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# Bellanet: A Mid-Term Review

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## Summary

Bellanet is over half way through the pilot project. Therefore, it is an opportune time to take stock of its accomplishments to date and identify areas in which it may need to make modifications to achieve longer-term success. This review summarizes views collected from Bellanet staff, Bellanet's funders, and Bellanet's partners in various activities. In general, it presents a picture of an organization struggling to have an impact on the donors it was designed to help and succeeding to have an impact on a range of partners through collaborative initiatives.

Some of the main observations and recommendations about Bellanet's current and future activities include:

- Bellanet has had success working with groups that share two important characteristics: they are intent on collaboration and they share, or are open to, Bellanet's philosophy of using ICTs to change how they work to accomplish their goals.
- The donors that are represented on the Bellanet International Steering Committee (BISC) are Bellanet's major conundrum. The representatives of the funders endorse and support Bellanet's mandate, but the institutions demonstrate very limited buy-in to the philosophy of transparency and sharing of information.
- Bellanet has a major responsibility to its funders to improve its efforts to inform them of its activities, their results, and possible uses in their own programs. In this regard, Bellanet should: review the distribution and impact of the newsletter; look for ways to make its webpage more effective; continue to collaborate in international meetings to ensure that the opportunities presented for better collaboration among donors remains in the consciousness of the donor community; and become more proactive by preparing discussion papers to stimulate dialogue and debate on issues related to ICT usage in both donors and collaborators.
- Bellanet must continue to strive to involve all of its funding partners in its work — not just a few of them. To accomplish this task, one or two members of BISC must step forward to help Bellanet gain a foothold within their organizations. This may involve

such ideas as staff secondments or short placements of Bellanet staff within its funding organizations.

- Given Bellanet's experiences to date, emphasis should be placed on collaborative initiatives that involve Bellanet's funders and on the development of projects that address needs identified by Bellanet's staff.
- Bellanet is highly valued by its collaborators for its technical input and advice. This gives Bellanet credibility and it should continue to build on this strength. Bellanet is seen as a source of informed and neutral opinion and advice.
- To have long-term impact, Bellanet must ensure that its collaborators and funders do not perceive it only as a source of technical support. Bellanet's strength, and niche, is its vision of how it expects ICTs will change how organizations will work in the future.
- Bellanet should continue to be at the forefront in developing innovative tools and methods through projects that address needs identified by its staff. It should ensure that the outputs from these activities are adequately shared.

# Introduction

The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in June 1992 resulted in the preparation of a global research agenda called *Agenda 21*. The challenge of *Agenda 21* went beyond the need to provide resources to developing countries to increase their capability to acquire and generate scientific knowledge and technical solutions. It challenged all partners to find new forms of partnerships for cooperation and called on donors to be creative in designing the means to facilitate these new partnerships.

In November 1993 in Bellagio, Italy, a group of donors met with the objective of responding to the need for greater and more effective collaboration within and among their organizations. At that time it was felt that more effective collaboration was needed among donors to explore new ideas and to assist in program planning and that the new information and communication technologies (ICTs) could facilitate this process of collaboration.

After a year of consultations, a three-year pilot project was developed:

- “a) to assist donors, and others in the development community, to improve their performance, individually and collectively, in program planning, implementation, and evaluation, through the better sharing of ideas, information and experience;*
- b) to promote and achieve more concerted efforts and financial collaboration among development assistance agencies; and*
- c) to improve the cost-effectiveness, impact and relevance of individual donors, in their support of sustainable development research and capacity development, through networking and greater collaboration, and of the overall donor community by improved synergy and/or a more effective division of labour based on this collaboration.”*

From the beginning, Bellanet was thought of as a networking process, not simply as a physical network among donors. This process was expected to use existing physical interconnections among institutions and individuals to encourage transparent dialogues and access to information both within and beyond the participating organizations.

The benefits of this initiative were to include better access to information; better communication with colleagues, partners, and clients; increased opportunities for discussion; the development of teamwork and better collaboration among donors; and greater impact of programs due to coordinated donor action.

The concept for Bellanet was based on two assumptions:

- that more effective collaboration among donors would increase the impact of their programs; and
- that the use of ICTs would provide an enabling environment for such collaboration.

The challenge for Bellanet was to promote the use of the electronic venue to support new forms of collaboration within the development community, and in particular among those donors that support it — Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Directorate General for International Cooperation (DGIS), International Development Research Centre (IDRC), MacArthur Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

During its initial stages, Bellanet sought to encourage the use of ICTs to build collaboration around topics related to sustainable development within its funders. Because Bellanet staff were not subject-matter experts on the content side, with the exception of expertise on ICTs, and the donor representatives were unable to provide sufficient help, it was difficult to make contacts within the funding partners in subject-specific areas. As a result, little “program” activity occurred during the first year. A new strategy was needed if Bellanet was to encourage and demonstrate the advantages of improved sharing and collaboration among development partners.

This new strategy involved the identification of groups that were supported by the organizations that funded Bellanet, involved staff from these funding organizations, and had come together for a specific purpose and were seeking advice and tools to enhance group collaboration. These groups shared two important characteristics: (1) they were intent on collaboration; and (2) they



shared, or were open to, Bellanet's philosophy of using ICTs to change how they worked to accomplish their goals. These activities have come to be known as "collaborative initiatives." These collaborative initiatives generally involve at least two of Bellanet's funders in a substantive way. To support these collaborative initiatives, Bellanet has also developed what have been called "Bellanet projects." These projects are activities in which Bellanet staff identify a problem and seek a solution that is directly relevant and can be applied to collaborative initiatives and to Bellanet's funding partners. The collaborative initiatives, Bellanet projects, Bellanet's funders, and Bellanet itself constitute the environment for this review.



