

DIGITAL PARTNERSHIPS

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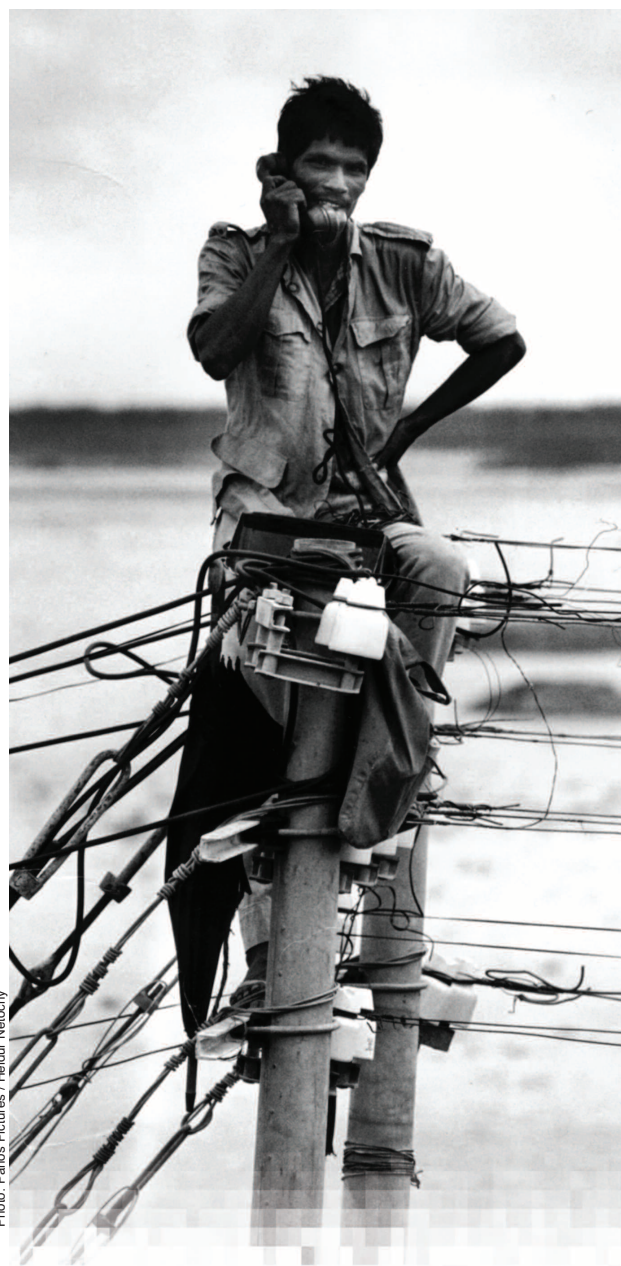
Online partnerships have great potential to narrow the information and communication gap that impedes access of the world's poor to knowledge, funding, technology, partnerships and other development drivers. How can we strengthen ICT as a force for bringing people together and as a vehicle of development, rather than one that further divides people into ICT haves and have-nots?

Experience at the UN Fund for International Partnerships (UNFIP) (www.unfip.org) shows that today's complex global problems can be addressed through cooperation, mutual respect, and partnerships between different stakeholders. Online partnerships can save precious time and resources provided that transparency and trust can be achieved. The United Nations and other agencies already have started using online partnerships and ICT as levers for development. What is needed now is to build on existing innovations and success stories to make the benefits accessible and meaningful for those who need them most.

Several notable online portals already exist that are rich in development information. In order to capture all relevant information in one place, what might be considered is a type of 'Google for development'. But even as this concept is fully developed, one can begin by collecting and posting linkages to relevant portals and search websites that provide the kind of specific information that different development partners are seeking. There are numerous ways to thread these resources together, and perhaps one of the existing international websites could be an appropriate place for posting such linkages and a description of what they offer. Key challenges will be to make this repository of links comprehensive, relevant, neutral, and easily navigable.

THE VALUE OF ONLINE PARTNERSHIPS

Increasingly, partnerships are being forged between the United Nations, foundations, multi/bilateral donors, the private sector, governments and civil society in response to development challenges. Significant efforts are already underway to harness the revolutionary power of the Internet for development. Facilitating access through user-friendly, timely, cost-effective and innovative ICT solutions will help to address the needs of the underprivileged and excluded by providing them with crucial information and knowledge.



