Connecting to Public Policy

An exploration of ICTs and Public Policy in Latin America and the Caribbean

Katherine Reilly and Ricardo Gómez

Results of a collective discussion supported by PAN Americas, IDRC

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We have not succeeded in solving all of your problems. The answers we have found only serve to raise a whole new set of questions. In some ways, we feel we are as confused as ever, but we believe we are confused on a higher level and about more important things.

Author Unknown.
In Cynthia Tobias,

1 Overview

In September 2002, the PAN Americas program of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) brought together a group of its Latin American partners to discuss two key areas of concern:

- the meeting place between information and communications technologies (ICTs) and the field of public policy, and
- regional collaboration among projects working on these issues in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC).

The workshop, entitled “Public Policy and Information and Communications Technologies for Social Transformation in Latin America and the Caribbean,” held in San José, Costa Rica, provided an opportunity for the participants to explore the issue of collaboration, as well as to network, and share advances around activities related to ICT and public policy.

This report is the main output of the meeting. And as the quote above suggests, the workshop was meant to be informal, and was designed to identify major issues, facilitate conversation, and generate questions, rather than reach conclusions or find answers. In keeping with this feel, the workshop did not propose to produce a consensus around a set of jointly produced findings. Rather, each participant was left to draw their own conclusions based on their own experience at the meeting. The job of this report is to pull out some of the main lessons learned from the workshop, and areas that were identified for further exploration and research.

As such, the paper begins by explaining the origins of IDRC’s ICT and policy work, and the background to the workshop. This is followed by five sections of results, which can be presented in the form of questions:

- What are the mega tendencies which influence ICT and public policy in LAC?
- What is the significance of collaboration to ICT and public policy work?
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- What is the object of advocacy?
- What are the major issues related to strategies for action?
- What are the deeper questions that we face?

Throughout the text, questions are raised, and boxes beside the text offer some of the answers that were suggested during the workshop (see the list of figures in the Table of Contents). The findings are difficult to sum up in a few sentences, since the questions raised do not respond to a single thesis, but overall, the following themes pervade the document:

- Collaboration is important for public policy advocacy, and collaborative work can be enabled by ICTs. In order to collaborate, groups either need to share a vision or learn to take strategic advantage of the differences in their visions and activities. In order to recognize their differences, groups must be clear on where they themselves stand. In this vein, the following underlying differences among workshop participants were identified:
  - One difference in opinion relates to the formation of the objective for advocacy: whether it is, or should be, formed through advocacy, research, the Internet as a political space for action, or the formation of the social actor at the grassroots.
  - Another difference relates to the relationship between civil society and the state – whether the state is an interlocutor that should be engaged, or an adversary that must be convinced. This may depend on the particular nation in question, among other variables.
  - Finally, and closely related to the previous point, there is a difference in opinion about the role for the state. Public policy and ICT practitioners must ask themselves if it is most strategic to work within the structures of neo-liberalism, work to change these structures, or work outside of them. Again, this will depend on the particular environment for policy advocacy around a given ICT issue.

These differences are balanced by several positive findings. The group was in agreement about the mega-tendencies that influence ICTs and public policy in LAC. In terms of collaboration, the participants recognized that they already cooperate in many ways. And although the group works on different areas of ICT and public policy, their efforts are complementary in many ways. And finally, three areas for future work have been identified as based on the workshop materials: greater capacity (enhanced professionalism) to participate in ICT policy making, or policy making which employs ICTs; greater collaboration to build CSO articulation, and advocacy for a social vision of technology.

2 Origins

The workshop was able to explore new ground because of the participant's lengthy experience in this field. The PAN Americas program has been working with Latin American partners on ICTs for social development since 1997. Over the years, several
of the initiative’s activities have addressed ICT and public policy, such as “Recapitulemos,” the September 2000 meeting of PAN Americas partners in Picton, Canada. One of the results of this meeting was the document *Internet, why? and what for?* (Gómez and Martínez, April 2001) which identified the need to “incorporate a social vision of the Internet into policies and concrete actions for development” as a challenge for ICT practitioners. More recently PAN Americas and the International Technologies Development Group (ITDG) co-financed the meeting *Appropriation of Information and Communications Technologies in Latin America* (Miguel Saravia, Cajamarca, Peru, March 2002), which included a session on ICT legislation, and produced *A Letter to Aunt Ofelia: Seven Proposals for Equitable Development through the use of New Information and Communications Technologies*.