## Objectives and Methods

The purpose of this review was to provide input that would help the Bellanet International Steering Committee (BISC) make decisions about the future of Bellanet, help Bellanet refine its strategies and services, and collect baseline data for future evaluation activities. Its timing was designed to help stimulate discussion at the BISC meeting in November 1997 by assessing the effectiveness and impact of Bellanet's activities and strategies to date; gathering lessons about the strategies and approaches adopted; and making recommendations concerning future Bellanet activities.

Information was gathered by using email surveys and by conducting telephone and personal interviews (questionnaires and interview guides are included in the appendix). As an initial step, an interview guide was developed to collect background information from Bellanet staff. Subsequently, separate questionnaires were developed and sent to two groups of individuals associated with Bellanet's activities. The members of both groups who were surveyed were identified by Bellanet staff. The first group were "funders" — representatives from the donor agencies that provide funds to support Bellanet. This group included both past and current members of BISC. The second group were people who had worked with Bellanet in various collaborative activities or projects — this group was called "collaborators." It is important to note that although the data are presented separately, there is overlap among these two groups. The collaborators in fact include some donors because Bellanet's mode of operation for collaborative initiatives requires that two of its funders are materially involved. A limited pretest was conducted of these questionnaires before they were administered by email.

In total, 11 people were included in the "funders" survey and 56 were included in the "collaborators" survey. A reminder email was sent after one week to individuals who had not yet replied. Replies were received from 7 of the 11 funders. Of the 56 surveys sent to collaborators, 29 completed questionnaires were received. In addition, replies were received from 8 people who said they either were not aware of Bellanet, had nothing to contribute to the review, or had no time to reply. The total rate of response rate was therefore about 65% (37 out of 56). The

complete questionnaires were also posted to the Bellanet website to give those who had not been sent questionnaires the opportunity to reply if they so desired (however, no additional replies were received in this way). A parallel survey of the people on the various listservs was conducted by Bellanet.

Interview guides were developed for both groups of respondents and telephone and personal interviews were conducted with some of the respondents to clarify replies in the electronic survey and to gather additional information. In total, 15 people were interviewed (5 funders and 10 collaborators). Data collection through the questionnaires and interviews took place over a three-week period between 6 and 24 October 1997. In addition, three brief case studies were conducted based on a review of information available on the Bellanet website, interviews with Bellanet staff, and discussions with individuals involved in the activities.

## **Input from Funders and Collaborators**

For the sake of this review, input was sought from two “groups” — funders and collaborators. Although this is a somewhat artificial division because in many of Bellanet’s activities and projects the funders are also collaborators, it did provide a convenient way to separate the views and perceptions of those representatives from organizations that provide funds to Bellanet and those that collaborate in Bellanet activities but do not contribute funding. The input received from these two groups is presented separately. There was a slight difference in focus in the two parts of the review to try to gather as much information as possible about Bellanet’s activities. The funders were asked to focus on their perceptions of Bellanet’s mandate, the progress that had been made in achieving Bellanet’s goals, organizational changes that had occurred within the funders, and the future directions that Bellanet might pursue. Collaborators were asked to focus on the details of their collaboration with Bellanet, the services they had received from Bellanet, and the effect or impact of their Bellanet-related activities. Because donors are also “collaborators” in many cases, some donor input is included within the collaborators sample.

### **Funders**

#### **Bellanet’s Mandate, Progress, and Mode of Operation**

The funders, who were both former and current members of BISC, unanimously supported Bellanet’s mandate, which is “to increase the impact and relevance of development program planning and collaboration through more effective use of information and communication technologies.” Support was given for two main reasons. First the recognition that ICTs are important and are increasingly recognized as so in the development community (both by the donors and their recipients). Second, the need to maximize returns and improve efficiency of resource use, which can better be accomplished by better sharing of information during program development. These views support the two basic assumptions upon which Bellanet was created.

The funding partners differ in their opinion on how much progress Bellanet has made with respect to meeting its specific objective “to play an advocacy role and provide technical

assistance in order to build organizational capacity in the use of ICTs for greater collaboration, stakeholder participation, transparency of action, and knowledge diffusion.” These views range among the seven respondents from no progress (1), to little progress (4), to a lot of progress (2). It is important to note that this important group of contacts for Bellanet did not feel well informed about Bellanet or the progress it may have made in achieving its objectives. Examples of progress for Bellanet included extending and facilitating contacts between donors and recipients, building knowledge about and raising the profile of ICTs within organizations, providing technical assistance for websites and discussion groups (listservs), and producing the newsletter and organizing demonstrations and seminars such as those mounted for Global Knowledge 97. The factors that were suggested as having contributed to this success were: a knowledgeable staff, leadership by the Executive Director, and good timing with respect to the spread of ICTs, which are no longer novel in the development community.

Bellanet was judged to have been unsuccessful in having any real influence within its funding partners. Bellanet has had but a marginal impact on increasing collaboration between these organizations. ICTs are becoming part of the working environment of many donors, but they are not being used to change the way donors share information or collaborate in any substantive way. Responses suggested that program officers often assume that since they now have a computer and email access, ICTs are fulfilling their purpose. They ask: “What more can Bellanet offer?” Clearly, Bellanet’s message of changing how organizations behave and share information resources has not permeated institutional behaviour or thinking in these organizations. A concern was also expressed that Bellanet may be focussed too much on trying to work for the donors themselves, rather than providing more direct assistance to those groups the donors are working with in development projects. It was suggested that Bellanet’s efforts might be better directed to solving practical problems related to connectivity among groups in developing countries that seek to work together. This suggestion lends support to Bellanet’s move toward working through collaborative initiatives and projects. These differences in opinion about the influence of Bellanet on its funding partners may also reflect differences in expectations among the donors. These expectations ranged from working exclusively with donors to working “on the ground” within developing countries. It is unlikely that a small organization can successfully meet such

diverse expectations. Clarification of donor expectations should therefore be a part of Bellanet's future planning activities.

