place between communities that spoke the same language and shared strong cultural ties. While this may have disappointed the architects of the project, this research has revealed that most people mistrusted ‘foreign local content’ from other cultural communities whose local knowledge differed substantially from their own. This suggests that poor and marginalised communities that lack strong cultural ties are likely to gain little more than novelty value from foreign local content in the absence of risk-takers who are willing to experiment with new ideas in ways that could impact the local economy. However, given the inherent risks associated with this activity, I have argued that it is inappropriate for donors to foster entrepreneurship through the provision of anything other than trusted and proven knowledge when pushing external information towards the poor.

Rather than interpreting these trends as justification for insularity, I concluded the case study by arguing that OKN had enormous potential to nurture the entrepreneurial spirit of
beneficiaries in their capacity as content providers. Drawing on insights from alternative ICT4D initiatives, which seize market opportunities for beneficiaries to profit from their knowledge, innovation and creative skills, I argued that OKN provided little incentive for people to place valuable local knowledge in the public domain. Although its licensing system left the door open for them to benefit financially from their knowledge, it assumed that this was not high on their agenda. On the contrary, this research has revealed that financial considerations played an important role for many people in setting the terms and conditions for the disclosure of their knowledge. Thus, I argued that in failing to provide more flexible terms under which they could share their knowledge, OKN failed to realise its potential to empower beneficiaries economically. In concluding the case study in this way, my goal was to expand current understanding of the risks and benefits associated with ICT4D projects that aim to give poor people greater voice in their development without helping them to forge new connections that could help them to generate much-needed income from their innovation, knowledge and creative skills.
Chapter 8

Conclusion
8.0 Conclusion

This dissertation has addressed the question: *To what extent can online networks support greater inclusion and fuller participation of Southern stakeholders in aspects of the development project over which they previously had limited influence or control?* through an empirical investigation of online networking initiatives hosted by three very different organisations that aspire to achieve that goal. The case studies demonstrate a wide variety of experience and a complex mix of success and failure. They also show that online networks can change significantly over time. Although each case experience is unique, they have some common features, which are the focus of this final chapter. My intention in exploring these is to contribute to greater understanding of the progress made and the obstacles yet to be surmounted by a range of online networks in bringing the new language of development into practice. In short, the main findings of the research are that inclusion is meaningless in the absence of incentives; participants exert power in shaping the boundaries of network activity; and new kinds of collaborative environments are needed to promote dialogue between different stakeholders with diverse interests and worldviews.

These findings mirror the shift in my own thinking over the course of the project, which was initially inspired by the rather naive concern that online networks were failing to live up to their promise to transform the development project with local knowledge, experience and ideas from the South. This starting point was underpinned by a crude critical structuralism that romanticised the value of South over North; local over global; and open over closed. Such dichotomies appear meaningless at the conclusion of the project, which has explored the impact of a broad range of human factors that affect not only the capacity, but also the desire of a diverse range of local knowledge actors to use online networks to effect change. While much of the literature bemoans their exclusion based on the same binary oppositions that framed my research question, in this final chapter I will draw on practical insights from the three case studies to argue that the dual dynamics of inclusion and exclusion follow a more complex path, which rarely corresponds with what is envisioned from above by the host organisation, but maps to incentives as seen from below by network members.

8.1 Moving Beyond Binary Frameworks

Before exploring the common themes to emerge from the research and the implications for future research, I take this opportunity to situate my conclusions in light of theoretical understandings gleaned over the course of the project. To do so, necessitates a reflexive critique of the normative assumptions that framed the empirical investigation, and were subsequently challenged by it. At the outset of the project, I was uncritical of calls to support
greater inclusion and fuller participation of Southern stakeholders in the formulation of solutions to international development challenges, viewing their contribution as crucial to reduce the dominance of the so-called experts in development and empower the people whose interests they are meant to serve. In tracing the oscillating ‘pendulum’ of development in Chapter 2, I lamented top-down, one-size-fits-all approaches, and welcomed the new language of development, which puts local knowledge and capacities at the fore. In this orientation, I was by no means alone. The new language of development is conventionally represented as emerging out of recognition of the ineffectiveness of externally imposed expert-oriented forms of technical assistance, which has resulted in almost universal support for greater inclusion of local knowledge, perspectives, priorities and skills. This is invariably justified in terms of enhanced relevance, sustainability and empowerment.

From this starting point, I sought to explore the extent to which online networks are helping to bring discourse into practice. Like many others, I was genuinely excited by the potential for new information and communication technologies (ICT), particularly the Internet, to change the topography of knowledge that is used to inform macro and micro level developmental processes by providing a new model of support for knowledge sharing that would empower Southern stakeholders as active knowledge providers, rather than passive knowledge recipients. However, I was sceptical of claims that they are rendering the old model of North-South knowledge transfer obsolete. As such, I anticipated joining in the chorus of critics whose research was explored in Chapter 3 who point a gap between the vision and reality of network participation for local knowledge actors to explain the weakness of the development project in practice. Instead, I now find that proposition wanting. It is too simplistic to frame empowerment as deriving from active participation by Southern stakeholders in aspects of the development project over which they previously had limited influence or control. To do so treats local knowledge actors as homogenous, static and harmonious in their circumstances, interests, and choices about when and how to share their knowledge.

