

SEVEN LESSONS ON HOW TO ACHIEVE EFFECTIVE NATIONAL ICT4D POLICY PROCESSES

Perspectives and insights gained from ICT4D policy processes
in Bangladesh, Bolivia and Uganda

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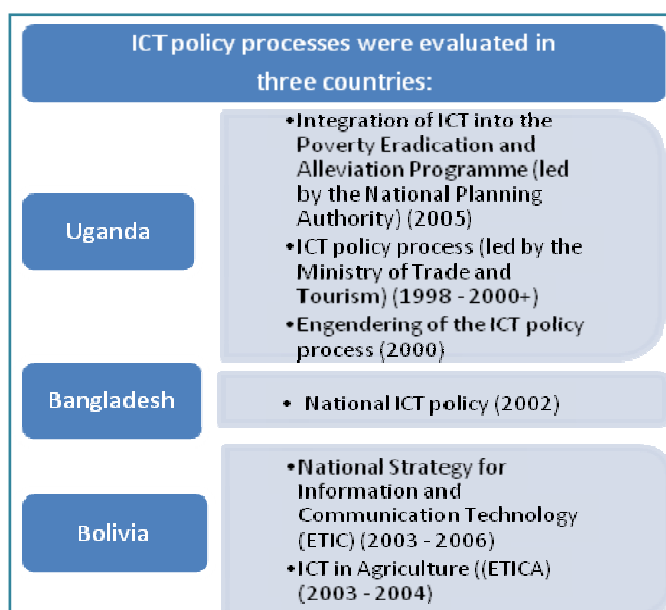
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WHY THIS SUMMARY?

This summary note highlights some of the practical experiences and lessons learned from ICT policy processes in three countries – Bangladesh, Bolivia and Uganda – over the past few years. Each of these countries has developed policies in which either information and communication technologies (ICTs) themselves are the focus, or policies were developed that specifically addressed the application of ICTs in a particular sector or were integrated into poverty alleviation programmes. This summary note intends to add to the growing body of practical knowledge on how ICT policy processes unfold in the planning and development phases, who has been or should have been involved, and what has worked well (and perhaps not so well).

The learning shared here has arisen through the collaborative work of two organizations - the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) and the International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD). Both have been involved in policy development for numerous years. The APC has been active in empowering civil society and broadening the reach and extent of stakeholder participation so as to influence policy. IICD has been particularly active in encouraging the development of multi-stakeholder networks with the participation of civil society, private sector and government organizations active in ICT for Development (ICT4D).



In order to capture the learning from the various ICT policy processes the APC and IICD undertook a series of evaluation studies to increase knowledge on participatory ICT4D policy processes, improve understanding of poverty-focused ICT policy processes, and learn from the collaboration and research process. The lessons learned were extensively discussed and consolidated at a workshop held in early 2007. What is presented here is a crystallization of the key points that emerged from the studies and the deliberations by workshop participants.

LESSONS LEARNED

Lesson 1: ICT4D policy processes are dynamic, fluid and sometimes chaotic

There is no 'one-size fits all' approach that can be adopted across countries and even within countries in various sectors. Although there are identifiable steps in the policy process, these are not likely to be followed sequentially or even in a particular order.

Each policy process has to be seen in its own context. This includes recognition of the existing national political and economic climate; important international policy debates, e.g. the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS); the identification of windows of opportunity to initiate ICT policy processes; and also in most cases the visible presence and leadership of a champion prepared to take the process forward. The process can also be given the necessary support and impetus through the involvement of a facilitating institution. Donor institutions as well as international organizations such as the APC and IICD were seen as knowledgeable and influential in playing this role. However, the policy making process should not rely too much on donors and foreign governments if it is to be sustainable.

In Bangladesh, the evaluation study was undertaken during a period of the worst political unrest in recent history. Many of the political players had either moved positions or were not prepared to comment on sensitive issues.