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the private sector and civil society
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Recognising this, a number of
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“Information technology is not a magic formula that is going to solve all our problems. But it is a powerful force that can and must be harnessed to our global mission of peace and development.”

Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General

Online collaborations have the potential to catalyse and sustain partnerships for development across national borders. They can create an enabling environment for those who need it most and help to mobilise resources to maximize development impact. Generally, the Internet has matured more within the technology, business and education sectors than in certain governments or civil society organisations. Just as ICT has become a key business driver, it also needs to become a key *development driver*.

There are several examples of online partnerships between different sectors: government and business; donors and NGOs; and business, government and civil society. They come in the form of government investor relations websites, search engines for donors or recipients, and various information gateways and virtual networks.

The United Nations has been working to build online partnerships for development to bridge gaps between stakeholders. UNFIP facilitates partnerships between UN agencies, the private sector and foundations. The UN ICT Task Force (www.unicttaskforce.org) is forging a strategic partnership between the UN system, the private sector, foundations, governments and other stakeholders to formulate strategies to put ICT at the service of development. As Sarbuland Khan, Executive Co-ordinator of the UN ICT Task Force, has put it: “The revolution in information and communication technologies has transformed each and every society on the planet and the ways in which people and communities imagine themselves and their place within the world.”

KEY STAKEHOLDER NEEDS

Different stakeholders – governments, the private sector and civil society – have different information needs. Recognising this, a number of clearing houses, portals and websites have emerged.

Grantseeker needs

Many civil society organisations face the daunting task of finding donors to obtain funding and technical assistance to achieve their development missions. An enormous amount of information is available online today. A well-informed person can locate online donors, information on global development issues, NGO networks in specific areas, and a wealth of other relevant information. However, even an experienced NGO will face great difficulty in extracting focused, relevant and reliable information from the masses of disorganised and dispersed information available on the Internet.



Empowering women

➤ A successful UN Foundation/UNFIP innovation that seeks to bridge the digital divide in a culturally sensitive way is the project on ‘Empowering Women and Girls in Poor Communities through Information Delivery and Dialogue’.

This pioneering effort to promote health, human rights and social progress in Asia through the delivery of vital information using cutting-edge satellite technology is designed to overcome constraints such as lack of connectivity and the paucity of genuinely useful and practical information for poor and isolated communities. ‘Empowering Women and Girls in Poor Communities through Information Delivery and Dialogue’ is currently being taken forward in Nepal as part of Equal Access’s Digital Broadcast Initiative; it will expand to India and Laos by 2006.

The project is a partnership between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the non-profit organisation Equal Access, and other donors such as the European Space Agency, the US Agency for International Development (USAID), the World Bank and the Open Society Institute.

www.undp.org, www.equalaccess.org

For a fuller examination of the ways in which ICT can empower women, see the article by Noeleen Heyzer (pp104-106)

This information would be even more inaccessible, for example, to a grassroots organisation in a village in remote Peru, searching for donors who fund ecological preservation. In fact, the same would hold true for most organisations in developing countries. The challenge is to make digital partnerships and tools for development accessible for those who need them most.



Various sites and search engines specifically assist grant seekers in their search for development partners. These tools address the challenge of establishing a mechanism to screen foundations, private sector partners and others listed on their sites in order to ensure accountability and transparency. They enable organisations to identify donor guidelines as well as track donor contributions and interest areas.

For example, the US-based **Foundation Center** (www.fdncenter.org) offers an online search engine to locate US donors awarding grants on a wide range of global development issues.

This and other search engines enable organisations to conduct searches by name, funding area, topic, geographic area, and other categories.

Grant seekers must often submit multiple proposals for the same project, geared to each donor's guidelines. **Funding.org** (www.funding.org) connects those looking for funds with those who have them, requiring them to submit only a standardised two-page synopsis online. Funding.org then forwards it to a list of prospective public and private sector donors.

The digital divide poses many obstacles to forging online partnerships for grassroots organisations, but notable efforts have been made, including the UN Foundation/UNFIP programme 'Empowering Women and Girls in Poor Communities through Information Delivery and Dialogue', and PRODEM FFP's smart ATM initiative in Bolivia (see boxes on p117 and right). These types of grassroots empowerment projects should be further promoted and replicated.