There is a small but growing critique of dichotomous theoretical and practical approaches to development, which call for greater attention to local knowledge based on conventional stratifications of power between North and South, global and local, aid donors and recipients, and so on. The most influential of these is an edited volume by Cooke & Kothari (2001), which questions the populist assumption that participation by the intended beneficiaries of development interventions is the key to aid effectiveness at the micro-level of projects, arguing that participatory approaches to development often conceal and reinforce daily oppressions and injustices in people’s lives. The authors call for a more nuanced understanding of the workings of power than is evident in much of the literature in order to
uncover its more varied and subtle manifestations. This follows from Spivak (1998) who interrogates the use of the language of ‘subalternity’ by many Western academics to critique their tendency to adopt an essentialist view of subjectivity among disenfranchised groups and thus neglect the heterogeneity existing within them. Drawing on these arguments, I find that much of the literature on the three major areas of online networking activity that were explored in this dissertation to have glossed over the complexities of power relations in development due to failure to recognise the multiple and diverse ways in which power is expressed.

The binary frameworks that lie behind much of what has been written in the three broad fields of inquiry on which this research builds consequently proved to be more of a hindrance than a help in explaining the complex internal and external dynamics that affected participation by Southern stakeholders that are rich in local rather than global knowledge in each of the initiatives explored. Indications that the dual dynamics of inclusion and exclusion would follow a more complex path were provided by scholars calling for a more critical approach to participation in each field (e.g. Bailur 2008; Ferguson, et al. 2008; S. Maxwell & Stone 2005). Some argue that greater attention needs to be given to what Ferguson at al. (2008) term the ‘human aspects’ of knowledge sharing and how they affect different stakeholders. These include the role of power, incentives, attitudes, language and culture in supporting or limiting knowledge sharing by all social strata in the South. In exploring how these factors support and limit active participation in different types of online networks by a range of local knowledge actors, my hope is that this research will provide a practical means for advancing the debate on the contribution that ICT can make to support dialogue not only between North and South, but also within the South where most scholars agree that the most valuable knowledge for development resides.

8.2 Internal Dynamics: Linking Participation to Incentives

One of the major findings to emerge from this research is the crucial role of incentives in shaping active participation by local knowledge actors in online networks that focus on the broad theme of development. Much of the literature that inspired this research presents, at best, a vague understanding of the motivations for knowledge sharing. This is characterised by an almost universal assumption about the rationality inherent in contributing to the global knowledge pool. In contrast, this research indicates that aspirations of active participation cannot be taken for granted, but are contingent on the existence of incentives. When present, the research has highlighted the valuable role that online networks can play in putting local knowledge and capacities at the fore – whether it is by empowering frontline development workers to play a more influential role in shaping aid programs, civil society organisations to
have greater voice in public policy debates, or poor people to promote local solutions to common development challenges. However these positive outcomes are by no means inevitable. Although at the highest level, participants may be driven by a shared commitment to improve development performance in some area, in reality their motivations to share their knowledge are usually far more self-interested.

The research has identified a number of incentives or ‘benefits of active participation’, which drove local knowledge actors to contribute to the online networks explored. These manifested as opportunities to build new connections, and were unevenly spread between the initiatives. Unsurprisingly, they were most clearly evident in UNDP and APC where participants are united by their shared professional backgrounds, thematic interests, and functional skill-sets. Despite being formal in nature, the online networks initiated by these organisations emerged in direct response to demand from members who have a strong vested interest in having their knowledge recognised. They have consequently made remarkable strides in putting their knowledge and capacities at the fore of their respective fields as participants pursue their own self-interest in expanding their professional networks by forging new relationships based on reciprocity and trust. In UNDP, program officers and other relatively junior field staff contributed to build their professional reputation and prospects for career advancement. In APC, organisational members sought to secure new business opportunities to pursue their mission in collaboration with other civil society organisations that share common goals.

The benefits of active participation were least evident in OKN, which was motivated by a top-down sense of what needs to be done to address the dearth of locally relevant content on the Internet for poor and marginalised communities, rather than a strong sense of need among the target beneficiaries of the project. It consequently had to hire dedicated human intermediaries to ‘pull’ local knowledge from them. I have questioned the compulsion to use ICT to promote local knowledge sharing in this context unless it is tied to new business models that seize opportunities for poor people to profit from their innovation, knowledge and creative skills, as per the other two cases. Drawing on evidence from alternative ICT4D projects, I argued that this could have been achieved by helping contributors to forge new connections with socially minded investors and/or consumers in their language domain who could view the global content pool over the multi-lingual web portal. Very few people were able to leverage their contributions to OKN in this way. The best that most could hope for was enhanced social status within their existing social networks based on their enhanced familiarity with or positive disposition towards ICT.
Language

Another related theme to emerge from the research is the interdependence of language and incentives. As the case study on APC revealed, English is invariably the common language for local knowledge actors working on global issues. However there was a strong sense that the benefits of active participation could best be realised by civil society organisations in their own language territory. Despite efforts to foster integration, network communications was highly fragmented along programmatic lines with the vast majority of knowledge sharing taking place in project teams that aggregate around the regional level. The most active contributors to global discussions concerning APC’s policy agenda at the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) were partners on policy-related projects linked to that process, rather than members whose work focused purely on facilitating access to ICT tools, which were more likely to remain knowledge recipients in that context. Similarly in UNDP, several interviewees suggested that program officers and other relatively junior field staff participate more actively in regional practice networks where available. One suggested that the most active contributors to the global practice networks are international staff with experience working in diverse country contexts, rather than national staff whose careers are based solely in their country of origin.

