

CONNECTING COMMUNITIES AND PROMOTING THE LOCAL KNOWLEDGE SHARING IN LATIN AMERICA

MIGUEL SARAIVA ¹

Intermediate Technology Development Group

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“I once asked a group of indigenous women in Guatemala what kinds of information were missing on the Internet. They had been working for several years within their communities using different communication tools, and after a few training workshops they were quite familiar with the Internet. Their response was almost unanimous: “What is missing is information about our own communities.” The Web has tons of information on many things, but what we usually find is information prepared from the viewpoint of power holders, the north, white people; the most common information is about entertainment and consumption, but this is seldom of much use for those of us who are working for human development. And the little information that we do find (I say little in comparison with what is available on all the other issues) is usually written in a way that is difficult to understand or use for the people to whom it is supposedly directed.” [2].

ITDG, established by Schumacher in the United Kingdom, has the mission to investigate and to scatter technologies that directly respond to the necessities of the most isolated and impoverished populations of the world, under the motto. *“To learn what people do and to help them to do it better”*.

Applying the previous statement to our work in information and communication technologies – ICT - and specifically to the subject of rural communication, would take us to affirm: *learn how people communicate to help them do it better*. ICT and particularly Internet have opened us a new scene of work, where local and global are combined and where we must learn of what has already been done to do it better.

But more important, Internet and ICT have started a new generation of interactive media, which allow single users -traditionally seen as passive receptor- to have an active role in the communication and information processes and open new learning scenario where to share knowledge. In words of Emilio, the character of “Letter to Aunt Ofelia, we would say, *“ICTs open the door to new possibilities for working cooperatively without geographic borders, where numbers of people can exchange ideas without having to be in the same place. The occasional face-to-face get-together is certainly good, as we found at Cajamarca recently, because that kind of intimate discussion is still much more enriching. But distance work offers incredible opportunities for building new knowledge in a collective way.”*

The new technologies are capable of creating new communications tools at the community level-whether these are community radio, TeleCentres, or other combinations of broadcasting with the Internet. These have the potential to reach, serve, involve and improve the lives of whole communities in developing countries by supporting education, health, food security, good governance, democratisation, and economic development broadl[3].

Conceptual model: knowledge sharing and learning process

We start doing a brief description of the conceptual model used in the analysis of the experiences, explaining the learning process in rural Andean communities, emphasizing the value

of the experimentation and the interaction in the process of learning. Here we make a point on the issue that technology must respond to the need of the people and to support its development. When we applied interactive technology to the processes of knowledge sharing, the centre is not the technology, but the process of learning.

KNOWLEDGE SHARING: THREE EXAMPLES FROM THE FIELD

The paper continue, showing different experiences happening in Latin America focused on the knowledge sharing at communitarian level and where the interactive media will play an important role. Most of these experiences are in the early stages but what they are achieving so far is promissory and allows us to be optimistic. The projects reviewed are SIRU project, Agencia Informativa Pulsar, Proyecto Información y Comunicación para las Comunidades Rurales:

SISTEMA DE INFORMACIÓN RURAL URBANO (SIRU)

Rural Urban Information System: pilot project in Cajamarca, Peru. The purpose of this project is to take advantage of the supply of information concentrated in department capitals and make it accessible to rural entrepreneurs, the rural population and local authorities. To this end, information infrastructure is being designed, based on information technology but under a scheme that will make the service sustainable over time. It combines Internet services with radio, chat facilities and basic telephone services[4].

AGENCIA INFORMATIVA PÚLSAR

Agencia Informativa Púlsar, is a Spanish-language radio news and information agency based in Ecuador. Founded in 1996, it distributes its material via email and the web. It has grown from eight subscribers and now reaches several hundred radio stations some 2,500 other subscribers in more than 50 countries[5].

PROYECTO INFORMACIÓN Y COMUNICACIÓN PARA LAS COMUNIDADES RURALES (INFORCOM)

InforCom is a project develops by CIAT (International Center for Tropical Agriculture) in Colombia, which aims to create a local information system to improve the information access and promote the knowledge sharing but to rescue the value of the local knowledge as well. During 2003, CIAT team develop an interactive system to support the information system: SIDER (Rural Information System), but the most important issue, they are documenting the process to create a participative information system, with emphasis in interactive technology[6].

INTERACTIVE MEDIA AND LOCAL KNOWLEDGE: LESSON LEARNED

The presentation ends up synthesizing the lessons learned from the described projects. The lessons move around how apply interactive media in rural communities to promote local knowledge sharing. There is an important point indicating that the relationship between interactive media and local knowledge will work if the protagonists take control of the technology and they use it in their learning process.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹Miguel Saravia Lopez de Castilla. Librarian, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú. Manager of the New Technologies Program, Intermediate Technology Development Group, with more than 12 years of experience in ICT's applied to development, leading several projects at Peru and Latin America.

miguel@itdg.org.pe www.itdg.org.pe www.infodes.org.pe

²Letter to Aunt Ofelia / Ricardo Gomez and Benjamin Casariego. Bogota: IDRC, RAICES MAGICAS and ITDG, 2002. pg. 12. http://web.idrc.ca/en/ev-8199-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html

³Creating New Knowledge Partnerships in Support of Rural Development in the Information Age / Claude Robinson

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⁴More information in: <http://www.infodes.org.pe/siru/>

⁵More information in: <http://www.pulsar.amarc.org/>

⁶More information in: *Uso Local de TIC para la Innovación Rural* / Nathan Russell