Providing access to grassroots organisations seeking online partnerships presents problems beyond the digital divide. End-users have to develop business acumen to use the portal to its full capacity. They need to view it not only as a trading mechanism to facilitate the transfer of funds, but also as a means of building networks, sharing information, transferring knowledge, and leveraging resources. The best way to facilitate ICT capacity-building is to develop simple portals that provide links to those selected sites that clearly present all relevant information pertaining to different kinds of partnership opportunities.

ICT for development ... Access for everybody

➤ A good example of an innovative use of technology to bridge the digital divide is PRODEM FFP's smart ATM initiative designed for low-income communities in Bolivia (www.digitaldividend.org/case/case_prodem.htm).

PRODEM FFP, a private financial fund with prior experience as a micro-credit non-profit organization, is providing ATM-enabled banking services to Bolivians who do not have access to traditional banks, by designing its own ATM tailored to meet the needs of its rural customers.

The company provides its customers with a smart card, so that the ATMs are able to verify the customer's identity and complete transactions without being electronically connected to the central office.

Using a combination of smart card technology with biometrics, fingerprint ID verification of all its customers is made possible at all of its branches and ATMs. This removes the need for PIN numbers which would prove a challenge for illiterate customers.

To make procedures friendlier for the illiterate customer, the ATMs are audio enabled. Voice activated commands and instructions are available in their local language, currently Spanish, Quechua, or Aymara. The touch screen with pictures allows customers to deposit and withdraw funds without filling out a deposit slip or withdrawal form. Additionally, the ATMs facilitate money transfers, and provide access to government programmes that provide work for low-skill workers and make payments to senior citizens.

Grantmaker needs

Grantmakers/donors can be governments, foundations, individuals, public charities, banks, multi-national companies or national private sector companies, each of which are driven by different considerations and capacities. Different donors, therefore, need tailored information solutions. Examples of constructive effort in these areas can be seen in the projects below.

The **Global Information Clearinghouse Initiative** (www.globalclearinghouse.org/gch), launched at the Monterrey Financing for Development conference, is designed to foster government-private sector partnerships by providing low-cost access to relevant, timely and reliable information and analysis on emerging market trends

and opportunities, political risk assessments, crisis prevention policies, financing mechanisms and access to expertise and partnerships for policy makers, investors and civil society. This model seeks to bridge costly gaps in information sharing and trust between private sector investors and developing country governments in areas critical to effectively mobilising private sector capital for development. By providing comprehensive and neutral coverage of economic risks and opportunities in developing countries, it acts as a one-stop platform for (i) these countries' investment promotion efforts, (ii) their major creditors and investors' due diligence and monitoring functions, and (iii) third parties' access to the full range of information and analysis on macroeconomic, financial, and political indicators.

While the Global Clearinghouse is focused on increasing private capital flows to developing countries, there are several comprehensive information gateways that target the non-profit sector. Donors need search engines and investment portals to find information and to identify capable, credible organisations and projects. This enhances their capacity to make quality, efficient decisions, and to minimise the risk of misguided grant-making. Donors face a due diligence and research task that can be greatly facilitated through online partnerships. In addition, many foundations face resource constraints mandating efficient research and vetting strategies. Foundations seek partners to match funds, share lessons learned and best practices, discuss policy issues, and stay current on global development issues.

In addition to efficiency, there is also a welcome focus on accountability. An electronic trail of registered organisations and projects generates greater transparency in the process of giving, and hence creates greater accountability.



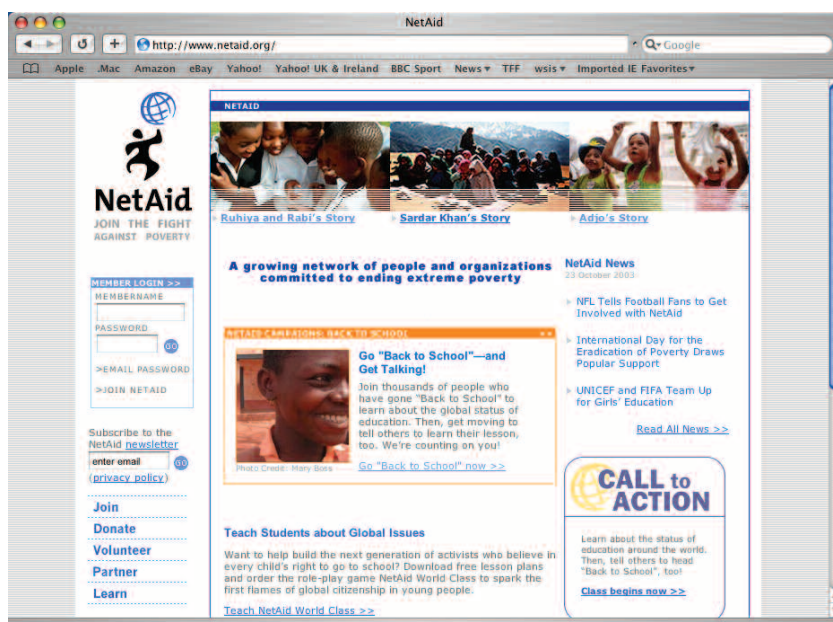
The most well known example of an online partnership between donors and recipients is the UN-World Bank supported **Development Gateway** (www.developmentgateway.org). This portal contains one of the largest online sources of information on development projects around the world. This interactive site also offers a procurement market that provides e-tendering solutions, information on development projects and links to a network of country-level initiatives.