These trends expose the limitations of the imagined ‘global village’ that characterises much of the literature on knowledge sharing for development. It also underscores the value of more spatially bounded initiatives like the Solution Exchange project of the UN agencies in India for promoting dialogue between multi-stakeholder groups in a specific locality. As of yet however, the Solution Exchange only supports interactions in English. Powell (2006) suggests that the lack of multi-lingual functionality is indicative of the dominance of the English language in the development sector more generally, which systematically undermines effective communication by many local knowledge actors. Language he argues is not simply an instrument of speech, but the main mode of thought. This creates difficulties for bi-lingual development experts and practitioners in many parts of the world who struggle to interpret and reconcile development discourses coming out of dominant intellectual traditions in the North. They must work in English or at least one of the major international languages to voice their knowledge or risk being excluded altogether. He does however acknowledge that “addressing the issue of language fully would have large financial and organisational implications, but [he argues] failure to do so carries the high costs of ignorance and inefficient communication.” (p. 532).

The failed attempt by OKN to enable poor and marginalised communities across the developing world to share local knowledge in their own local languages suggests that the
potential for inefficient communication transcends investment in multi-lingual support functionality. Despite lofty aspirations, OKN was the most fragmented of all three initiatives. General consensus among interviewees was that the architects of the project invested too much time and money building the complex technical infrastructure needed to facilitate global exchanges between the communities at the expense of more pressing concerns at the local level. The resultant shift in priorities coupled with the lack of an efficient translation system meant that OKN did very little experimentation in terms of moving local content outside of its community of origin, let alone outside of its language territory. Even with the modified focus, few people used the system to share local knowledge with people facing similar challenges elsewhere, indicating that local language support on its own is insufficient to motivate people to actively participate in online networks in the absence of incentives.

**Power Relations**

While incentives are very important, this research has also identified a number of modes of exclusion, which limited the ability of some local knowledge actors to contribute to the initiatives explored, regardless of their desire to do so. These usually manifested as obstacles to the benefits of active participation and were borne out of the power relations in which participants are enmeshed. They were particularly striking in UNDP where the global practice networks have engendered an organisational culture change that has elevated the perceived validity of local knowledge to that of global knowledge in some parts of the agency. However there are powerful pockets of resistance to the new culture of local knowledge sharing, particularly among the agency’s in-house policy advisors and some senior managers who appear to favour the conventional model of centralised power and control. The propensity for junior field staff to contribute to the global practice networks in this contradictory environment is inherently dependent on the attitude of senior staff in their particular country or region. Where there is recognition of the value of local knowledge, they can leverage their contributions to raise their profile in the agency; where there is resistance or overt opposition, they tend to abstain from contributing, to avoid damaging their career prospects.

In APC, the ability of organisational members to contribute to global discussions concerning APC’s policy agenda follows from resources. Evidence presented from the WSIS revealed that they were dominated by well-established or well-connected civil society organisations whose own portfolios included policy-related projects which enabled them to attend preparatory meetings so they could learn, network, and build visibility for their own area of interest. Among the least active contributors were grassroots CSOs with an expressed interest in becoming more involved in policy advocacy, but lacking the means or the confidence to engage as equal partners in global discussions with members with more experience in the
policy arena. Some were concerned about the impact of disagreement in an environment that was by all accounts characterised by high levels of trust and good will, and engaged in a form of self-censorship to avoid antagonising prospective project partners and thereby precluding themselves from new business opportunities in the policy arena. Exclusion in this case was driven more by conventional power politics stemming from resource dependencies, than the privileging of one type of knowledge over another, as was the case in UNDP. Indeed, one interviewee emphasised the deliberative nature of policy discussions, which aim to accommodate diverse local knowledge from across the developing world and welcome difference as an opportunity to forge common positions that will be more persuasive to governments on the global stage.

In OKN, the ability of the intended beneficiaries to contribute to the global content pool depended largely on the human intermediaries or ‘community reporters’ who were hired to gather information from them. There was a strong sense among network managers that local people made the best community reporters because they were already well connected and trusted in the communities. However recruitment practices varied, with some member organisations appointing local people and others appointing aid workers to the role. Community development workers who succeeded in earning the trust of at least some local people appeared to be better equipped to generate local content on sensitive issues that might otherwise have remained shielded from public view. However local people were able to leverage the position to advance their own life opportunities. Thus, the particular strategy adopted impacted on the type of knowledge that was shared. However local power politics was more important in determining who was called upon to contribute in the first instance. Factors such as ethnicity, religion and caste affected the community reporters’ mobility and social connections, but gender was a more ubiquitous concern due to the sheer prevalence of social and culture norms which made it inappropriate for them to engage, let alone request sensitive information from local people of the opposite sex. This meant that the most marginalised groups tended to be excluded from the social networks that were enlisted to contribute, unless there was a deliberate attempt to target them.

**Opportunity Cost**

Another theme to emerge from this research is the opportunity cost of active participation in online networks by local knowledge actors across the aid delivery chain. In each case, there was a tendency by some research participants to view the pressure to share their knowledge as placing new demands on their time, which would be better spent on more productive activities. This finding has important implications for UNDP in particular where there is a drive from the most senior echelons of the agency to promote knowledge sharing by tying it
to staff performance appraisals. The move is intended to strengthen the agency’s capacity to tap the rich contextual knowledge from its experience of the ground in 166 countries by equalising incentives for program officers to contribute to the practice networks, among other things. While it may well increase the diversity of contributions from junior staff who are negatively affected by alternative management directives intended to dissuade participation, it is unlikely to overcome other factors that influence people’s decisions about whether and how to share their knowledge. Most crucial of these are individual aptitudes and cultural attitudes towards online networking. Some staff may be uncomfortable using ICT to share their knowledge, preferring instead to dip into the networks as a means of keeping abreast of important issues in their field. To ask them to prioritise active participation or risk damaging their career prospects assumes that this will not detract them from other pursuits that may ultimately be of more value to the agency and to the development project as a whole.

