CHARACTERIZATION OF DGROUPS

Research Design

January - March, 2004

General Objective

To identify the achievements and limitations of Dgroups as a dialogue platform for Latin America

Evaluation Questions

- What are the most relevant characteristics of Dgroups platform?

- What are the main weaknesses and strengths of Dgroups?

- What are the most relevant characteristics of the Dgruops' interaction dynamics in LAC?

- What are the main recommendations to increase the potential access and use of Dgroups among its target population?

Methodology

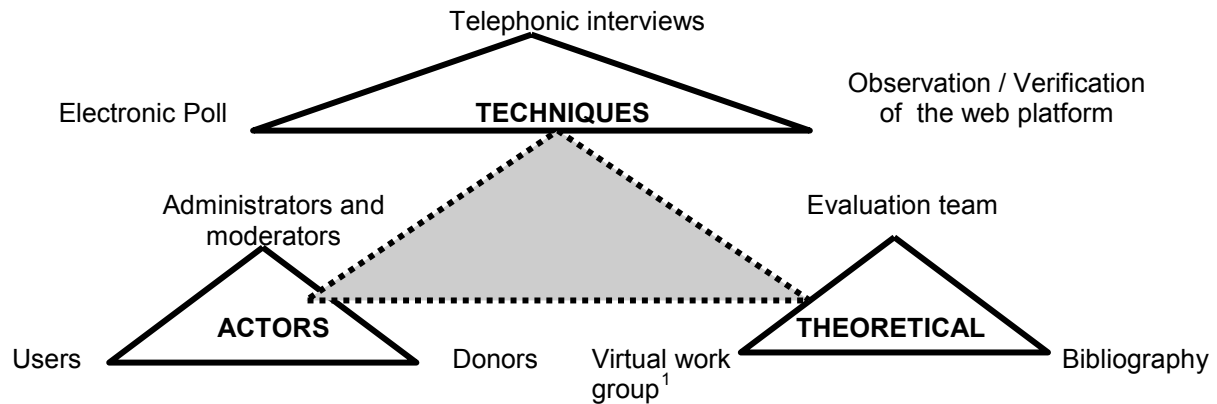1. **Research Approach:**

   - Qualitative approach

2. **Data collection strategy**

   - Bibliographic and documental revision
   - Observation y experimentation with check lists
   - Extracting y processing of data form the D-groups web site and database.
   - Electronic poll to d-group participants
   - Selection of case studies based on the preliminary categorization of the d-groups analyzed
   - Telephonic interviews with the case studies selected

3. Information analysis techniques

- Descriptive statistics analysis

- Elaboration of a matrix for the variable crossing

- Qualitative analysis supported on the existing theory

- Feedback by the virtual workgroup

4. Validation techniques:

Telephonic interviews

Electronic Poll **TECHNIQUES** Observation / Verification of the web platform

Administrators and moderators Evaluation team

ACTORS **THEORETICAL**

Users Donors Virtual work group[1] Bibliography

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[1] It may include consulting other experts in the developement and management of plataforms similar to D-groups, such as Tomoye and Yahoogroups, if it´s possible to contact them.

DGROUPS IN NUMBERS

Worldwide		Latin America
548	number of Dgroups	**71** (13%)
165 (31%)	read access	**9** (13%)
76 (14%)	write access	**26** (37%)

Contrary to the norm, Dgroups of Latin America show a strong tendency to allow members to write messages. However, only a small proportion of them are open so that public can read their contents.

It is difficult to estimate the exact number of people who participate in Dgroups because the data reflects electronic mail received via the web interface. One person can be registered twice with different email addresses. Similarly, the email subscriptions via Lyris are not considered.