These activities reflect a need in LAC to address policy advocacy as a research theme, and a growing willingness on the part of donors to support policy and advocacy-related work. Within PAN Americas this has been reflected by a growing number of ICT projects in the field of public policy. Recognizing this, the 2001 PAN Americas prospectus identified its three main objectives as learning and evaluation, dissemination and utilization of results, and Internet policy. Thus, overall, this workshop provided an opportunity to recognize advances in the theme, while at the same time starting the process of defining a strategy for PAN America’s work in the area of ICT and public policy. In doing this, the workshop recognized one of PAN America’s central concerns, which is to foster collaborative approaches to research and learning.

### 3 Objectives of the Workshop

#### Major Objectives
- Explore and learn about collaboration as a theme in and of itself.
- Share lessons learned as well as advances in the area of ICT and public policy.
- Elaborate basic principles to help orient work on ICT and public policy.

#### Day 1 Objectives
- Learn and reflect about collaborative work.
- Create an environment to facilitate and provide starting points for collaborative relationships.

#### Day 2 Objectives
- Establish definitions and group understanding for work on ICT and public policy.
- Learn about and reflect on what we have achieved and learning in ICT and public policy.

#### Day 3 Objectives
Our vision of the future: identify and discuss challenges, questions, and gaps in our work.
Plot new courses.
Elaborate basic principles that help to orient IDRC’s strategy in this field for the next few years.

**Thematic Areas**

- Exchange and collaboration.
- Public Policy and ICT in LAC.
- Vision of the future.

**4 Processes and People**

The workshop strove to incorporate the experiences and visions of all the participants. As such, pre-workshop activities included a set of telephone interviews, a facilitated discussion list, a review of projects, and the production of an annotated bibliography.

The telephone interviews included the following 6 questions:

- Why are you participating in the workshop?
- What are your main concerns and desires for this workshop?
- What do you think of the planned workshop activities? Do you have recommendations for other activities?
- What are your main concerns and objectives for ICTs and public policy in LAC?
- What is the current state of your project?
- Do you recommend any documents which should be read by the coordinator before the workshop, and which should be included in the annotated bibliography?

The telephone interviews were *invaluable*. The results informed the questions to be addressed in the discussion list, and assisted the conference coordinator and facilitator in planning for the event. Apart from identifying participant’s individual concerns, the interviews identified the following issues:

- While we see the importance of combining ICTs and public policy, we are not sure how to describe the combination of ICTs and public policy.
- We recognize the importance of large common goals, but we do not know, or are not in agreement about, what they should be.
- And, given the first two points, and the lack of resources we confront, the need to collaborate is obvious, but we do not have the bases for collaboration clearly defined.

These findings produced the following questions, which were addressed in the discussion list:
Public Policy + ICTs = __________

There are many ideas for areas of collaboration, but before entering into this, we need to respond to two questions: Who are “we”? What do we want to achieve as a group?

The results of each of these discussions were summarized, distributed in the discussion list, and used to inform the organization of the workshop.

The annotated bibliography was distributed to participants during the workshop. Besides providing a list of related documentation, the bibliography helped to identify key areas of public policy and ICT work, and several key themes: theory which underlies frameworks and processes of analysis which inform policy analysis of ICT policy, which informs the creation of agendas for action. Two themes of interest were social movements online, and state-civil society relations.

The review of each project – also distributed at the workshop – was done through one-on-one email collaboration with workshop participants. The result was an input to one of the workshop activities, which eliminated the need for extensive project presentations during the workshop, and helped identify the characteristics of the workshop group. From this activity, we know that the participants work primarily at the regional or national levels, but with strong roots in local activities. Furthermore, the place of public policy in the participant’s projects conforms to one or more of the following five points:

**Box 1: What is the place of public policy in my project?**
- Policy as an arena of contention / as the object of participation / as a process of social change
- ICT policy as the object of advocacy
- ICTs as a tool for policy research or advocacy
- ICT and public policy as the focus of research, monitoring, evaluation
- ICT policy as a constraint placed on civil society or local development

The workshop itself took place on September 3-5, 2002 in San Jose, Costa Rica. The agenda is presented below. The meeting was not meant to be a planning process; rather the goals centred on facilitating networking, building moral and providing a space for reflection. As such, the agenda started with presentations of ideas, and later provided opportunities to reflect on these ideas within the context of past endeavours. This was done rather than identifying the context and then planning for the future because it was felt that this would reduce possible spaces of contention.