Opposing points of view were expressed about whether leadership should be carried out by one lead organization or several. Governments (with their public structures, institutions and resources) are generally seen as the natural leaders for driving the process of policy formulation, implementation and evaluation, and providing the resources (financial and otherwise) to support the process. Their ownership of the process is critical. It is also their function to ensure the balanced representation of interests. Alternatively the process could be led by a steering committee. This is likely to be dependent on national contexts. Where governments convene a steering committee, it should be seen as representative and legitimate, allowing the different stakeholders to participate in the identification of their representatives. Civil society organizations do sometimes substitute for the role of governments in developing public policy processes.

A policy process is not always likely to end in a final policy document which can be carried forward to implementation. In such cases, the process of planning, formulation and engagement with multi-stakeholder groups becomes an end in itself, pointing to the importance of understanding the process and the elements that have to be managed in the process. Providing a roadmap for an ICT policy process becomes important as it ensures greater transparency in terms of how various stakeholders can become involved.

Recognition should also be given to the fact that some parts of the policy process may need to be closed or limited to the involvement of only a small number of experts and stakeholders, e.g. when research is carried out or when the policy document is being written. This is likely to differ considerably from country to country, depending on cultural norms, political conditions and levels of transparency and openness.

In Uganda, the ICT policy process was initiated in 1998, yet no final official ICT policy document was approved by Cabinet even by 2006. Uganda has however put several processes and implementation strategies in place, e.g. the Rural Communications Development Fund, despite the lack of an officially-approved ICT policy.

Policy implementation is not always a direct response to the contents of a policy document, even where a country has validated and legitimized such a policy. The political climate, particularly in countries where this changes regularly, may create opportunities for the introduction (and adoption) of policy processes, and these should be identified and exploited when the window of opportunity arises.

Consideration must be given to the informal processes that contribute to the shaping of a policy, many of which take place behind closed doors and out of the public domain. This is particularly so at the level of policy implementation and the setting of the regulatory context. These informal processes are critical, particularly in countries where the institutional structures are weak. The policy process should create space for these informal interactions. This should not however substitute for the need to put transparent processes into place within the policy process.

Lesson 2: ICT4D policy processes need appropriate and comprehensive background research

It is important to ensure that appropriate background research be carried out at the start of the policy process, as well as at key points throughout the process. This fulfils many functions – 1) to determine real needs, particularly for rural people and the poor as well as other excluded groups; 2) to ensure that the necessary technical information is available e.g. on universal access, available infrastructure, spectrum allocation, costing, access by disadvantaged groups, rural versus urban digital divides, existing regulatory frameworks, converging technologies, etc.; 3) to provide well-informed and consolidated inputs on practices elsewhere in the world; 4) to formulate a range or a set of policy options to address the 'public issue' or the needs of identified beneficiaries; and 5) to provide resource materials which can be used to raise awareness and educate decision makers and the broader stakeholder groups on both ICTs and how policy processes operate.

In Bolivia, the policy process to integrate ICTs into agriculture was seen as highly participative. Government officials with decision-making power were seen as very active. Key players from academia and the private sector were also involved, as were representatives from leading civil society organisations. There was however little participation from producers in the agriculture sector, most of whom are women.

In the ICT policy process, there was also strong participation by civil society groups such as TICBolivia and CRIS Bolivia.

Lesson 3: Involve a broad range of stakeholders in the ICT4D policy process

A key deficiency identified in a number of the ICT policy processes was the lack of involvement of specific stakeholder groups, particularly grassroots organizations. It is not always easy to involve these groups – they are usually under-resourced, often located in rural areas, and generally not as well-versed in policy processes. Governments, donor agencies and facilitating organizations need to pay particular attention to supporting the participation of these organizations, which can be done through the allocation of funds to support travel and other related costs. In addition they need to ensure that ICT policy processes are relevant and made understandable to grassroots organizations.

ICT policy processes also tend to exclude public institutions which could provide high political visibility, particularly those in key national development areas and in ICT4D. More effort should be made to integrate and crosscut ICT policies with other development policies and with these key players.