The opportunity cost of knowledge sharing was well illustrated in the case study on APC, which did not enjoy consistently strong support for its role in the WSIS from members who were the least active contributors to policy development. A clear division was apparent between CSOs who sought to become more involved in policy advocacy and those who did not. Among those who did not, one questioned the opportunity cost of APC’s involvement in the WSIS due to the perceived lack of impact of that process on people directly facing development challenges. While undoubtedly a valid critique of civil society engagement in the formal political world, the organisation in question isolated itself from global discussions on WSIS-related matters, deeming the effort required to convey this position as outweighing the potential impact on APC’s agenda, which was widely supported by other members. In adopting what I have elsewhere termed a realist approach, it understood that its contribution to the negotiations would be unlikely to overcome the fundamental gap between its own goals and the goals of APC as a whole. As such, the organisation sought to prevent the diversion of further scarce resources away from what it considered to be more productive activities in the field.

The opportunity cost of digital inclusion projects that use ICT to promote local knowledge sharing by people whose basic needs have yet to be met was a reoccurring theme in the case study of OKN. The lack of opportunities for the intended beneficiaries of the project to generate much-needed income from their knowledge, innovation and creative skills helped not only to explain the limitations of the content offering, but also why the modest benefits of local content production tended to replicate and reinforce existing inequalities in participating communities. In situations where the poorest and most marginalised groups were targeted, the prospect of advancing their social status is unlikely to have been a priority.
Figure 19: The Elusive Benefits of Active Network Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Network</th>
<th>Stakeholder Group</th>
<th>Incentive</th>
<th>Modes of Exclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>Program officers and other junior field staff</td>
<td>Professional reputation</td>
<td>Managerial opposition, inadequate multilingual support, global scope considered off-putting, inequities in the privileges of membership favouring international rather than national staff, lack of awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APC</td>
<td>Civil society organisations</td>
<td>Business opportunities</td>
<td>Resource constraints and dependencies, dominance of English language for network-wide communications, lack of experience in the policy arena, self-censorship in deliberations designed to produce consensual knowledge, scepticism concerning impact of engagement in the formal political world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OKN</td>
<td>People from poor and marginalised communities</td>
<td>Social status</td>
<td>Social and cultural norms that restrict mobility and social connections, relationship with key support personnel; lack of familiarity with or fear of computers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8.3 External Dynamics: Tensions Between Openness & Closure

Another major finding to emerge from this research is the prevalence of tensions between openness and closure in online networks across the aid delivery chain. Although the hosts of the online networking initiatives that were explored in this dissertation each embrace a discourse of inclusion that suggests that they have a high degree of openness to outsider groups, in reality they vary widely in the extent to which they draw on local knowledge from outside their network borders, which were often quite rigid. Much of the literature portrays exclusion of this nature as grounds for concern based on the same dichotomies that framed my research question. However the study has revealed that exclusion of this nature may just as easily be intentioned by local knowledge actors as by global knowledge actors. They too exert power when shaping the boundaries of network activity in accordance with their own self-interest. A related trend that was identified by the study is the tendency by some host organisations to disseminate network communications over the web, rather than leveraging that technology to facilitate knowledge sharing between insider and outsider groups. This trend has yet to receive attention in the literature, which invariably associates this practice with efforts to disseminate relatively static best practice information, with little regard for context. It points to a need for host organisations to reassess the way they use the web to promote different types of local knowledge where context is of upmost concern.

Tensions between openness and closure came to the fore in UNDP in debates about its role in the wider development community. The threat of becoming a ‘knowledge fortress’ has
resulted in a high-level commitment to become more outwardly oriented in its approach to knowledge management. To date, most practical efforts have centred on improving UNDP’s capacity to tap expert-generated knowledge from epistemic communities based in the South, but the techniques adopted have differed between regions, with some focussing on connection and others on collection. Countering the latter trend is a new directive to gradually open the global practice networks to external experts, thereby enabling new understandings to emerge dynamically through interactions between insider and outsider groups. Some external experts already contribute to the practice networks on request, even though they are not yet allowed to be members. However, many junior field staff oppose opening the networks to external practitioners because they want a safe space to discuss issues affecting their work. Their exclusion also gives junior field staff a special place in the agency’s knowledge supply chain at the intersection between insider and outsider groups as the exclusive providers of practice-based knowledge. Thus, as much as UNDP is becoming more inclusive of external knowledge flows from epistemic communities, it has excluded external knowledge flows from frontline development workers. In other words, its approach mirrors the conventional preference for expert-generated over practice-based knowledge inside the agency.