The workshop was followed by an open report-writing process in which chunks of information were organized and distributed for comment. However, participation in this process was limited.
### Box 2: Workshop Agenda

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sept. 2</th>
<th>Welcome reception</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 3</td>
<td>Project exchange: the offerings and needs of our projects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lunch</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reflecting on collaboration: presentation and group activity</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Free time followed by dinner at Juliana’s house</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 4</td>
<td>How do we understand public policy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lunch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strategies for social change from the local level: participant presentations and discussion</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Small group activity based on the presentations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept. 5</td>
<td>Visions of the future: presentation of the <em>Social Vision of the Internet</em>, and <em>A Letter to Aunt Ofelia</em></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reflection on what each participant would take away from the workshop</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discussion on where we have been and where we are going</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Closing and lunch</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5 Results

As mentioned above, the job of this report is to pull out some of the core ideas raised at the workshop, as based on the participant’s conversations and presentations. This section presents explanations of five theme areas, highlights some of the major
elements that were discussed with regards to each theme, and presents questions for future explorations. If you are left with lots of queries as you read the five theme areas, then this paper has met its goal. The themes only attempt to present the thinking to date on these issues – thinking which still requires fine-tuning - and in no way constitutes a full answer.

5.1 Mega Tendencies

One of the activities at the workshop was a set of presentations on the region’s mega tendencies related to ICTs and public policy. After the presentations, the list of tendencies was refined during a small group activity. The points identified are significant because:

- They illustrate some of the common points of departure for this group
- They point out some of the problems that the group sees as targets for action
- They capture the major influences on ICTs and policy in the region

The ‘positive’ tendencies centred on higher levels of CSO articulation, and progress in the formation of inclusive national and regional social movements. Interestingly, while one of the positive points was “the emergence of movements with more “pull”, with growing public policy advocacy capacity,” one of the negative tendencies was “low intervention of CSOs in the formation of public policies: un-participatory structures and CSO’s own internal limitations”. This contrary result points to questions around civil society articulation:

- Is it that we more articulated than before, but less than necessary?
- What is the role of Internet in civil society articulation?
- Are we articulated, but lacking capacities and windows for advocacy?
- Is there a lack of articulation between ICT actors and other social actors?
- Does the level of articulation and advocacy capacity depend on the sector, country or level (regional, national, local) of study?

Overall, ‘articulation’ as a term could be more clearly defined, and the level of CSO articulation in the region seems to be unclear. In particular, it is not always clear if the term articulation is being used within a social movements framework, referring to NGO relationships. If this is not the case we could, for example, contemplate the possibility of social articulation in general – more along the lines of Putnam’s social capital. And in either case, there is a question around how such a thing as articulation can be qualified. Since Internet and ‘articulation’ are two clearly related phenomena, this is a theme that could benefit from further exploration.
Box 3: Some Mega-Tendencies

- The crisis of representative government.
- Growing international movements.
- Growing sentiments against the tendency to put the market above all else.
- Government tendency to see the “ICT problem” as one of access and connectivity (rather than use and appropriation for societal benefit).
- Public policies formed in accordance with the interests of national monopolies and multinational companies.
- Excessive influence of multilateral organizations.

5.2 Collaboration

The significance of this theme results from several factors:

- Public policy is so complex that it requires collaboration (thesis?)
- Collaboration may be a strategy to deal with resource constraints
- Collaboration plays a role in forming common visions
- Before the workshop, the group did not feel that the bases for collaboration were clearly defined

But perhaps the most significant aspect of collaboration to this group is the fact that Internet provides an opportunity, at least in theory, for geographically disperse organizations to realize larger joint projects. This possibility is a challenge that various members of the workshop group have been investigating, struggling with, learning about and benefiting from.

In the workshop, a scale of collaboration was developed ranging from least to most ‘collaborative.’ (The first three points are in fact degrees of a lack of collaboration.)
In this scale, the level of collaboration will depend on whether the parties share only tasks in common, if they also share interests, or if they share an entire vision. That is, co-appropriation would require all parties to share a vision, interests and tasks in common, while complementarization would only require shared interests and tasks. The size and complexity of the collaboration is also significant. For example, there can be small cases of cooperation, or complex, sector-wide cases of cooperation. Also, organizational cultures are different, both within, and between groups. One participant pointed out that, “There is a need to reflect on the type of organization that can respond to collaboration.”