Worldwide		Latin America
9,897	number of members	**1,679** (17%)
19	average of members	**24**
398 (4%) One World South Asia	maximum of members	**167** (10%) ICA Caribbean

Worldwide		Latin America
45,685	messages	**6,803** (15%)
87	average of messages	**96**
9,617 (21%) Bellanet Staff-cl	maximum of messages	**1,242** (18%) ICA Caribbean
95 (18%)	Dgroups with 0 messages	**14** (20%)

The high percentage of inactive Dgroups reflects the need to improve criteria for starting a group, as well as the need for a follow-up system.
- Why are Dgroups created and not used?
- Are there policies concerning this Dgroups that are not being used?

A large proportion of Dgroups are being used only as mailing lists. Some of the administrators and facilitators interviewed maintain that their groups' participants report multiple problems logging onto the web interface (when the groups are private) and adding resources to the Dgroup.

| Worldwide		Latin America
4.331	Resources	**654** (15%)
8	average of resources	**9**
290 (7%) FIPA Public	maximum of resources	**125** (19%) ICA Caribbean
217 (41%)	Dgroups with 0 resources	**31** (44%)

WHERE ARE DGROUPS USED?
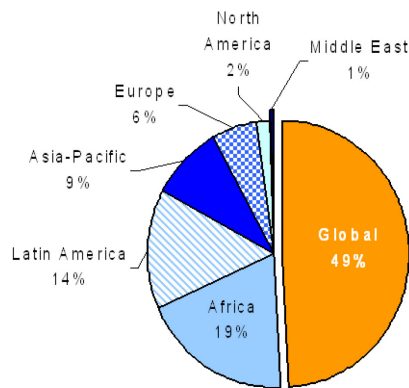
Dgroups per Region

Of the 528 Dgroups that currently exist, almost half are classified as 'Global', due to the majority of Dgroups' associates and members working worldwide. Approximately 3 out of 10 Dgroups are classified as workspaces for participants in developing regions: Africa, Latin America and Asia.

Number of Dgroups per Country (Worldwide)
*Note: Multiple countries may be represented in one Dgroup

Each Dgroup can specify the country where the group's owner organization is based, the countries where its members live, or the name of the country as a subject. Although this classification criteria can be ambiguous, this category allows the activity level in specific countries to be identified. England and Canada show the largest number of Dgroups, due to the majority of partners and members having their bases there (OneWorld, DFID, Bellanet, ICA). The high number of Dgroups in Costa Rica, Zambia and India can be explained by the presence of OneWorld Centers in those countries. The explanation for the high number of Dgroups in Afghanistan is given to the fact that Afghanistan is the first option in the country list. It is likely registered by mistake.
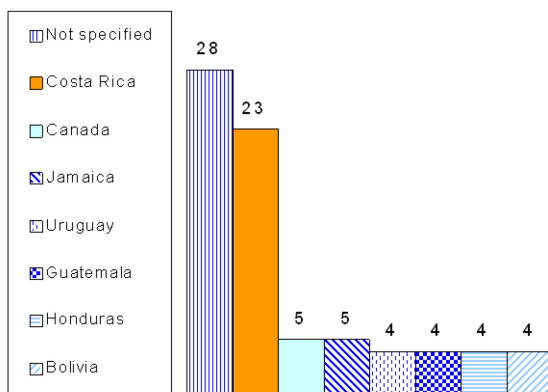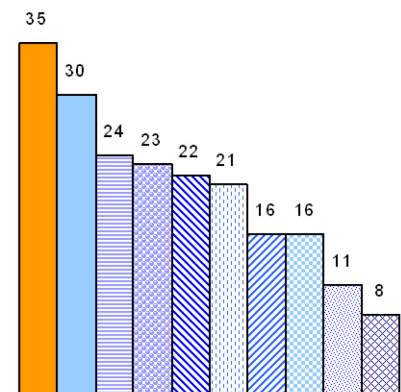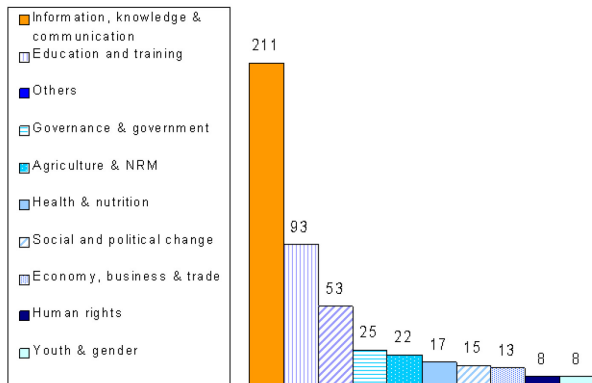