The need to become more responsive to local knowledge, experience and ideas from beyond the auspices of its own programs has prompted UNDP to begin experimenting with a separate set of cross-organisational communities of practice, which include external practitioners. The Solution Exchange project of the UN Country Team in India is one example. It promises to improve UNDP’s capacity to be innovative by giving its policy advisors better access to lessons learned from innovative practitioners working on a wide range of development-related programs and projects in that country. However, the drive to create a global repository of network communications from diverse country contexts to be accessed by the wider development community over the web also poses new risks. Although ostensibly a move towards greater openness, the use of the broadcast model of communication to disseminate lessons learned from across the developing world is unlikely to contribute to new understanding among outsider groups. On the contrary, the focus on collection in this context could convey a sense of transferability, which could weaken development performance in the absence opportunities for recipients to collectively assess and critique local knowledge that has not yet proven to work beyond a specific locality.

APC had the highest degree of openness to outsider groups of the three initiatives explored, but it is by no means immune from tensions. Although members alone determine its agenda, its programs work by involving external CSOs in the development of resources to build their capacity and making those resources available for others to use in developing new skills. It
also hosts capacity building workshops to support face-to-face interactions between insider and outsider groups involved in adapting and applying the resources to their work. Despite APC’s core focus on building the capacity of Southern CSOs to use ICT strategically to advance their mission, the network manager expressed her frustration at the tendency by many donor agencies to limit project funding for wider capacity development to the production of resources for dissemination over the web. This is a preference that APC has sought to counter by integrating interactive communications functionality on almost all of its project websites to allow recipients to share lessons learned from implementing the resources in diverse organisational and cultural contexts, thereby allowing new understandings to emerge. However, face-to-face interactions are still considered crucial to avoid excluding grassroots CSOs from opportunities to engage in participatory learning.

APC’s efforts to promote both virtual and face-to-face interactions between insider and outsider groups over the course of the WSIS were not well recognised by its critics who perceived its ascendancy to the most senior echelons of official civil society as somehow compromising its legitimacy as a representative of Southern civil society perspectives. In reality, APC remained very open to external knowledge flows from its vast network of project partners, capacity building workshop participants, and contributors to its online forums during the Summit. It also remained an active participant in the informal civil society structures it helped to create. It even established a travel policy fund to enable some of its project partners to attend WSIS meetings in person. However, this produced tensions among some member organisations who resented the inclusion of external CSOs in policy-related project teams from which they were excluded. These tensions are indicative of the fine line that APC must walk to balance donor expectations that it will partner with the most qualified organisation for any given task with internal pressure to build policy research and advocacy skills among its members. This it has tried to do by securing seed funding for some of its less-established members to gain project experience in the policy arena, but demand for funding persists.

In contrast, OKN had the lowest degree of openness to outsider groups of the three initiatives explored. Ironically, the project architects went to great lengths to create an ‘open’ network of CSOs and their clients from poor and marginalised communities across the developing world that allowed them to create, exchange and publish local content on the web. In reality, however, OKN was closed. It consisted of little more than a series of interconnected but otherwise isolated community networks that promoted local content exchange in rather narrow geographical settings. Unforeseen redundancies between OKN and the pre-existing communication channels and independent service offerings of its local project partners meant that there was little incentive for them to channel information to their clients through the
global network. This meant that the vast majority of information originated from and ultimately failed to move beyond participating communities, which resulted in an overly insular and supply-driven content offering for which there was little latent demand.

A major weakness of the project stemmed from its use of the broadcast model of communication to publish the global content offering on the web, rather than leveraging that technology to build new connections between insider and outsider groups. The limitations of OKN’s approach mirror the drive by the UN Solution Exchange to create a global repository of network communications from across the developing world. However in this case, the problem was not that OKN conveyed a sense of transferability to external audiences, but rather that it offered very little to them. The compulsion to protect, rather than exploit local knowledge in this context meant that the project adopted a defensive stance towards online users, rather than embracing them as a potential source of opportunities for the intended beneficiaries to profit from their knowledge, innovation and creative skills. The people who were enlisted to contribute to local content production consequently had very little to gain from publishing their knowledge on the web, which effectively amounted to a dead-end rather than a catalyst for exploring new ways to generate much-needed income.

8.4 Web 2.0: An Alternative to Inclusion from Above

At the outset of this project, a definition of inclusion was provided that entailed giving local knowledge actors the capacity not only to contribute to the global knowledge pool that is used to inform solutions to international development challenges, but also to have their contributions countenanced. For this to occur, host organisations ideally seek to promote dialogues between different stakeholders both inside and outside their formal network borders. Evidence of a tendency by some host organisations to rely on the broadcast model of communication to deliver information to external audiences over the web consequently has important implications for their potential impact in promoting new understanding. Inside networks where this trend was also in evidence, the relationship between members is well defined. Although facilitators may moderate discussions, members use their own judgement to determine the value, veracity, and reliability of contributions based on their relationships of trust and reciprocity. Outside networks, this becomes much more difficult.

For people to make sense of the information provided, they need what Mansell (2002) has termed ‘new media literacies’ which enable them to discriminate between authoritative information and information whose provenance is detached from its originator. These skills are becoming increasingly important for people to navigate the web. However they have arguably yet to be finely honed in relation to development-related issues due to the
entrenched expectation that development organisations use the web to disseminate authoritative ‘best practice’ information that has been applied and has proven to work in diverse organisational and cultural contexts. To promote attention to local knowledge in this environment, development organisations need to embrace new ways of working on the web. Specifically, they need to adopt interactive communications functionality to enable recipients to express their opinions about the information provided and, through their feedback, assist others in assessing its potential to help people facing similar challenges elsewhere.