Some of the factors that were suggested as limiting Bellanet's success include lack of time and staff and an inadequate budget to provide the support and services that are needed to make it "indispensable" to its funding agencies. The lack of high-level commitment among the funding agencies and a failure to involve and engage senior staff in understanding Bellanet's mandate have also limited Bellanet's impact. This failure was attributed in part to the fact that Bellanet is not "wired into the central nervous systems of the participating agencies." As a result, there is much dialogue about adopting a Bellanet "philosophy," but organizations have not committed to participating in specific activities. At the same time, the rapid developments that have occurred in technology over the last three years may make Bellanet appear to be outdated. Within these agencies, staff feel they now have the capability to provide the same technical services and support as Bellanet. However, the provision of technical services alone is not why Bellanet was created. It is important that Bellanet continue to work on changing organizational perceptions. It must be seen as a source of ideas and concepts of how to use ICTs to change organizational behaviour with respect to information sharing and collaboration — an advocate for a fundamental shift in philosophy not simply a provider of new tools to automate old behaviours.

The funding representatives support the move by Bellanet to working through collaborative initiatives because they see this as a good way to provide concrete examples of novel ways to use ICTs and a practical, rather than theoretical, way to raise issues. But, they also felt that Bellanet must find more effective ways to inform BISC of these activities, their results, and their potential applications. Unfortunately, some of the members of BISC do not feel they are well informed. It is not enough to simply put information on a webpage because the respondents stated that they do not have the time to search for information and do not look at the Bellanet webpage on a regular basis. More active methods of information delivery are clearly needed.

When the respondents rated how useful five methods were for providing them with information about Bellanet's work (Table 1), the website was rated the most useful. This is interesting given

Table 1. Usefulness of different methods of information delivery.

	Not useful	Useful	Very useful	Not applicable
Meetings	1	3	–	3
Telephone conversations	2	3	1	1
Listserv discussions	2	3	1	1
Bellanet website	–	3	3	1
Bellanet newsletter	1	5	1	–

Table 2. Organizational changes as a result of collaboration with Bellanet.

	None	A little	A lot
Uses ICTs	1	6	–
Interacts with other donors	3	3	1
Interacts with clients	1	5	1
Shares information	2	4	1

the concerns were raised about having sufficient time and inclination to access the site. Perhaps this reflects individual differences in usage, or that the website is useful on the occasions when time is taken to access the site. The newsletter was said to be useful for information delivery; however, the question that must be raised is how effective is the newsletter in reaching beyond BISC members? Bellanet is not well known among those who should know about Bellanet within its funding organizations (estimates ranged from “several” to a maximum of 10–20%). The newsletter might be expected to be a good mechanism to raise awareness of others in the organizations because it is distributed via members of BISC. Either the newsletter is not reaching its target audience or it is not doing a good job of informing those it is reaching. Bellanet should review its distribution plans and methods for the newsletter and perhaps include a readership survey in an upcoming issue to better understand its audience and their expectations. Listserv discussions were no more useful than telephone conversations for informing BISC members about Bellanet activities. This suggests that Bellanet could make better use of listservs to inform its funders about its activities, raise issues, and seek assistance.



It is Bellanet's responsibility to seek more effective ways to better inform its funders about its activities. The funders urged Bellanet to promote the results of its work, especially its undertakings with collaborative initiatives. It was suggested that this could be done by holding workshops and seminars within Bellanet's funding organizations. Critical to any success would be the involvement of senior staff from the funders in the dialogues and discussions. It would also be important for Bellanet to do sufficient research to identify willing groups within the organizations that want to collaborate and offer them the tools to allow this to happen. These seminars must be more than public affairs events — it is not sufficient to present information about Bellanet, what is important is to demonstrate how Bellanet's interests and activities can help develop solutions to specific problems faced by program groups within the organizations. Clearly, BISC members would be required to play an active role in both promoting the activities and suggesting and cultivating initial contacts for Bellanet to explore. Participation in future international meetings such as Global Knowledge 97 would also be appropriate to broaden the range of organizations that are aware of Bellanet and its activities and also to engage participants in discussions of the potential of ICTs to change organizational behaviour.

### **Organizational Changes Resulting from Collaboration with Bellanet**

Only two examples were given to support the types of changes that had occurred in funding organizations as a result of their collaboration with Bellanet (Table 2). In both cases, the respondents indicated that their association with Bellanet had influenced their thinking about ICTs. In one case, this has influenced the way in which communications are now conducted with other organizations. In the other case, Bellanet provided the facilities for a closed listserv discussion, and subsequently, the organization has developed its own website and similar support services to those offered by Bellanet. From Table 2 it can be seen that the major change in organizations has been in their use of ICTs. However, it is unlikely that credit for this change can be attributed to Bellanet because there has been such a global acceptance of computer technologies in the workplace. It is interesting that five of the seven respondents say that they have increased their interactions with clients. This indicates just how many in-roads ICTs have made in these organizations since the Bellanet project was originally conceived and developed. Three of seven report no change in how they interact with other donors and three suggest there

has been a little change. The donors are more likely to interact and share information with their clients than with other donors because they have a direct stake in the success of their partners. This sense of joint purpose and mutual benefit is not evident in most of their dealings with other donors.