This last thought points to the significance of the changing balance between individuals, organizations and networks as a result of the information revolution. Figure 1 illustrates some of the themes that were discussed during the workshop, related to the following concerns:

- Organizational adaptation to the network forms brought about by Internet.
- Empowerment of individual organizational representatives working in networks.
- Correspondence between network objectives and organizational objectives
- Clarity in visions and objectives, and mechanisms to accommodate them over time.

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1 In this scale the least intensive form of collaboration is “complementarization.” This is the idea that organizations can simply be aware of how their efforts complement each other. And while they may not share a common vision, they actively recognize the possibility of taking advantage of their complementarities to realize mutually beneficial tasks, or forward each other’s interests.
Given their history of working together, one of the workshop participants pointed out that “ya de por si, estamos relacionados” and there are many examples of small-scale collaborations among this group. The bigger question is:

**When is it worth it to enter into a large-scale, complex collaborative project?**

That is, when should several organizations work together on a specific activity? Collaborative projects require large quantities of time and resources, and as such, they may imply giving up other things, including the possibility of several smaller projects. Also, collaborative projects imply a reduction in the expectations for individual results, and a change in the type of work done by each participant. This raises an important question in itself: *when is it desirable for a researcher to give up individual work time in order to pursue a collaborative goal?* The implication is that participants in a collaborative project would spend less time on individual, personal work, and more time on group work, and work dedicated to the larger project.

Given these concerns, one conclusion is that large-scale, complex collaborative projects should only be entered into, *if* the conditions exist, and *if* there is a strategic necessity for collaborative work. That is, when the value of a collaborative output is greater than

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2 As it is, we are already related to each other.
the value of the combined outputs of several smaller projects. In this vein, the following ideas were expressed:

- IDRC should provide the option of collaborative projects.
- Stimulating collaborative projects is necessary, but not sufficient.
- However, IDRC should not make collaboration a condition of funding.

All of this leads to the question, “When do the conditions for a collaborative project exist?” which is considered in Box 4 below.

On a larger scale, we can also ask when the conditions exist for articulation. The scale of collaboration presented above contains the term ‘complementarization’. This was a term coined by one of the workshop participants to express a situation in which parties do not share a common vision, but actively recognize the possibility of taking advantage of their complementarities to realize mutually beneficial tasks, or forward each other’s interests. It falls somewhere between consensus, in order to advance an agenda, but at the risk of alienating some members of the group, and convergence which accommodates the agendas of all, but may undermine the realization of an agenda (Capurro and Badia, 2002). Pressing this theme a little further, it is interesting to reflect on whether articulation is made up of a series of complementarizations. If $C=\text{collaboration}$ and $A=\text{articulation}$, does $C^2=A$? And conversely, does $A=\sqrt{C^2}$?

**Box 4: What are the conditions for a collaborative project?**

Here are some ‘conditions’ that were suggested during the workshop:

- A common vision or common interests, common objectives. (One person even went so far as to suggest common ideologies.)
- When a network is already emerging from the grassroots.
- A clear strategic need.
- A macro environment that supports, or allows for collaboration.
- At the micro level, an organizational culture that facilitates collaboration.

5.3 What is the Object of Advocacy?

This was a tricky area of discussion, in part because the question itself was not clearly defined. At the workshop, it was split into two discussion topics: the object of advocacy, and “advocacy for what?” But even still, the concepts remained unclear. Here, the issue is divided into two questions.

- How is the objective of advocacy formed?
- What is the immediate objective of advocacy? That is, what are some of the specific issues that were identified for action? (See Box 5.)
Part of the definitional problem relates to the need to establish more common ground among the members of the group (see section 5.5). This issue also results from Spanish terminology. In Spanish, the term ‘incidencia’ was used, which has the connotation of ‘influence or intervention.’ It is a term that is applied in many different situations, including activities to bring about change within civil society. This can cause confusion when, for example, one is discussing both ‘incidencia’ in public policies and ‘incidencia’ in the formation of social movements to realize advocacy. (The English equivalent ‘advocacy’ tends to be applied more exclusively to the area of social change through state-civil society relations.) But perhaps the most immediate cause of confusion is that, our conceptualization of ICT advocacy will be necessarily and inextricably linked to our specific advocacy objectives.