This approach is what is driving the so-called Web 2.0 revolution, circa 2004. Web 2.0 refers to a perceived second generation of hosted services and applications that have made the web more inclusive than ever before. They include blogs, wikis, RSS feeds, social networking, social bookmarking, and social trading sites, and other forms of peer-to-peer publishing. Popular examples include Wikipedia, Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Flickr, del.icio.us, Ebay and Google Wave. These services stand in contrast to static websites and portals used to disseminate information because they facilitate interactive communication among users who can create and distribute content, often with the freedom to change content that has been contributed by others. These changes may be conceptualised as a move away from the cathedral to the bazaar model of content production. This follows from ideas put forward by Raymond (1999) in his manifesto for the free and open source software movement, which argued that the conventional ‘cathedral’ model of software development requires an inordinate amount of time and energy because code is only made available to a few software engineers before a working version is made available to the public. Instead he advocated the alternative ‘bazaar’ model in which software engineers develop code over the Internet in full view of the public so it is available for testing, scrutiny and experimentation while it is being developed. Raymond’s argument rests on the assumption that many people are smarter than a few, which has since been theorised and given catchy slogans, such as ‘smart mobs’ (Raymond 2003) and ‘civic intelligence’ (Schuler 2001, 2008), among other terms.

The call for greater inclusion and fuller participation of local knowledge actors in the resolution of international development challenges anticipates the Web 2.0 revolution. Yet, despite synergies, the so-called ‘architecture of participation’ has received scant attention in development studies (Thompson 2008). It has however captured the imagination of scholars in the development informatics school of information systems (e.g. Thompson 2008; Heeks 2009). Thompson (2008) argues that Web 2.0 challenges existing debates and approaches to development studies because it reduces the binary oppositions in which participation has become associated into a single logic of inclusion in which people are either included or excluded. Notwithstanding severe limitations imposed by the digital divide, Thompson’s
utopian vision is of an open platform in which participants’ identity and location are much less relevant than they are in formal online networks where the boundaries are often quite rigid, thereby creating “a new logic of inclusion that redefines the entire social and physical geography of which these oppositions were the previous contours”. He states, “Conceived as Web 2.0, a paradigm for technology-enabled social life, comprising diversity, collaboration and multiple truths, ICT now poses a direct challenge to development studies itself” (p. 825).

Utopian imaginings aside, the allure of the new logic of inclusion is that it calls attention to the division between insider and outsider groups in online networks that relegate online users to passive recipients of content supplied by network members. More importantly, it offers an apparent solution to this problem whereby outsider groups are transformed from passive knowledge recipients into members of an inherently open community. In this conception, anyone can participate in generating, interpreting, contextualising, enriching, debating and disputing knowledge. The goal is dialogue that leads to new understanding. As was shown in the case study on APC, which embraced these principles to support the collaborative production of civil society declarations and position statements during the WSIS, dialogues between individuals and organisations with divergent interests and worldviews are political. They necessarily result in exclusion. And the opportunity to participate in any such community will only have meaning in so much as it is desired.

8.5 Questions for Future Research

A number of scholars in the development informatics school of information systems are calling for a new interdisciplinary field of inquiry, which draws on development studies, development communication and ICT disciplines, and embraces the principles of Web 2.0. This has been dubbed ‘Development 2.0’ (Heeks 2009; Thompson 2008). In hindsight, this dissertation represents an early contribution to that field, which poses a number of questions for future research. First and foremost, I believe a broadening of the research agenda to encompass the three major areas of online networking activity that were covered by this dissertation would be beneficial. At present, the agenda is directed towards digital inclusion projects that target poor and marginalised communities, but these blur and blend with issues explored in relation to civil society partnerships and policy dialogues, at least in theory if not in practice. There are also mounting calls for a broadening of the ‘knowledge management for development’ research agenda in development studies, which suggests that discipline is set to venture into the same territory (see Ferguson et al. 2008; Krohwinkel-Karlsson 2007). Development 2.0 thus has enormous potential to help bridge the disciplinary silos between these increasingly interconnected, but still largely disparate fields.
At the macro-level, researchers of donor-driven knowledge management and civil society partnerships and policy dialogues invariably call for a sustained dialogue between different stakeholders, but scant attention has been given in existing research to the type of communications environment that is required in this context. Empirical studies that critically explore how Web 2.0 platforms are being used by the main decision-makers in development would be particularly valuable. Investigations of open communities that support knowledge sharing in a single language territory would also be useful to provide better understanding of the human factors that support and limit participation by a range of stakeholders in a less dichotomous framework than is arguably possible when exploring initiatives at the global level. Despite considerable theorising that has accompanied the new knowledge paradigm in development, this remains an area in which empirical research is remarkably slim.

At the micro-level, many researchers of ICT for development projects emphasise the need to enable poor people to engage in local content production as a means to acquire new forms of citizenship and political agency. This research suggests that the benefits of digital inclusion projects may be more modest, particularly if the focus is broadcasting local content over the web, rather than leveraging that technology to facilitate new connections between content providers and recipients. Heeks (2009) has set out a ‘manifesto for ICT4D 2.0’ which implicitly agrees with this finding. He calls for greater attention to the creative productive potential of Web 2.0 to provide a foundation for the growth of new and traditional industries. He states “The sense of empowerment and inclusion that come from content creation are valuable. But the number one priority for the poor is typically income and employment. Here we are only just waking up to the possibilities” (p. 12). This indicates that empirical studies are needed to clarify the prospects and dimensions of empowerment in this context, particularly as the growth of mobile phone ownership coupled with increased migration flows improves peoples’ ability and motivation to work online (Heeks 2009).