### **Future Directions**

Some funders felt that there was little for Bellanet to do now because of the rapid development of ICTs within the donor community since Bellanet was created. This may make Bellanet appear to be outdated because other agencies feel they have the capability to provide the same technical services and support as Bellanet. Bellanet must confront and alter this perception. It is not the provision of technical services that sets Bellanet apart, rather it is the founding principle of the benefits of transparency and openness among donors upon which Bellanet was created. If this is not appreciated by BISC members, Bellanet must work hard to change this perception. The electronic services are only tools. Unless they are used in ways that lead to better information sharing and collaboration in an open and cooperative way, they will fail to realize their full potential and will tend to increase competition and further marginalize those who have limited access. Bellanet must find more effective ways to inform its donor constituency of its activities and their results and potential applications. As one respondent said: "Although ICTs are here to stay, the donor community has become very competitive instead of cooperative in the promotion and use of ICTs."

Bellanet was encouraged to continue to seek ways to market its successes within the donor community and to find ways to provide concrete examples of how to facilitate donor collaboration. Demonstrations were suggested, but at the same time it was conceded that participation might be low. It was suggested that Bellanet directly address individuals and small working groups in the various organizations who are concerned with providing ICTs to developing country partners and present these staff with specific ways in which they can advance that agenda and influence how these ICTs can be used to greatest affect. Bellanet was also seen as a neutral source of advice for development agencies as they embark on programs to provide information technologies to developing country partners. In this regard, Bellanet could provide

Table 3. Reactions to several possible future directions for Bellanet.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	No reply
Bellanet should find ways to become more directly involved in policymaking in the donor community	1	4	1	–	1
Bellanet should continue to experiment with new tools for information sharing	–	–	5	2	–
Bellanet should expand its range of contacts outside the donor community	–	–	5	2	–
Bellanet should manage a small-grants fund to support its activities in developing countries	1	2	1	1	2
Bellanet should place more energy into increasing the returns to its funders	–	1	3	2	1

useful advice and perhaps participate in joint projects or activities. At the same time, it was suggested that Bellanet ensure that it provide specific suggestions for ways to use ICTs, and avoid “generalized advice to donors that is hard to apply.” If such in-roads are to be made within the Bellanet funding institutions, its representatives on BISC must be prepared to play a facilitating role.

Several possible activities that Bellanet might undertake were presented to obtain reactions from funders (Table 3). It is clear that the respondents think that Bellanet should continue to play a role by experimenting with new tools that will assist in the sharing of information. This was in fact suggested to be Bellanet’s strength. Equally, it should continue to expand its range of contacts outside the donor community. BISC needs to consider the implications of this action. If Bellanet is to increasingly work through collaborative initiatives, it will have insufficient resources to try to directly influence donor actions and policies. Is it sufficient to hope that the demonstrated results that are expected from the collaborative initiatives are enough to change donor attitudes and practices? Or, is it more important to work with groups that are committed to developing closer working relations? If these collaborative activities are successful, will the

members of BISC be in a position to assist with the demonstrations and follow-up work that will be needed to encourage their institutional bureaucracies to move toward fuller collaboration with other donors for forward planning?

There were few positive replies to the question about Bellanet becoming directly involved in policymaking in the donor community; however, some comments suggest that Bellanet could play a role in facilitating policy discussions or providing background material to assist others make informed policy decisions. In retrospect, the wording of this question should likely have been restricted to becoming more involved in providing policy advice about ICTs because Bellanet already provides policy input. However, this issue does require careful consideration, because if Bellanet is not able to find ways to influence donor policies, it is unlikely to have much long-term impact on how donors use ICTs in their activities, plan ICT programs, or collaborate with other donors and partners.

Although Bellanet staff are very interested in managing a small-grants fund to support activities in developing countries, there was little support for this idea from the funders. It was suggested that small-grants programs are very labour intensive if they are to be well monitored. A concern was also raised that it would bring Bellanet further from its initial objective of promoting fuller and more transparent collaboration among donor organizations, although this has already occurred to some extent for practical reasons. Perhaps Bellanet should seek ways to play a more active role in providing guidance in the assessment of projects and advice on their implementation as a service to the donor organizations. This would be one way to encourage greater support from within these organizations. This issue of a small-grants program requires further discussion and exploration by BISC and Bellanet.

There was support for the notion of Bellanet placing more energy into increasing its returns to donors. This suggests that donors do not feel they receive the type of return they expect from Bellanet. However, it is not clear that there has been much buy-in by the donors into the Bellanet philosophy. Until there is some movement on this front, it will be very difficult for Bellanet to make much progress. The donors must not simply express a desire to collaborate; they must

introduce policies and take specific actions that will support and encourage such collaboration. Until this happens, Bellanet is likely to be much more successful working with collaborative initiatives and projects with organizations that have an expressed interest to collaborate and are seeking tools and advice on how best to use ICTs to accomplish this. BISC must play a role in this transformation if it is to happen and must share responsibility for Bellanet's ineffectiveness in this area to date.

## **Collaborators**

Over the past 18 months, Bellanet has developed a range of collaborative initiatives and projects (Table 4). More than half of these collaborators were introduced to Bellanet and its objectives through Bellanet staff (16 of 29 replies; Table 5). Six additional contacts were made through referrals. The website (2 replies) and the newsletter (1 reply) are not effective tools for creating new contacts for Bellanet. However, the website is used increasingly by collaborators to obtain information. If Bellanet wishes to extend its range of contacts it will have to find new ways to make contacts with potential collaborators. With a small staff, it may not have the resources to rely solely on personal contacts.