One participant summed up the problem with the question:

What do we mean when we say, ‘construction of Internet policies’?

This same individual went on to say, “Incidencia is a tool for the construction of the objective.” In order to use incidencia as a tool for constructing objectives, it was suggested that it would be helpful to identify fields of action. One proposal was to divide ‘ICT and public policy’ into three areas: 1) ICT policy, 2) Use of ICTs in public policy (i.e. for implementing public policy), and 3) use of ICTs for advocacy. But this approach is developed from a perspective focused mainly on action, and takes emphasis away from other tools for constructing the objective.

This framework can be refined be taking into account the response to the question “What is the place of public policy in my project?” presented in the methodology section (See Box 1). Thus, ICT and policy can be divided into:

1) ICT policy  
2) Use of ICTs in public policy  
3) ICTs for participation and advocacy, and  
4) ICTs and/or observation, research, monitoring and evaluation.

The fourth point recognizes that objective research, monitoring and evaluation can also be tools for constructing the objective. Some would argue that research is a form of action, but here it is recognized that there is a tension between objective analysis, research, and information production on the one hand, and ensuring that concrete results serve for action, on the other hand.

It also puts more emphasis on a field of public policy encompassing many actors including advocates, researchers and representatives. This is significant, because it illustrates another question raised by the group – one which was alluded to the sections of the annotated bibliography. The first conceptualization is more from the perspective of political actors intent on action. But, by recognizing a wider slate of actors, this format shifts the agenda formation process more towards the context of state-civil society relations. It is also interesting to reflect on how this conceptualization relates to
the discussion of articulation presented above: that is, are we talking about civil society articulation or societal articulation?

Some of the conversation revolved around issues that affect the process of constructing an agenda. In particular, the group discussed the fact that advocacy becomes a moving target when regional policy processes adopt the discourse of the left without changing the substance of their activities. It becomes difficult to discern the difference between discourse and practice, which undermines the capacity of the left to construct the objective. This could be thought of as the challenge of stabbing a phantom. Or as one participant put it,

*In the field of ideas we have won, but it has been a dangerous gain, because in the field of reality, we have lost the capacity to say what is right, because they are saying the same thing as we are.*

This issue points to the need to be politically strategic in participating in international arenas. And it points to the need for work on monitoring, appropriation of accounting mechanisms, and social auditing.

This discussion on the objective of advocacy is still not inclusive of all the views presented at the workshop. At least two other suggestions were offered as to how the objective of advocacy is constructed. One contribution was the idea of Internet as a system of connection that itself constitutes a political space for action. This idea was rapidly dismissed because “the space for action should be the information society, which is more than just the Internet.” However, the concept of the ‘mediatico’ merits further exploration, because it provides a starting point from which to discuss the re-appropriation of social communication in the face of big media powers which are ‘enclosing’ these spaces. Another perspective is related to the construction of the agenda through action, but it focuses more on the formation of the social actor at the local level and the growth of agendas from the grassroots. This is explored more in the next section on strategies for action.

**Box 5: Specific Areas for Action**

Here are some of the specific issues and arenas that were identified for action.

- Creating effective, ‘real’ channels or opportunities for participation, as well as improving the quality of participation. This agenda is closely related to work on ICTs, both because information is a basic requirement for participation, and because participation is beginning to be realized through ICTs in LAC.

- The need to make the decision-making processes of telecommunications regulators participatory, and to begin influencing
Connecting to Public Policy

The need for accountability mechanisms – and where they are being implemented, the need to produce methodologies to ensure that reports reflect proposed goals and implementation realities. Again, this agenda is closely related to ICT work, especially in the area of e-government.

The e-government agenda is seen as an important arena for action which touches on some of the areas mentioned above (e-management, e-participation, e-accountability). A particular area of concern is the use of ICTs for ‘modernization of the state’ or government reform. How are governments changing and how can we make this work to our advantage?

National and regional policy processes are important, such as the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), Communication Rights in the Information Society (CRIS), ACNET (UN-ICT Task Force), Alliance for the Information Society (ALIS), Global Citizens Network (GCN), and World Social Forum (FSM).

A particular area of interest is that of Open Source Software, copyright, and the concentration of property.