Number of Dgroups per Country (Latin America)
*Note: Multiple countries may be represented in one Dgroup

Of the 71 Latin American Dgroups, 32% have participants from Costa Rica or are managed by a Costa Rican organization. This is due to the promotion carried out by Fundación Acceso, both as a OneWorld Center and as the Bellanet South office.
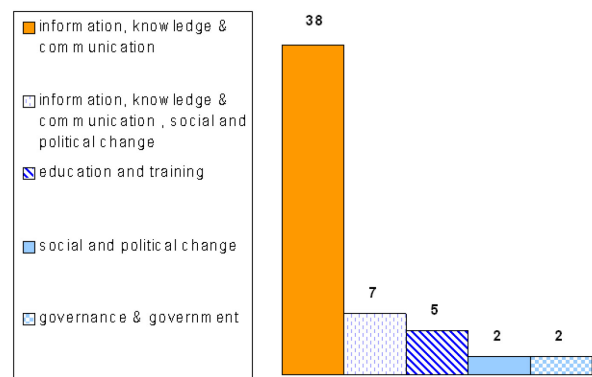
WHAT TOPICS DO THEY WORK ON?

Topics worked by groups, worldwide

Legend:
- Information, knowledge & communication
- Education and training
- Others
- Governance & government
- Agriculture & NRM
- Health & nutrition
- Social and political change
- Economy, business & trade
- Human rights
- Youth & gender

Bar values: 211, 93, 53, 25, 22, 17, 15, 13, 8, 8

In spite of Dgroups being conceived as a supporting tool for organizations that work in various aspects of development, the data shows that the majority of them work in the area of information, knowledge and communication. How can Dgroups reach other organizations and populations whose areas of work are not only ICT?
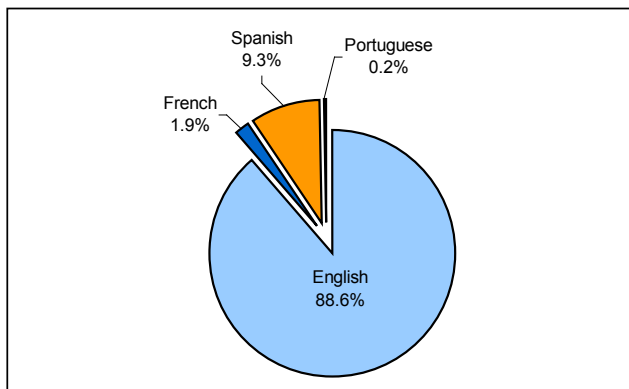
Topics worked by groups, In Latin America

The situation in Latin America is very similar. This could be associated with the fact that the majority of Dgroups have been promoted by partners working in the ICT area.

Legend:
- information, knowledge & communication
- information, knowledge & communication, social and political change
- education and training
- social and political change
- governance & government

Bar values: 38, 7, 5, 2, 2

WHICH LANGUAGES PREDOMINATE?