## **Collaboration with Bellanet**

Collaborators provided information about what they expected to achieve as a result of their collaboration with Bellanet. Their expectations were grouped in relation to sharing information, accessing information, and building more effective partnerships, which are the building blocks of Bellanet's philosophy.

### **Sharing Information**

Among collaborators there is a strong desire to develop systems and methods that will help them share information with others. This is an important point because it reflects a necessary condition for collaboration that is not evident in the actions of most donors. Collaborators expected to be able to share information by improving the development of databases, by participating in Bellanet-mediated listserv discussions, and by using Bellanet services to develop websites. Respondents varied in their expectations from promoting information sharing in

Table 4. Collaborative initiatives and projects undertaken by Bellanet over the last 18 months.

Collaborative Initiatives	Associated Bellanet Outputs/Projects
African Networking Initiative (ANI)	ANI Donor Database (lead to AI-AIMS) ISP connectivity database INDIX ICT Subset
Indigenous Knowledge Program (IKP)	IKP website
Iwokrama	Iwokrama website Connectivity advice
Strategic Initiative for Fisheries Research (SIFR)	Website Advice on website design and on Fisheries Projects Information System (FIPIS)
African Information Society Initiative/Harnessing IT for Development (AISI/HITD)	Grew out of ANI Developed and host AISI website Training (internship) Advice about online database etc. Facilitate 4 listservs (AISI-HITD-CL; NLCI4A-CL; NLCITECH-CL; ATAC-CL) Work on AI-AIMS supports AISI
Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA)	Developed and host ADEA website Training (internship) Communication support for ADEA Steering Committee (listserv) ADEA-SC-CL
InfoDev	Manage InfoDev website including online database development and maintenance (proposal information included) Also supports group communication
Learning for Development in the Information Age (LDIA)	Development of conceptual framework Website Hosting of Internet impact listserv (INET-IMPACT-L)
MicroFinance Network (MFN)	Developing strategy to place MFN online and facilitate discussions via website and listserv
Partnerships for ICTs in Africa (PICTA)	Responsible for the development of the PICTA (website) Host PICTA-CL AI-AIMS supports PICTA Provides advice on coordination of PICTA
Women Leaders' Network (WLN)	Developing strategy to place WLN online and facilitate discussions via website and listserv

Table 4 (*continued*). Collaborative initiatives and projects undertaken by Bellanet over the last 18 months.

Bellanet Projects	Associated Bellanet Outputs
Connectivity Study	Matrix that provides guidelines for sending email and attachments across the Internet
Email Directory	Directory of funding members' staff
INDIX ICT Subset	Online database of information on current and completed projects that involve ICTs
Program Mapping Initiative	Prototype database using Common Exchange Format for Development Activity (CEFDA) information -- donor programs/priorities
Pipeline/Program Information Management	On hold, but listserv (PPWG-CL) was developed to discuss. PMI has led to formation of PPWG — representatives from organizations contributing to INDIX-DAI database
Development of Connectivity Information Services	Listserv to discuss ways for ISPs to provide information and update themselves — led to development of online database (NLCI4A-CL)
Web-to-Email Gateway	Collaborate with Unganisha (IDRC project) to launch GetWeb server Informal survey of users Listserv for service developers (WMAIL-DEV-CL)
Dynamic Database Development	Investigated technical issues and developing prototypes (e.g., AI-AIMS, customized ACACIA database)
Donor Consultation (ACACIA)	Helped with information exchange

Table 5. Ways in which collaborators first learned about Bellanet.

Website	Newsletter	Bellanet Staff	Referrals	Other
2	1	16	8	5

narrow subject areas, such as a single topic or a single network project, to looking for broad changes in information flows among wide and divergent groups such as donors and other development partners. In two cases, people were looking for help from Bellanet to change corporate planning with respect to information and communication technologies and to bring a new “vision” of ICT usage to their activities — these are the groups that have the best grasp of Bellanet’s goal, which is to fundamentally change how groups and organizations view information and its role in forward planning and collaboration.

### Accessing Information

Expectations were not as ambitious for accessing information. This is interesting since it is the inverse of sharing information. Areas in which information is sought include: donor activities (including pipeline activities); additional knowledge about Africa, in particular information related to the Internet; and descriptions of other Bellanet partners and their activities. It was suggested that Bellanet might want to develop and promote itself as a pointer to relevant development information (perhaps with an emphasis on how ICTs can influence the behaviour and accomplishments of development organizations).

### Building More Effective Partnerships

This is the area in which Bellanet’s partners had the greatest expectations. Partners expected: technical support to create the tools (websites and listservs) to help to build partnerships and make it easier to work together; closer networking among interested staff in various agencies; improved programming to maximize the impact of small budgets; increased impact from their Internet presence; access to new partners and new sources of information for existing databases; and better coordination among development partners that are active in the use of ICTs for development.

### **Bellanet’s Performance**

An overwhelming number of Bellanet’s partners report that their expectations have been met by Bellanet (Table 6). A few mentioned that it is still too early to judge how fully these expectations have been met, but there is no doubt that there is a high level of satisfaction with



Table 6. Perceptions of how well Bellanet is meeting collaborator's expectations.

	Yes	No	Too early to say
Sharing information	17	1	1
Accessing information	12	3	1
Developing partnerships	14	4	—

the input they are receiving from Bellanet, and this level of satisfaction is reflected in the examples that were provided.