The link between ICTs and regional economic integration is important. One participant suggested that, “we should focus on a strategy that starts both the internal and external engines of development. How can we intervene so that governments start to think about both national and regional policies – instead of just opening all the doors to the big multi-nationals?” This question relates in particular to the development of the IT industry and sales of software in LAC.

5.4 Strategies for Action

Having looked at the construction the agenda, and specific areas for action, this section turns to strategies. One workshop participant made the observation that “we are naïve and lack the capacity to make an impression in spaces where lobby requires a measure of credibility to be heard.” With this in mind, three main themes arose related to strategies for action:

- How can we include ICTs in the agendas of CSOs and social movements?
- How can we plan strategically for advocacy and be political?
- How can we work from the local level to realize policy advocacy?

It was noted that Internet policy advocacy is not included in the agendas of social organizations because they see it as a technical field – a question of telecommunications. Because ICTs are a cross-cutting theme, a major advocacy strategy is to link ICT policy concerns with other social advocacy agendas. That is, actors working on ICT and public policy can make the bridge between their concerns
and core social agendas such as gender, health, environment or education. A particular
difficulty with this strategy is that there is a certain separation between actors with the
level of analysis required to understand ICT themes, and the groups who work on other
social agendas. This question also relates to the theme of collaboration. Workshop
participants pointed out that organizations concerned with ICTs are not just working with
each other, but also with other actors of various types at various levels.

It was also noted that work must be done around planning strategically for advocacy,
rather than jumping on opportunities when they arise. One person described this in
terms of a game of chess in which the players constantly ask “where am I right now,
and how am I constituted in this space?” and then “which move will improve my
position?” Another person suggested that in order to “Asaltar las Oportunidades” we
need methodologies and consciousness. Working towards this is a means to develop
‘permanent’ (rather than punctual) and professional advocacy capacity. Some specific
areas of work were identified, including:

- Demanding accountability from government bodies
- Social auditing of government bodies
- Development of strategies to access, use and appropriate public information for use in
  public policy advocacy
- Taking advantage of the existing advocacy experience in social organizations, and
  adjusting it, or adopting it to ICT agendas.

These points may provide the bridge between social and ICT agendas. For example,
ICTs can be an important tool for health advocates to demand accountability from
government bodies. If these groups begin to see the importance of appropriating ICTs
for the realization of their own agendas, then they may begin to support social visions of
the Internet.

One of the major themes at the workshop was that of strategies for action from the
grassroots. This is a challenge given “our (still) timid interventions at the local level” and
“given the mega tendencies”. One participant clearly summarized thinking on this point
with the following observation: if our role is to connect the local to the local, create
learning environments and construct agendas, then we need to strengthen the local
actor as the basis for our work. As local actors study cases from other local actors and
begin to act, social actors will emerge, and the local will begin to connect with the local,
and collective agendas will begin to emerge.

Again we can ask the question of whether this social actor is emerging in a context of
state-civil society relations or one of social movement formation. While the two contexts
are not necessarily exclusive of each other, they may imply different visions of the state,
a theme that is explored further in the next and final section.

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3 Literally, “assault the opportunities.”
Box 6: Challenges at the Local Level

- The need for supervisory mechanisms or social auditing in order to form self-regulation at the local level.
- The challenge of developing local policy advocacy capacities that situate the local within the global.
- The use of ICTs locally to facilitate advocacy at the regional or international levels.
- Exploration of the advocacy capacity of the subjects of policy: their constitution as political actors, and their self-perception as citizens.

At any rate, two agendas were suggested as *starting points* for these efforts. One was the human rights movement because “when the situation is analyzed from a rights perspective, then you aren’t talking about service provision, you are talking about dignity.” It was also pointed out that, “rights are complementary and inter-dependant. With the realization of one, there is a higher possibility of realizing the others.” Another possibility was the *Social Vision of the Internet*, which was instrumented by Kemly Camacho for OLISTICA. But in both cases, there are questions around how to employ these agendas for social movement building and social change in a way that appropriates ICTs.

These three areas of concerns pointed to the overall need for an agenda for policy advocacy that could incorporate ICTs into social agendas, provide a ‘north’ for strategic efforts, and consolidate efforts emerging from the local level. As one person put it, “we need to launch ourselves towards the desirable from the achievable in order to achieve the possible.” The question of shared visions is considered in the next section.