A major challenge for researchers from different disciplines as they seek to address these and other questions under the nascent Development 2.0 umbrella will be to avoid adopting utopian or dystopian perspectives that relegate them to silos, but to focus instead on conducting more nuanced empirical studies. Just as I have sought to go to practice to improve understanding of the progress made and the obstacles yet to be surmounted by a range of online networks with fairly rigid network borders to bring the new discourse of development into practice, more interdisciplinary studies are needed to investigate the impact of Web 2.0 technologies on the dual dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, rather than speculating about the possibilities, as exciting as they might be.
Bibliography


Lakshmy, R. (2006). MSSRF Information Village Research Project. Information Technology in Developing Countries: Newsletter of the International Federation for Information Processing,


# Appendix 1: Detailed Overview of Research Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Network</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Participant Group</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Mode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNDP Knowledge Services</td>
<td>Global Manager</td>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>Kim Henderson</td>
<td>Chief Coordinator</td>
<td></td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Steve Glovinsky</td>
<td>Coordinator, Solution Exchange Knowledge Management Partnership Project</td>
<td></td>
<td>New Delhi</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>Regional Manager</td>
<td></td>
<td>Robert Juham</td>
<td>Team Leader, Knowledge Services, Regional Bureau for South Asia &amp; Pacific</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bangkok</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Africa</td>
<td>Regional Manager</td>
<td></td>
<td>Emmie Wade</td>
<td>Knowledge Worker, Southern &amp; West Africa Regional Service Centre</td>
<td></td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>Regional Manager</td>
<td></td>
<td>Eric Overvest</td>
<td>Coordinator, Latin American &amp; Caribbean Sub-Regional Resource Facility</td>
<td></td>
<td>Panama City</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External Stakeholder</td>
<td>OneWorld South Asia</td>
<td>Basheerhamad Shadrach*</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td></td>
<td>New Delhi</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APC</td>
<td>Global Manager</td>
<td>APC</td>
<td>Anriette Esterhuysen</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td></td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organisational Member</td>
<td>BytesforAll</td>
<td>Partha Pratim-Sarker</td>
<td>Co-Founder</td>
<td></td>
<td>New Delhi</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>Organisational Member</td>
<td>WomensNet</td>
<td>Natasha Primo*</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td></td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>Organisational Member</td>
<td>CEPES</td>
<td>Carlos Saldarriaga</td>
<td>Technical Coordinator</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lima</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>Organisational Member</td>
<td>CEPES</td>
<td>Maicu Alvarado</td>
<td>Director, ICT for Development Office</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lima</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External Stakeholder</td>
<td>CEPES</td>
<td>Alan Morleighem</td>
<td>Information Officer</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lima</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jaime Torres</td>
<td>Information Systems Engineer</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lima</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OKN</td>
<td>Global Manager</td>
<td>OneWorld International</td>
<td>Pete Cransont</td>
<td>Networking &amp; Communications Manager</td>
<td></td>
<td>London</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regional Manager</td>
<td>OneWorld South Asia</td>
<td>Busheerhamad Shadrach</td>
<td>Executive Director</td>
<td></td>
<td>New Delhi</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>Organisational Member</td>
<td>Dristree</td>
<td>Nitin Gachhayat</td>
<td>Head of Strategy and Special Projects</td>
<td></td>
<td>New Delhi</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organisational Member</td>
<td>Tarahaat</td>
<td>Rakesh Khanna</td>
<td>Head of Strategy and Special Projects</td>
<td></td>
<td>New Delhi</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organisational Member</td>
<td>Datamation Foundation</td>
<td>Sarita Sharma</td>
<td>Participatory Action Researcher</td>
<td></td>
<td>New Delhi</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Divya Jain</td>
<td>Programme Officer</td>
<td></td>
<td>New Delhi</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Participants</td>
<td></td>
<td>Seelampur Community Telecentre (supported by Datamation Foundation)</td>
<td>16 female users of OKN from the urban ghetto of Seelampur in northwest New Delhi, which is home to a predominately Muslim ethnic minority community</td>
<td>Participants included the telecentre manager, 3 community reporters, 5 members a micro-finance group, and 7 others not identified. Participants included broad mix of young and elderly women from the local area</td>
<td>New Delhi</td>
<td>Focus Group</td>
<td>F2F</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Africa</td>
<td>Regional Manager</td>
<td>OneWorld Africa</td>
<td>Peter Benjamin</td>
<td>African Programme Manager</td>
<td></td>
<td>Johannesburg</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organisational Member</td>
<td>SAFIRE</td>
<td>Roseline Murota</td>
<td>Knowledge Worker</td>
<td></td>
<td>Harare</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual Participants</td>
<td>Nyamazura Community Telecentre (supported by SAFIRE)</td>
<td>Alice Mugore (represented users of OKN from the subsistence farming community of Nyamazura)</td>
<td>Community Development Worker (Dedicated Community Reporter for the OKN project based in Nyamazura)</td>
<td>Harare</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>Regional Manager</td>
<td>OneWorld International</td>
<td>Torri Holmes</td>
<td>Program Development Manager</td>
<td></td>
<td>Rio de Janeiro</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>F2F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organisational Member</td>
<td>Practical Action</td>
<td>Miguel Saravia</td>
<td>New Technology Program Manager</td>
<td></td>
<td>Lima</td>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual Participants</td>
<td>Boza-Aucallama Community Telecentre (supported by CEPES)</td>
<td>5 male users of a community network created by APC member, CEPES, to serve farmers in the rural Huaral Valley of Peru</td>
<td>Participants included the telecentre manager, Vice President of local Jaunta, President of the Boza Commission, President of the Palpa Commission, 2 officials from local government agencies, and 5 local farmers</td>
<td>Lima</td>
<td>Focus group</td>
<td>F2F</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Basheerhamad Shadrach, Natasha Primo and Miguel Saravia participated in the study in two capacities, but only Miguel Saravia was interviewed separately about each role
Appendix 2: Plain Language Statement

