

Thematic Networking at IICD

Sharing knowledge about ICTs within development sectors

How can Bolivian farmers market their products online? Should Zambian schools invest in computers? Is e-governance good governance? The people who need answers to questions like these are farmers, educators, civil servants and others - making decisions that will impact the development of their communities and countries. To find the answers they need access to ICT expertise - but they also need to talk to people like them who have faced similar decisions. Thematic Networking responds to this need.

"Knowledge sharing can get you very far, compared to donating goods like computers. If you have two oranges for two people, each person gets one. If you have two ideas to share, then each person gets two."

- Daniel Kakinda, coordinator SchoolNet Uganda

Connecting local and global knowledge

The International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD) assists developing countries to realise locally owned sustainable development by harnessing the potential of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). We use two strategic approaches to achieve our mission and goals: *Country Programmes* and *Thematic Networking*. While Country Programmes are implementing ICT-enabled development projects and policies in nine countries, Thematic Networking links IICD's local partners with experts and counterparts in other countries who are working in similar areas, connecting local and global knowledge, and promoting South-South and South-North exchange.

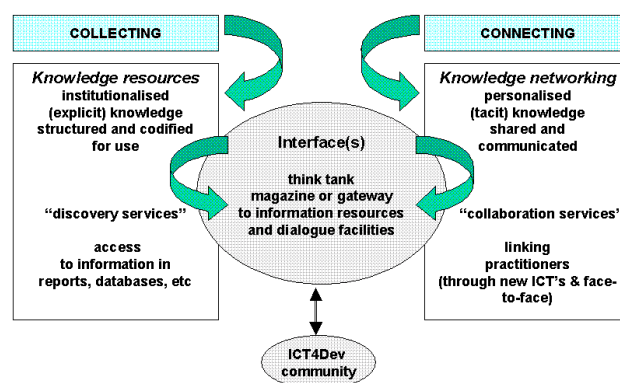
Thematic Networking has two components: an *online resource centre* in which reference material is collected, and an *interactive expertise network* in which practitioners share knowledge with each other and draw on the experience of consultants and other experts.



Collecting knowledge...

Online Resource Centres serve the Thematic Networks by bringing various knowledge resources together on the application of ICTs to specific sectors such as health and the environment. Materials are disseminated online mainly through

the *iConnect-online* website. There, partners looking for best practices can search the ICT Stories database, read news from IICD and other partners, download research reports and toolkits, and find links to other organisations also using ICTs to support development goals. IICD and its partners in the networks also produce CD-ROM based toolkits bringing together the most current knowledge resources.



...and connecting people

In addition to the resource centres, there is online and face-to-face interaction among partners. IICD organises workshops bringing together its partners and international experts; these events commonly result in research briefs and toolkits that feed into the resource centre. E-discussions are supported by the Dgroups community platform. Thematic Networks are "communities of practice", in which knowledge flows horizontally among practitioners, transcending institutional and geographic boundaries.

Thematic Networking is one of the mechanisms used by IICD to deliver a Question and Answer Service on ICTs in support of the Building Digital Opportunities (BDO) Programme.

Thematic Networks

eGovernance	Health
Education	Environment
Livelihood opportunities	

Thematic Networks are being established in *education, eGovernance, environment, livelihood opportunities* and *health*. The themes reflect the priority sectors in which IICD supports projects in nine countries. The networks are in different stages of development, and the range of services varies from theme to theme. Priority is given to livelihoods and education, where IICD supports a large number of projects in its focal countries. Evaluation, ItrainOnline and local content are crosscutting issues that are integrated as far as possible into the thematic areas.



The Global Teenager Project is a particularly active project within the Thematic Network on education. GTP links students in different countries with each other via the Internet. Global Teenager is now connecting 120 schools worldwide, applying ICTs to support education and global inter-cultural understanding.

Partnerships

Partnerships are the foundation of Thematic Networks, enabling IICD to share knowledge and leverage the resources needed for implementation. Three types of partnerships exist:

Enabling Partners - Currently, Cap Gemini, Ernst & Young and Atos Origin provide expertise and support to projects on a consultancy basis. In the context of Thematic Networks enabling partners are usually from the private sector.

Research Partners - Where gaps exist in a particular area of relevance to IICD partners, IICD may commission or support research projects. For example, Bridges.org is collaborating with IICD to produce case studies on the use of ICTs to alleviate poverty in Africa.

Development Partners - IICD links up with international development agencies in order to combine forces and to avoid duplication in development efforts. IICD is partnering with SchoolNet Africa and SchoolsOnline in order to catalyse collective learning from experiences using ICTs in education.

Although IICD partners are the direct beneficiaries, Thematic Networks are open to participation by other stakeholders. Other partners increasingly turn to IICD for assistance in deepening their knowledge of sectoral application of ICTs. IICD has been invited to carry out research, produce knowledge products, and participate in global dialogues such as those forming around the World Summit for the Information Society (WSIS). In this way Thematic Networking serves as a springboard for linking the experience and learning of IICD and its partners with that of the wider global community.

More information

For additional information, please visit our website: www.iicd.org and click on 'Thematic Networks' or contact IICD at information@iicd.org.

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