There was also limited participation by women and women's groups. The policy domain is generally seen as a male domain, but in countries such as Bolivia and Uganda, women exercised actual influence despite their small numbers. More attention should be paid to the

increased participation of women, both in numbers and in their qualitative contribution. This will ensure that the differential needs of women and men will be adequately addressed in ICT policy formulation, e.g. issues such as mobility, access to income, literacy levels, safety issues, etc.

One of the key recommendations to emerge from practice is that a comprehensive stakeholder analysis should be carried out at the start of the ICT policy process. This should identify the various stakeholder groups, who the key players and institutions are, and how and when they could and should be involved in the process. The roles of men and women should be considered across all stakeholder groups.

Like other policy processes in Uganda, the ICT policy process was largely dominated by men. These mostly got involved by virtue of the fact that they were already occupying positions related to policy making.

Particular stakeholder groups that should be considered when carrying out a stakeholder analysis are listed below:

STAKEHOLDER GROUP	LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION
Government decision makers	Generally well-represented; levels of knowledge vary from country to country
Politicians	Needed for lobbying / playing champion role for ICT4D
Academics and researchers	Well-represented; seen as knowledgeable and objective; used extensively in most policy processes
Private sector	Varied levels of participation; concerns about vested commercial interests
Grassroots organizations	Generally poorly represented
Local government	Generally excluded, but critical players in implementation of ICT4D strategies
Women / women's groups	Generally poorly represented
Media	Generally poorly represented; regarded with suspicion
Facilitating institutions	Generally well-regarded and seen as adding value
Donor agencies	Various views ranging from negative to positive. Sometimes seen as adopting a top-down approach which discourages stakeholder participation. In other cases, seen as playing a useful facilitating role

Policy processes generally take place in the main cities. This tends to exclude key stakeholders from smaller towns and rural areas. If policy processes, particularly those addressing poverty alleviation, are to be regarded as credible, more meetings should be held in outlying areas, or funding needs to be made available to allow wider participation from the end-users/beneficiaries of these policy processes.

Lesson 4: Validate the ICT4D policy process to create a credible and sustainable outcome

There are various key points during the ICT4D policy process at which various types of validation need to take place. The absence of such validation is likely to stall the process and possibly result in the policy process being placed in jeopardy. Requirements include:

- Ownership of the policy by government decision makers, not only those in ICT but also those responsible for development at the national or sectoral levels – this is a key condition for effective policy formulation and implementation;
- Acceptance of the organization which assumes the facilitating role;

- Acceptance of the champion/s of the ICT policy process, who have to be seen as credible, neutral, knowledgeable, respected and trusted by the various stakeholder groups;
- Legitimacy of the policy documentation that is produced in terms of breadth and extent of stakeholder involvement in the drafting, and incorporation of feedback;
- Allowing enough time for feedback and validation of the policy documentation;
- Validation by changing governments and changing Ministers;
- Validation by monitoring the policy implementation, analysis of its impacts and dissemination of information about the process. Transparency and accountability around implementation (including how public financial resources are being used) are key factors.

I-Network is a recognized ICT4D association in Uganda with more than 200 registered members from the public, private and civil society sectors. I-Network, with support from IICD, played a facilitating role for the process of mainstreaming ICTs into the national planning framework and the Ugandan Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP). The National Planning Authority (NPA) played the leadership role in the process by chairing and directing the process and overseeing the work of an inter-agency team.

Lesson 5: Build strong communications and dissemination activities into the ICT4D policy process

A common theme emerging from the evaluation studies was the lack of adequate communications during policy processes. Key stakeholders mentioned that they were not always given enough warning about upcoming consultative meetings and workshops and did not always receive documentation in time. The amount of time allocated to providing feedback on policy documents was also not long enough, particularly where other members in stakeholder groups had to be consulted.

A communications protocol should be drawn up to deal with the types of communications and information flows that need to occur throughout the ICT4D policy process. A communications matrix should be developed which sets out the types and levels of communication with diverse stakeholders. Cultural and linguistic aspects should be taken into consideration. Dissemination in indigenous languages is critical.