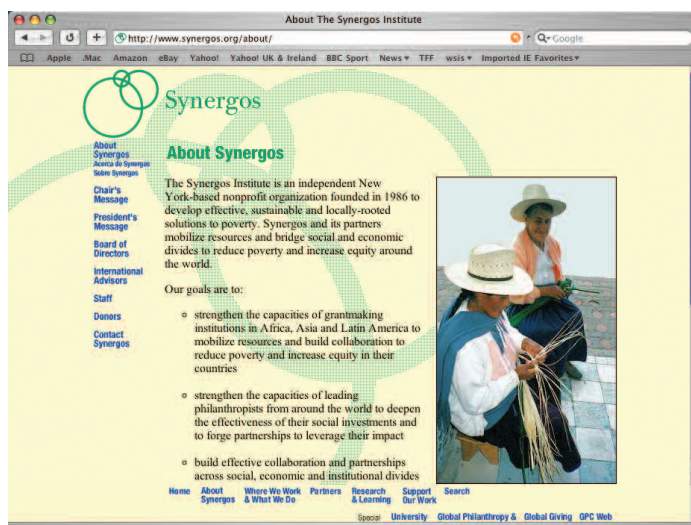
Another initiative, **Digital Dividend** (www.digitaldividend.org), provides research tools and information services to governments, entrepreneurs, NGOs and members of the development community in order to identify and promote sustainable solutions for bridging the global digital divide.

Global Giving (www.globalgiving.com) offers a search engine that enables donors to find and fund social and economic development projects worldwide.

A key challenge in providing a project clearinghouse is to screen organisations for legitimacy and effectiveness. There has been a need for a rating agency that rates NGOs according to an index using indicators such as legitimacy, accountability and effectiveness. This process not only provides reliable information to donors, but it also renders NGOs more open and transparent. Such a rating model is provided by **ForeignAid Ratings** (www.foreignaid.com), which seeks to offer foundations, governments, the media, lay people and NGOs themselves with objective criteria for evaluating NGOs. It rates NGOs worldwide according to relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, accountability, transparency, integrity and sustainability.

Donors seek to network, collaborate, research and discuss policy issues world-wide in an easily accessible digital forum. They value the ability to





share success stories and learn best practices, as well as stay current on philanthropy and development topics. Various foundation consortiums exist to offer these types of services. Examples include the **Council on Foundations** (www.cof.org), the **European Foundation Center** (EFC) (www.efc.be), and **The Foundation Center** based in the US (www.fdncenter.org). The EFC's **Network of European Foundations** (www.efc.be/nef) offers **Europe in the World** (www.europe-in-the-world.info/), a portal for European foundations and their partners to seek further collaboration, engage in policy discussions, and research global development funding issues.

In addition to portals focused on private sector investors and donors/recipient search engines, there are several online communities or networks involved in knowledge sharing and development of partnerships and projects that increase development impact. These networks have the potential to encourage greater South-South cooperation among donors, as well as greater collaboration overall amongst the development community.

The **Synergos Institute** (www.synergos.org) is devoted to strengthening philanthropy in the South, including South-

South cooperation among donors. Specifically, it seeks to strengthen capacities of grantmakers in Africa, Asia and Latin America to mobilise resources and to build collaboration in order to reduce poverty and increase equity in their countries.

Netaid (www.netaid.org) is a network that combines innovative programmes with new technologies to combat poverty, working in partnership with the private sector.