Dgroup per default language, worldwide

- Spanish 9.3%
- Portuguese 0.2%
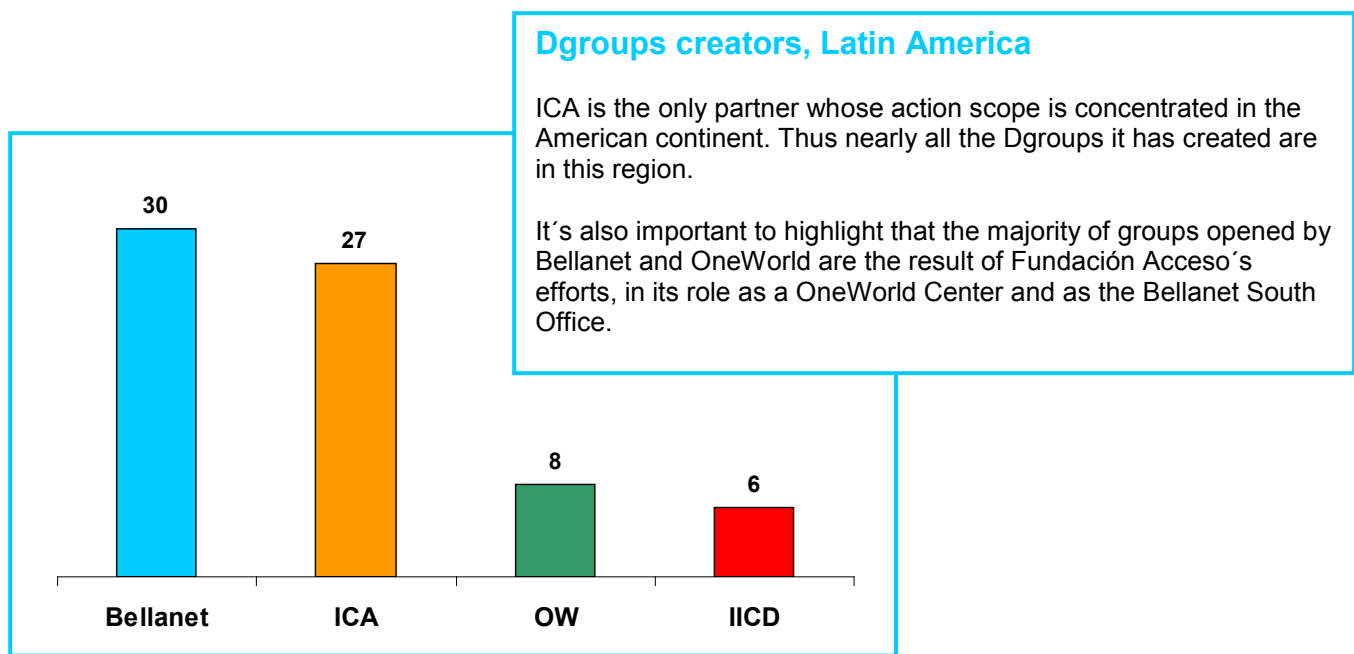- French 1.9%
- English 88.6%

'Default language' is the language in which the web interface appears. Therefore, it´s a given that English results as the predominant language, since almost half the groups are global.

Dgroup per default language, Latin America

- English 38%
- Spanish 62%
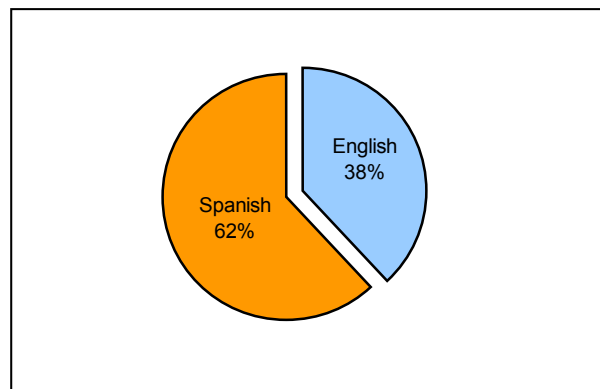
Some groups in the region, having members from Canada and the Caribbean, have defined English as their default language. However, the majority of groups also offer the interface in Spanish, French and/or Portuguese.

WHO PROMOTES DGROUPS?