Box 7: Some Practical Strategies to Facilitate Policy Work

- Identify the clusters of countries with shared political environments in order to facilitate lesson sharing (with an emphasis on the importance of learning without de-contextualizing)
- Explore similar cases, such as the biotechnology industry (as it parallels the telecommunications industry and property rights issues), both to learn lessons, and to establish the specificities of ICT policy issues.
- Create or acquire a shared language for discussing public policy issues.
- Share and publish lessons learned and examples of success.

This last point is one of PAN Americas three strategic objectives. In terms of ICTs and public policy, it was suggested that the following activities be
pursued:

- Develop examples of success as a means to facilitate the consolidation of social movements or policy agendas
- The results of policy-related activities can be translated into capacity building and inspirational materials.
- Lessons learned should be incorporated into new strategies and actions.
- It is particularly important to gather local experiences – especially of ICTs in local policy - systematize them, and distribute this information.

5.5 Deeper Questions

Using the first four sections of results as a backdrop, this section looks at the deeper questions we were left with. The points that follow tend to have one thing in common: the questions arise out of differences in the approach towards, or the vision of public policy, the state, and advocacy. This is significant, because if we believe that we need to work together to realize social change, but we don’t share a vision, then it will be difficult to collaborate. This helps illustrate the importance of the concept of complementarization, and the need for inclusive agendas, presented above. Keeping this in mind, the deeper questions we are struggling with are examined here. They respond to one overarching question, which is: How can we improve the political, social and economic position of citizens and civil society?

- How do we understand the process of forming public policy?
- What is our conceptualization of the relationship between civil society and the state?
- What is the role of government? Markets? Civil society?
- What are the approaches being used at the local level? In other social movements?

The workshop group observed that the process of forming public policy is often found to be irrational and spontaneous, occurring when certain conditions present themselves, or when there is a champion with power. This is seen as undesirable for a number of reasons. First, policies are less sustainable, and less easily implemented when they are not based on a rational evaluation of the situation, and/or when they do not emerge from a need identified at the grassroots. Furthermore, in the turbulent circumstances presented by a policy window, there could be a higher risk that civil society projects “convert themselves into monsters,” again because they lack careful analysis and planning. In this sense, there is a certain sensation that you have to be careful what you advocate for. Given these concerns, there was a great deal of sympathy for the idea of strategic planning for ICT policy advocacy, or policy advocacy that uses ICTs. This is an area that requires work, and it should be noted that, in and of itself, it requires greater investigation into how public policy is formed in specific contexts, and the place of ICTs in policy formation.
One aspect of public policy formation is the relationship between civil society and the state. In LAC, this relationship is broadly felt to be limited at every level from local to global. It was felt that traditional political parties lack an understanding of civil society concerns, let alone those relating to ICTs, and therefore do not represent all members of society adequately. And it was a unanimous conclusion that, in LAC, key actors are excluded from participation in public policy, and in particular from decision making around ICT policy.

One of the mega-tendencies mentioned above, the crisis of representative democracy, is a particularly important context to keep in mind when considering this issue. What to do about the relationship between civil society and the state depends on what you see as the role of the government, and this was probably the single biggest area of disparity among the workshop participants. As has been noted above, two approaches are social movement and state-civil society relations. And while these are not mutually exclusive, it could be suggested that social movements can generate cohesion by painting the state as an adversary. The idea of state-civil society relations may provide more latitude for thinking of the state as an interlocutor. Discussion around this complex theme addressed some of the following issues:

- When and how (with what restrictions) should the state be granted power?
- Is auto regulation possible? Is auto regulation desirable? If so, under what conditions? (With particular reference to telecommunications, telecom regulators, and the Internet.)
- What is an adequate level of state involvement?
- Under what circumstances should civil society demand that the state assume its responsibilities, and when should civil society assume the responsibilities of the state?
- How can we take advantage of markets strategically? (Particularly in terms of telecentres)
- How should ICT market failures be regulated? (Particularly in terms of universal access)

The lack of agreement around the answers to these questions raises a number of other deeper issues. One workshop participant felt that we needed to situate our ICT island within the greater ocean of public policy. Yet it is not yet clear that we are on the same island or even working within the same ocean. And this would make it difficult to differentiate the ICT policy issues from “general public policy issues.”