#### Sharing information

Five respondents specifically mentioned the creation or use of websites to help share information with others. Four others cited the advantages that had been provided to them by listservs. Two recognized the input that databases had made to project and program activities. In the replies there was strong support for the concept of open exchange of ideas and information to improve program planning and delivery. There was also recognition that information providers are still not as good at submitting and updating information as they should be. Reference was also made to the contributions by Bellanet of innovative tools and the staff's promotion of innovative ideas and policies with respect to information sharing.

#### Accessing information

The Bellanet website was cited as a good source of information by four respondents and Bellanet staff themselves were also given as examples of ways that information had been accessed — specifically information about ICT needs, ideas, and potential. Information with regard to African networking was singled out as being excellent and it was suggested that Bellanet would continue to grow as a source of information on pipeline activities because of its efforts to establish working groups in this area and to support listserv discussions. It was suggested that Bellanet take this access to information part of their mandate one step further by investing in a search engine that would enable Bellanet to collect and make available information from the websites of all its partners — the suggestion was that this would provide both a useful service to

users as well as help Bellanet gain wider recognition as a pointer to useful development information.

### Building more effective partnerships

Listserves were mentioned by five of the respondents as being critical to the establishment of better partnerships. Listservs improve communication among partners who are often geographically separated (for example, a five member committee located on four continents). Listservs were also credited with making it easier to identify potential partners. Contributions made by Bellanet staff at meetings to both build and maintain partnerships were cited as being useful. These contributions included help in facilitating communication within the group to form partnerships as well as activities to maintain and strengthen ongoing collaboration. Once again, it was noted by someone who was trying to establish more effective partnerships among aid organizations and programs that success was primarily a matter of the willingness of these organizations to collaborate, which was rated as “uneven”.

### **Bellanet's Services**

Bellanet provides access and assistance to create websites, electronic communication services (e.g., listservs), and information management tools (e.g., databases) to help groups improve their ability to communicate and share information resources. Collaborators were asked how often they use these services and what sort of impact they had had on how they collaborate with others in the development community (Table 7).

Collaborators use listservs “a lot” and see them as having “a lot” of impact on improving collaboration. Websites are used almost as much but they are rated more often as having “a little” impact on collaboration. This difference may be attributed to the fact that the webpage is a more passive form of information delivery. It relies on the partner to visit the page and seek the information they require. A listserv in comparison actively delivers information and facilitates or encourages discussion. Databases, at this time, are having less effect, although in the examples that follow it is clear that they may take on more importance in the coming months and years.

Table 7. Use and impact on collaboration of various ICT tools.

	Not at all	A little	A lot	NA
Websites				
Usage	2	13	12	1
Impact on collaboration	4	10	7	6
Listservs etc.				
Usage	4	8	14	1
Impact on collaboration	2	6	12	5
Databases etc.				
Usage	7	14	5	1
Impact on collaboration	3	11	4	7

#### Websites

Use of websites reflects the “newness” of this technology for several of the collaborators. Comments such as “we are just beginning to use the service,” “I am still learning my way around this stuff,” “I am much more inclined to begin searches for information on the web,” and the “website has helped me think more broadly about the potential of this vehicle for communication and information exchange” indicate that the full potential of the web is yet to be realized. Other users, however, have overcome this novelty and are using webpages as a part of their information dissemination and gathering strategy. Comments included: “Websites in general have become a vital source of information for any researcher and especially anyone looking for information on ICTs. The Bellanet site is one of many that I refer to as a networking resource on ICTs in Africa.” “Websites offer an effective way for people to communicate at low cost. Websites are often the first place I consult for information.” “We use the websites as a daily part of information gathering to do our work; we have changed our thinking on information dissemination to become conscious of the need to share information through the AISI and PICTA websites.” “I have used Bellanet websites in preparing for African Internet Forum meetings, and for travel to Africa to look at Internet use.”

## Listservs

“Listservs are an essential component of collaborative work, networking, and researching.” This opinion expressed by one of the collaborators mirrors the views of many of Bellanet’s partners. Although some users are new to listservs, they anticipate making greater use of these services and are anxious to extend the idea to other activities and working groups with which they are involved. Listservs were said to be an effective way to “solicit and gather much more input from a much broader audience,” “identify overlapping initiatives or opportunities for collaboration,” “communicate with others about a report we are preparing for the National Academy of Sciences on indicators to measure the impact of the Internet in Africa,” and “communicate with colleagues in similar types of organizations.” One respondent credited involvement in Bellanet listserv activities with “assisting in acceptance of ICTs in the UN family.” One listserv respondent suggested that the listserv could be more successful if there were more postings and it was suggested that the listservs could be better moderated to encourage more input.

## Databases

One database stands out in the responses to the ways in which databases have been used to enhance collaboration — AI-AIMS. Half of the examples that were provided mentioned how useful this database was to their collaborative work. Not only is it seen as an important source of information about ICTs in Africa, it was said to be the primary means for communicating Acacia project information to the world and to colleagues in similar type institutions. The use of Cold Fusion software was also suggested to be the factor that made entering information on the database much simpler. This simplicity plus the ability to customize the interface for each data provider so that each partner can maintain their own project information on their own website while automatically updating the information in the central AI-AIMS database offers a very valuable resource that Bellanet should be able to use to encourage collaboration among groups that have an expressed desire to share information.

## Other Services Bellanet Could Provide

By far the most common request was that Bellanet provide more information about donors and their plans and activities. It was suggested that Bellanet provide access to donor pipeline

information, develop a source of information on the information management plans and practices of major development players, foster closer networking of interested staff in various aid agencies around the world and “not just stick to the official contacts,” look at the issue of how donor agencies manage their information, encourage integration of various separate databases, and convene and facilitate policy and planning dialogues among donors and partners. Suggestions were also made that Bellanet develop a database of people engaged in ICT training activities in Africa and consider developing on-line training activities. Bellanet was also encouraged to provide assistance in the preparation of project proposals for its partners.