Bar chart values: OW 186, Bellanet 120, IICD 111, ICA 31, Not specified 27, DFID 23, UNECA 13, IDRC 3, UN 1
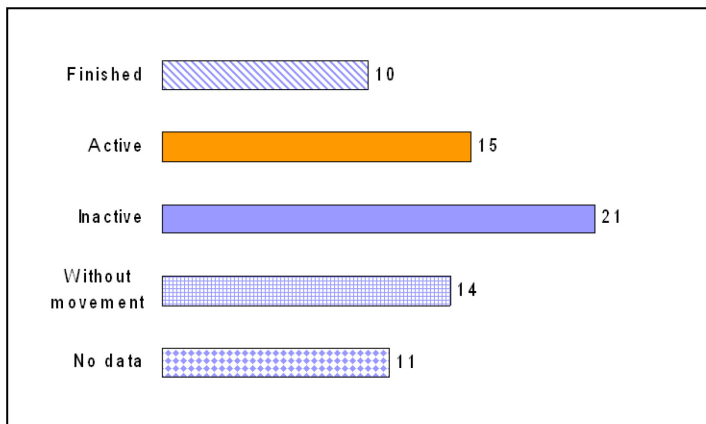
Dgroups creators, worldwide

Some partners have taken a more active role in opening Dgroups for their counterpart or associate organizations. It is worth mentioning the case of OneWorld, that has centers in all continents. This centers have the possibility to open dgroups in a non-centralized manner.

The 4 organizations that have created the most Dgroups work directly in the field of ICTs. To what extent is the platform able to respond to the needs and abilities of organizations that are directed towards other, non-ICT, areas of development?

Dgroups creators, Latin America

ICA is the only partner whose action scope is concentrated in the American continent. Thus nearly all the Dgroups it has created are in this region.

It´s also important to highlight that the majority of groups opened by Bellanet and OneWorld are the result of Fundación Acceso´s efforts, in its role as a OneWorld Center and as the Bellanet South Office.

Bar chart values: Bellanet 30, ICA 27, OW 8, IICD 6

INTERACTION DYNAMICS

Dgroups per activity level, Latin America

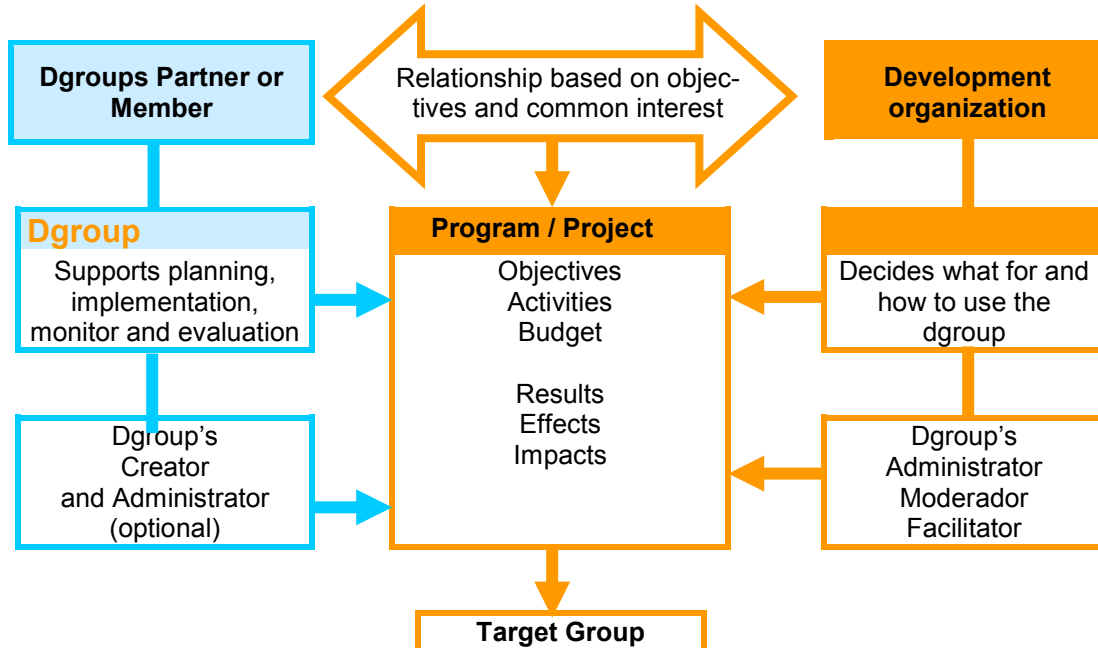|	
Finished	10
Active	15
Inactive	21
Without movement	14
No data	11

Only 21% of Latin American Dgroups are active. Almost 50% of the groups are inactive or have not registered a single movement. This raises many questions about the factors that make organizations ask for a Dgroup but never use it or, after a while, stop using it.