Global Knowledge Partnership (www.globalknowledge.org) is a multi-stakeholder ICT for development partnership at the global level that seeks to harness the potential of ICT for sustainable development. Its members comprise governments, donor agencies, private sector companies, civil society, networks and international institutions.

Private sector needs

Going beyond private investment in developing countries and foreign aid and donor assistance, there is also a need to encourage multinational corporations and large businesses to contribute to sustainable development. These firms are a source of vital experience, expertise, information, technology, products and funding.

One approach is to facilitate businesses to support concrete projects. Although businesses have extensive resources available to conduct research, they also have a need for efficient and reliable search tools, networks and portals in the specialised areas of philanthropy and development. A significant effort in this area is the International Project Clearinghouse (IPCH), being developed to enable businesses to choose from a variety of projects worldwide and initiate partnerships for development with local NGOs across the world. IPCH's framework for corporate citizenship is intended to generate funds for the Millennium Development Goals by enabling effective grass-roots organisations worldwide to compete for funding.

Bridging the gap ... Local initiatives, global funding

► Global Giving offers a search engine which enables donors to find and fund social and economic development projects worldwide.

In partnership with Global Giving, the Multimedia Computer-based Training for Rural Areas programme has improved the quality, efficiency, and coverage of education provided to Haitian schoolchildren and has expanded the horizons of students and teachers alike by giving them access to educational software and unlimited educational resources via the Internet. www.globalgiving.com





A participant in the Community Kraal – a community dialogue space sponsored by the Equator Initiative at the World Summit on Sustainable Development – flashes a smile at the camera before checking out online resources relating to community action to reduce poverty and conserve biodiversity

Global action ... The Equator Initiative

► The Equator Initiative is a global partnership among the UN, governments, civil society, businesses and foundations to build the capacity and raise the profile of community enterprises in the tropics that link economic improvement and job creation with protecting the environment.

The initiative shows how conserving biological diversity has become a part of the business bottom-line for these thriving local enterprises, ranging from sustainable forestry and fishing to organic agriculture and ecotourism.

In addition to providing awards, the Equator Initiative plans to develop local capacity through community-to-community learning exchanges and contribute to the creating and sharing of knowledge to make an impact on policy and public awareness. www.equatorinitiative.org

CHALLENGES TO BUILDING ONLINE PARTNERSHIPS

There are economic and technical challenges in deploying ICT for development, mentioned above. But the main “barriers to universal ICT deployment are cultural, meaning by that a lack of understanding on the part of decision-makers with respect to how ICT can turbo charge the cause of development,” as José María Figueres Olsen, Senior Managing Director of the World Economic Forum and chair of the UN ICT Task Force, reflected at the ITU Telecom World 2003 Conference in October 2003. There is a need to work collectively to broaden understanding of the possibilities of ICT, and the leadership and commitment must be in place to do so.

BUILDING ON SUCCESS STORIES: UMBRELLA PORTAL OR A TYPE OF 'GOOGLE FOR DEVELOPMENT'?

This paper has brought attention to a number of initiatives that are currently underway to harness the power of ICT for development. They deserve greater support. We need to think creatively about how to build on these success stories to bring together key stakeholders who are mainly operating in parallel and occasionally come together online.

Key stakeholders must come together to leverage the existing online partnerships, and develop new ones, to increase cost-effective and efficient access to information and knowledge. Developing these models requires deep cooperation between international institutions, development agencies, foundations, foundation consortiums, and organisations representing the poor. To be meaningful for the poor, these models have to operate on the 'KISS' principle – ‘keep it short and simple’ – and be clear and accessible.

One very simple step forward may be to create an umbrella portal that might provide links to knowledge networks, research portals, search engines, and online information clearinghouse portals that already exist. The

value proposition would be to aggregate existing links in a simple and clear format that is as comprehensive as possible.

IS A 'GOOGLE FOR DEVELOPMENT' POSSIBLE OR REALISTIC?

Another possibility is to create a type of ‘Google for development’. This would be more useful but entail a higher degree of investment and complexity, since it involves the development of a flexible yet effective search technology to sort through diverse sites and sources of information and data.

In either case, the main idea would be to create a one-stop portal to locate the range of development-oriented information and knowledge discussed in this concept paper. Simple to use, this one-stop portal might provide an efficient, focused and highly accessible approach to conducting global research. ■

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