With respect to additional tools, it was suggested that Bellanet consider developing a suite of web-based communication tools (webpace, mailing lists, and databases) that would allow people to collaborate remotely using current Internet technologies. This suite of tools would operate in the background and the user would think they were using their regular email/web browser. It was also suggested that Bellanet consider adding an FTP site that would be accessible by anyone in the development community and develop a system that would automatically update partners about changes that have occurred on each of the other partners websites.

### **Organizational Changes**

Respondents were asked how collaboration with Bellanet had changed how they work in four areas (Table 8). Several people replied that it was still too early to see changes in how they worked because their collaboration was very recent, but they suggested that collaboration had opened their eyes to the possibilities that existed. In general, changes have started to occur in most organizations. Compared with donors (Table 2), collaborators use ICTs more often to share information and to interact with donors and less often to share information with their clients.

In terms of the usage of ICTs, listservs were most often cited as an example of how the organization had changed. Organizations now appreciate the potential of listservs for committee work. They reported that their colleagues had not previously used listservs and their experience with Bellanet had shown that listservs could be a very effective, convenient, and useful device to communicate with people. Others said that although they had the capability to establish listservs

Table 8. Changes in organizations as a result of collaboration with Bellanet.

	None	A little	A lot
Uses ICTs	5	14	2
Interacts with donors and other organizations	2	14	4
Interacts with clients	6	9	2
Shares information	3	10	6

themselves, Bellanet had facilitated reaching out to other organizations. Credit was also given to Bellanet for establishing protocol and client responsibilities for effective electronic communication.

With respect to websites, Bellanet's advice and openness were considered to be a "key to the evolution of our approach for the development of our own website." Others cited their expanded use of the web to diffuse information and the availability of the Bellanet site as a source of development information.

In regard to interactions with other donors and other organizations, PICTA was cited as an example of what is now happening. Bellanet seems to have in PICTA an excellent example of how ICTs can help donors and other organizations work together in a more open collaborative way if they have the incentive to do so. One respondent suggested that he was "able to offer in a donor consortium a practical way of sharing donor pipeline information and matching donors with proponents. But the opportunity has not yet turned into an effective link." This once again points to the need for Bellanet to enhance its public awareness activities and to promote tools and services such as PICTA that can facilitate easier and more transparent collaboration among organizations.

The collaborators provided very few examples of ways they have changed how they share information with clients. Respondents suggested that they now had more options and could provide access to their project database, but in general this is an area in which there has been less

Table 9. Value of the help received from Bellanet.

	Not useful	Useful	Very useful	NA
Technical advice	1	6	17	4
ICT expertise	1	6	16	4
Links to other interested parties	2	9	15	2
Development expertise	1	11	10	5
Direct technical assistance (websites and lists)	4	4	13	5

change. Perhaps this may be because the clients of these development partners could be expected to have more limited electronic connections and to rely on more traditional communication tools.

Information sharing was reported most often as having been affected the most. Six respondents suggested that there had been “a lot” of change in how they now share information. For example, one respondent suggested that information sharing will “grow substantially” as donors and executing agencies make better use of Bellanet. Another reminded that the critical factor is the organization not Bellanet. In this case, the organization was not yet prepared to take advantage of the services and experience of Bellanet. One collaborator reported that “we have shared our preliminary findings and solicited input from a wide audience in several different countries, something that we hadn’t done previously.” The AI-AIMS database was cited as an example of how organizations were starting to share information and pointed to as a good demonstration of how information can be shared.

### **Value of Bellanet’s Input**

The collaborators provided a strong endorsement of the assistance they had received from Bellanet (Table 9). Technical advice, links to other interested parties, and direct technical assistance with the creation of websites and listservs were all rated as being “very useful.” Development expertise was rated more often as “useful,” perhaps because Bellanet is working with development agencies that have expertise in development and are looking for assistance in the use of ICTs to enhance their development efforts.

## **Future Directions**

Suggestions for other ways that Bellanet could help collaborative initiatives focussed on better sharing of information. For example, Bellanet was asked: to make sure that partners submit information in a timely fashion and help them do so when necessary; to obtain more resources to make sure that more information is available on their website; to continue to host interns and provide online technical advice; and to set up an alert mechanism to notify others of changes in interesting webpages.

There was great interest expressed with respect to encouraging collaboration among donors. With regard to donor sharing, it was suggested that better links be created to donors, that Bellanet bring donors on board to collaborate in ICT development work, and that Bellanet establish closer collaboration with a broader range of donors. It was also suggested that Bellanet needed to identify activities that have a high payoff for donors to demonstrate the value of the work they are doing. The framework for collaboration that has been developed by Bellanet was judged to be sufficient, but it was recognized that it must still be adopted by more players — in particular the development organizations.

Bellanet was encouraged to continue its efforts to engender broader sharing of information and to expand its range of contacts even if all donors do not “sign on.” It was suggested that Bellanet needs to carefully define its niche and present a very clear picture to both donors and participants about what it does and who it serves. To better reach the donor community Bellanet was encouraged to identify key technical people in each donor agency so that communications could be better focussed and directed. It was pointed out that the power of the new technologies can be used to break down users into narrow groupings — you can identify groups or individuals in organizations and form networks of like-minded people in narrow fields in each donor. This would allow Bellanet to create networks of special interest groups (maybe 3–4 people in each donor). It was also suggested that Bellanet develop “think pieces” that would identify areas of donor concern in which there is lots of information that needs to be managed and in which dialogue is essential. In this way, Bellanet could raise awareness of the potential of ICTs to solve problems and present itself as a “solution” to a specific donor need.