Another question surrounds the idea of intervention in the creation of the political subject. It was suggested that we need to 'construct' the political subject in order that she may realize advocacy, transform local knowledge into political action, and generate the potential for self-determination. But if this is the case, it will be necessary for both the political subject and the capacity builders to come to an understanding of how they approach the state and public policy. This also applies to the idea of introducing ICTs into the advocacy agendas of other CSOs. ICT practitioners and social advocates may not share the same vision of state-civil society relations, or the policy-making process. The concept of complementarization suggests that all parties need to be aware of their
own visions and approaches so that they can respect each other’s points of view, recognizing that they have something to offer each other.

6 Summing Up

Taking these five sections of results together, this section will attempt to sum up some of the major findings and key questions. It also presents some thoughts on how we might inter-connect the various issues that have been presented. Overall, the workshop identified several starting points for future work on ICTs and public policy:

- There is a common understanding of some of the mega-tendencies faced by practitioners of ICTs and public policy in LAC.
- There is a group that is already related through its many small collaborations and interactions around ICT issues in LAC.
- The group is working on various different areas of ICT and public policy, ranging from research and practice to advocacy and capacity building, and covering ICT policy, ICT in public policy and ICTs for advocacy. The research produced by the group has strong complementarities.
- The results of the workshop have begun to identify questions for future research and areas for further work. The identification of some differences among members of the group will hopefully help to facilitate future interactions.

In conclusion, three key goals for public policy and ICTs discussed at the workshop were more and higher quality participation in decision-making, CSO articulation, and a social vision for technology. These three areas correspond with action around “professionalism” at the individual or organizational level, collaboration, and better advocacy skills and tools – especially those that appropriate ICTs. Figure 2 below presents one way of summing up these ideas, where individual professionalism can contribute to greater participation, collaboration can help to achieve CSO articulation, and advocacy can help put a more social vision of technology into action.
While this figure conveniently writes up the workshop’s content in shorthand, the event did actually produce many more questions than answers. For example, if groups can find enough common ground to work together – if they complementarize - they might come out the other end of a public policy or research process a different group. That is, working together can be a means for the construction of political actors, social movements, and common agendas. But while recognizing the potential, it is important to remember that greater articulation must take place within existing political structures, relations and processes; certain historical contexts can only be transcended over time.

Furthermore we cannot assume, as does the summary figure above, that there are common visions, such as the conceptualization of ICT and public policy. This is key, because the group’s fundamental vision informs agendas out of which flow specific objectives. In fact, it is curious, if not alarming, to see that the section of this document, which embodied the highest level of cohesion, was the one on strategies for action.

*Are we tempted to build our advocacy house on an ideological foundation of sand?*

The workshop identified at least three separate approaches to forming an agenda:

- Advocacy and/or research as the construction of the agenda.
- The mediatico, enclosure of the media, and re-appropriation of social communication.
- The emergence of the agenda through the formation of social actors at the grassroots.

Furthermore, while not stated outright, there were differences of approaches to relations with the state: one which viewed the state more as an interlocutor which must be engaged, and another which viewed the state more as an adversary which must be
Connecting to Public Policy

... convinced. The ‘right’ approach may again depend on a particular context. Are we jumping to the strategy-building phase before we have formed enough of a shared vision? Can we realistically compensate for differences in vision, as this document would suggest, by recognizing them and working together strategically?

Taking this into consideration, one of the biggest questions comes down to whether we are working within the structures of neo-liberalism, working to change them, or working outside of them. If we are talking about policy advocacy, this question simply cannot be avoided because it is the current overriding context for public policy. On the one hand, it may be possible to look for windows (perhaps weaknesses) which allow for the advancement of alternative agendas. At times it may be possible to accommodate social agendas within neo-liberalism. But what vehicles for change can you use when neo-liberal and social agendas do not coincide – when accommodation is not possible? It has been suggested that between revolution and reform lies “structural reform.” This is the idea that action for policy change can double as a self-conscious effort to empower people and to raise questions about the larger model. But regardless of whether this is an acceptable answer or not, the point is that policy advocacy groups need to be clear on where they stand with regards to these issues.

... Many different factors play into the decision around what approach is right in any given context. In one country, under one political party, it may be possible to advance significantly within neo-liberal structures. In another, the possibilities may be more limited. Other influences may include the particular sector, international developments, or popular support. In the end, the most strategic thing to do may be to become aware of our differences in vision, and work to accommodate them while still seeking to advance agendas. No single vision is necessarily correct, and no single agenda necessarily the right one. Learning from each other’s visions and strategies can open up new spaces for action.