- Are organizations trained – technically and methodologically – to use the tool in an effective way?
- Do organizations know and apply appropriate methodologies to generate participation and interaction dynamics between members?
- Are the the groups' working objectives clear?
- Do the organizations have a defined project or program that the Dgroup supports?

What is the interaction dynamic that is established between key actors?

Dgroups Partner or Member	Relationship based on objectives and common interest	Development organization
Dgroup Supports planning, implementation, monitor and evaluation	**Program / Project** Objectives Activities Budget Results Effects Impacts	Decides what for and how to use the dgroup
Dgroup's Creator and Administrator (optional)		Dgroup's Administrator Moderador Facilitator

Target Group

"It doesn't have publicity that we don't want or that's against our principles...... I think it was created for organizations like ours" Costa Rican feminist organization

"It's a virtual space with a user-friendly design; it doesn't carry advertising or banners, which often hinder the feeling of belonging to a virtual group" academic organization in Uruguay

"Technical assistance is possible"

"...in Yahoo our work group could be next to some singer's fan club"

"...privacy policies are better, Dgroups' storage capacity is more flexible..."

"The graphic design and the technical platform are user-friendly and nice to look at"

"...it presents the challenge of achieving a true dialogue or exchange of opinions that goes beyond an exchange of documents"

"There's no way of dividing the group into different lists. If different lists are created, there's no way of getting them to interact simultaneously"

"...it doesn't have a simple summary for managing the tool that includes technical and application aspects, that is brief and efficient"
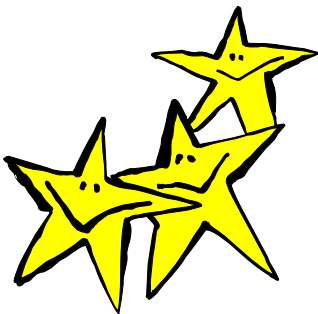
"...people join up without thinking if they have time to dedicate to the group...The groups become monologues or dialogues"

"The work methodology isn't always well defined and, when it is defined, not all participants have the same level of appropiation"

"..the tool does not allow synchronic work to be integrated (chats)"

"...few technical training"

"Finding effective mechanisms for encouraging participation...demands more time and energy from the facilitator"

"...more work is needed in the areas of facilitation and platform's sustentabilit; objectives and responsibles need to be clear, activity reports are necessary. Dgroups should not be created without a good reason and follow-up should be strengthened.".

WHAT ARE DGROUPS USED FOR?

Internal communication

to facilitate message interchange and information storage for people who work in the same organization.

Communication between organizations

it allows people who work in different organizations to have a tool and a common space to be informed, have dialogues and coordinate actions.
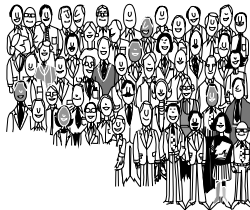
Organizing events

to support coordination processes, announcements, planning, information and follow-up before, during and after a face-to-face activity .

Virtual Communities

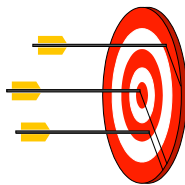it constitutes an ongoing space for the exchange and joint building of knowledge.

Virtual forums of limited duration

it allows specific themes to be proposed and considered during a pre-determined, usually short, time.

Working Groups

to facilitate coordination between people or teams who have to implement a specific task (research, project proposals, etc) during a pre-determined time.

Information Publication

it works as a distribution list and as a space for publishing news, bulletins and other information formats.