Communication strategies should not only consider online and mass media channels but also ways to reach the broader population and groups with specific and particular needs such as illiterates, people with disabilities, etc.

Establishing a relationship with the media can assist in promoting better dissemination of information about ICTs and ongoing policy processes.

Regular updates should be provided to the public on the policy development process, as well as on follow-up implementation actions. These can be achieved through monthly newsletters as in the case of Bolivia, or regular meetings such as those facilitated by I-Network in Uganda.

Good practices should be documented so that others can draw lessons from practical experiences elsewhere – these should be widely disseminated. The present evaluation study

is an example, as is the documentation process undertaken in Kenya following the formulation of their ICT policy and ICT Bill.

Lesson 6: Building ICT capacity and improved knowledge of ICT policy processes is a critical success factor

Widespread capacity building is needed as the levels of understanding of 1) ICTs - their use and more importantly, their strategic application - and 2) policy processes, is uneven across different stakeholders. This is particularly so in sectors such as agriculture and education where there may be little understanding of how ICTs can be applied to promoting economic development and quality of life.

When Bolivia undertook its ICT-in-Agriculture strategy process, special awareness and training programmes were offered to decisionmakers in the Ministry of Agriculture. This included the Minister, Vice Ministers, and directors, technical and administrative staff of the Ministry. The programmes included training information management and basic ICT skills. Individual tailor-made training was provided for decision makers.

An interesting and unexpected outcome was that many participants who had been involved in ICT policy processes mentioned that they had gained invaluable experience through their participation - learning by doing. They had gained a better understanding of ICT4D as well as of the actual process of policy formulation. This, coupled with evaluation and documentation of these experiences, proved to be a powerful way of developing capacity.

Experience from Uganda also shows the need for training on gender and ICTs, particularly with decisionmakers and key stakeholders involved in policy formulation. This should include an understanding of how gender impacts on policy processes as well as issues of gender in development. A sector-driven approach may be more effective in reaching a wider audience. Particular attention needs to be given to how the engendering of ICT policies can be encouraged, as this is an area that has been neglected in most ICT4D policy processes.

Lesson 7: Moving the ICT policy process toward implementation is not fully understood

One of the major lessons to emerge from the evaluation studies is that little attention has been given to understanding the transition from policy formulation to implementation. A policy process, and the production of an officially-approved policy document, cannot be regarded as truly successful unless there is some evidence of follow-up action. This requires stronger emphasis on the setting of goals, objectives and targets and a system whereby implementation progress can be monitored and evaluated against these targets. The policy should also be directly aligned with development and poverty alleviation policies at both the national and sectoral levels e.g. gender equality frameworks, poverty reduction strategy papers, sectoral policies such as education and health. Stakeholder networks could play a role as pressure and monitoring groups e.g. I-Network in Uganda and KictaNET in Kenya.

More research is required which examines both the policy development process, the conditions needed to ensure successful implementation, and how best to ensure that action is taken. The policy process should also define what skills and knowledge are required for successful implementation.

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This document is based on the following ICT policy papers and workshop reports:

Mridul Chowdhury (January 2007). Bangladesh – National ICT policy process:
www.apc.org

Elizabeth Rodas & Martin Lopez (January 2007). The ICT policy in Bolivia: An evaluation of the policy formulation process 2003-2006.

Final report: www.iicd.org/files/bolivia-national-ict-policy

Final report in Spanish: www.iicd.org/files/bolivia-politica-TIC-nacional

Elizabeth Rodas & Martin Lopez (January 2007). The ICT policy for the Agriculture Sector in Bolivia: An evaluation of the policy formulation process.

Final report: www.iicd.org/files/bolivia-agriculture-ict-policy

Final report in Spanish: www.iicd.org/files/bolivia-politica-TIC-agricultura

Summary report: IICD – APC ICT4D policy workshop, Cape Town, South Africa, 12 – 14 February 2007. Prepared by Tina James (facilitator), 21 February 2007:

www.iicd.org/files/APC-IICD-workshop-report-Feb07