June 10, 2005

Dear [insert name],

My name is Charlotte Scarf. I am undertaking a PhD in International Studies at RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia. The title of my research is “Knowledge Networks for Development: Towards A New Conceptual Framework”. It explores how development organisations are using the Internet to support knowledge sharing by individuals and organisations in developing countries.

Three initiatives will be investigated in the empirical component of the study, which will take place in phases between August and December 2005. The novel approach to knowledge sharing taken by [insert name of initiative] makes it of great interest to this research. As such, I am writing to formally invite you to take part in the study.

The purpose of the project is to explore factors that affect the ability of Southern stakeholders in the development project to participate in online networks as active knowledge providers, rather than passive knowledge recipients. The project has been approved by the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee, and is funded by a scholarship from the Australian Postgraduate Awards scheme and the Smart Internet Technology Cooperative Research Centre.

You have been approached because you have responded to an initial email inviting you to participate, or because your name has been passed on to me as someone who fits the criteria for participation and may be interested in the themes of the project in your capacity as [insert stakeholder group].

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in an interview, and where possible help to arrange a focus group discussion with individual network participants. As far as possible, the activities will take place onsite, where participants engage with the initiative being investigated. In other cases, interviews will be conducted online using the Voice over IP software program, Skype.

If you would like to examine a list of the interview questions before you decide to participate, you are most welcome. At your request, you will be able to review a copy of the transcript of your interview. You will also be able to examine the analysis of the data before the research is submitted for assessment or published. Participation is purely voluntary and you may withdraw at anytime.

The research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr Christopher Ziguras (christopher.ziguras@rmit.edu.au) and Professor Chris Duke (chris.duke@rmit.edu.au). It is part of the User Environment Programme of the Smart Internet Technologies Cooperative Research Centre in Australia (www.smartinternet.com.au). If you have any questions about the research, please feel free to contact me (P: +61 (0) 403 996822, E: charlotte.scarf@rmit.edu.au), or one of my supervisors.

Kind regards,

Charlotte Scarf
Doctoral Candidate, RMIT
MA (Virtual Communication), RMIT
B Ec (Social Sciences) Hons, USyd

Any complaints about your participation in this project may be directed to the Secretary, RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee, University Secretariat, RMIT, GPO Box 2476V, Melbourne, 3001. The telephone number is +61 3 9925 1745.

Details of the complaints procedure are available from: www.rmit.edu.au/council/hrec
Appendix 3: Interview Guide for Network Managers

1. Can you please provide me with a rough breakdown of network activity?
2. Who are the most active users? Who are the least active users?
3. Which regions/countries/segments of the community are they from?
4. In your opinion, what is the reason for these variations?
5. Do user needs differ?
6. How would you characterise the culture of the network?
7. Is it globally uniform among the more active participants?
8. Which way does the majority of information flow?
9. In your opinion, what is the reason for this trend?
10. What ICT tools does the network use to support knowledge sharing?
11. How do these compare with face-to-face interactions?
12. What are the minimum system requirements for users?
13. Do you employ any ancillary media to assist users that are unable to meet these requirements?
14. Who designed/selected these systems and tools?
15. Did users participate in the design / selection process?
16. Can information be accessed and contributed in the languages spoken by all users?
17. Who is responsible for translating information for different audiences? What is the process?
18. Is there an editorial policy governing contributions? What is it?
19. Is information contextualised for different users?
20. Have you conducted any user evaluations?
21. What were the main findings?
22. How do findings compare between countries/regions?
23. How is network performance measured?
24. In your opinion, are there any issues with the current approach?
25. In your opinion, how could these issues be resolved?
26. What are the main factors affecting network participation?
27. Finally, what are the trends for the future?
28. Do you think it is important to continue broadening the user community?
29. What is your organisation doing to assist in this area?
Appendix 4: Focus Group Guide for Network Participants

1. How did you hear about the network?
2. Why do you participate?
3. Does it benefit you personally, or does it benefit your organisation or community?
4. In your opinion, do some segments of the user community benefit from than others?
5. Is that a problem?
6. Is it easy to participate?
7. Have you ever experienced a problem?
8. How could the difficulties you experience be resolved?
9. What functions of the network do you value most?
10. Which ones do you use most often?
11. Is there anything missing from the current offering?
12. Is all the information that flows through the network relevant to you?
13. What kind of information is most/least relevant to you?
14. Do you trust all of the information that flows through the network? Why / why not?
15. Does the origin of the information affect its value?
16. Have you ever contributed to the network?
17. What compelled you to do this?
18. How was your contribution received by other users?
19. Did you get any feedback?
20. What are the advantages of contributing your knowledge to the network?
21. Are there any risks?
22. Do you ever have reservations about contributing?
23. What kind of information are you most/least comfortable sharing?
24. In your opinion, how could the network be improved?
25. Have you ever provided this feedback to network managers?
26. What was their response?
27. Do you participate in any other networks?
28. How do they compare to this one?