Finally, suggestions were made that Bellanet make efforts to build capacity in African organizations to do what it does and to continue to provide training. Bellanet was also encouraged to consider the use of chat facilities with multilingual capabilities or develop parallel listservs in different languages and establish appropriate interactions among them because those who are not fluent (or confident) enough in English are excluded from many major international discussions. Bellanet might also consider establishing mirror sites in other parts of the world and take the lead in coordinating interest in cutting-edge technologies such as telecentres.



## Case Studies

Bellanet has identified a number of “needs” within its collaborative initiatives over the last 18 months and has developed activities to seek appropriate solutions. These needs have been directly related to Bellanet’s mandate of encouraging broader collaboration and information sharing through the use of ICTs. These three brief case studies indicate the initial problem that was identified, summarize the activities that have been undertaken, explore their potential impact, and suggest some follow-up action that may be needed.

### Case Study 1: Web-to-Email Gateway

#### Problem

Many people and organizations in developing countries have limited electronic communications facilities; therefore, they are restricted to email and have no direct access to the Internet. About 18 months ago, Bellanet decided to investigate ways to provide web access via email. A web-to-email gateway helps reduce this inequity of access by providing a way for people with only email access to retrieve information from the Internet.

#### Activities

To promote the web-to-email gateway concept, a listserv was created to encourage dialogue among developers of these services, to determine the demand for such services, and to seek ways to make these systems easier to use.

In collaboration with the IDRC project Uganisha, a gateway was created and tested at IDRC — one of about 10 such gateways in the world. The server was launched in August 1997, and during the first 19 days of operation, requests were received from over 450 users around the world (Table 10) and, in response, information from 13,000 web pages (112 megabytes) was delivered. The reaction to the service surpassed IDRC and Bellanet’s expectations but did not noticeably affect the speed of the IDRC Internet connection.

Table 10. Distribution of email-to-web gateway users in first 19 days of operation. Included 20 nonprofit organizations and 20 educational institutions. The rest of the users were from Western Europe, North America, and Australia.

Argentina	11
China	23
Cuba	4
Fiji	1
Lithuania	4
Philippines	11
Romania	14
Ukraine	8
Saudi Arabia	16
South Africa	1
Thailand	1
Zimbabwe	1
	95

### Potential Impact

It could be argued that the demand for this service will decrease as more organizations obtain full Internet access. However, over the next three to four years, this email-based Web access could be an important service where electronic connections are of limited bandwidth and where telephone connection charges are high. The high volume of usage and the geographic distribution of the users suggests that this service has the potential to become an important resource for development partners in the Third World who have limited electronic connectivity.

### Follow-up Needed

If such systems are to be useful to developing country partners, they will have to be both accessible and well promoted. To be effective, these gateways must be secure and stable, and for this they require institutional support. The cost for each server is low (about USD3000), but the returns for developing country institutions that have either no or limited Internet could be very high. The Uganisha project is investigating ways to make these gateways more accessible to IDRC partner institutions. Bellanet could play a lead role by promoting the availability and use of these gateways and by making such gateways accessible to the development partners

supported by its funding partners. The cost of establishing a network of perhaps ten servers in different countries across Africa and promoting their use would be low and would provide access to many development resources that are currently out of reach of many Africans. In addition, it would establish centres of expertise across the continent and might encourage greater information flows among the countries of Africa.

## **Case Study 2: Dynamic Database Development**

### **Problem**

Existing database tools and structures do not promote information sharing among organizations because they contain unstandardized fields and database structures, are not online, and do not allow public access. In short, they make information sharing difficult. Bellanet therefore decided to seek tools that could be used on the Web to make it easier to share information and thus to encourage forward planning and collaboration among agencies.

### **Activities**

Bellanet has acquired the tools needed to create a dynamic database system that allows users to update their data in a central database by simply maintaining their own web-based data. This system is easy to use, provides a range of reports from both the users own data and the data in the central database, and is always up-to-date because it changes as new data are added. Using this dynamic system, Bellanet developed a prototype — African ICT-Activity Information Management System (AI-AIMS), which is designed to use a variety of tools (e.g., structured databases, country-level activity summaries, full-text databases, and agency profiles) to deliver data on such things as proposals, programs, planned projects, meetings, and country missions. AI-AIMS allows organizations to manage their own information over the Internet. Members of the public can also access this data and run personalized reports. In the African Information Society Initiative (AISII) and the Partnership for ICTs in Africa (PICTA) this database tool is now being expanded into an operational system to manage information on ICT-related development activities in Africa and to improve information sharing and cooperation.

## **Potential Impact**

This type of database uses a software package called “Cold Fusion” that reduces the time and effort it takes to update database information on the Web. It also allows users to update data online and to generate reports on demand. In the past, it was necessary to convert database files to HTML format so that they could be displayed on a webpage. In this format, the data were static and typically it might take up to 60 hours to update a large corporate database. The use of Cold Fusion has reduced this time to about half an hour and allowed remote users to update their own data. Data from any common database package can be incorporated. This technological advance makes it much easier for groups that want to share data to do so. Adoption of database standards such as the Common Exchange Format For Development Activity Information (CEFDA) mean that data can be easily shared among partners.

Recently, the Acacia project at IDRC has adopted this database tool. A custom interface allows the database administrator to enter and maintain information about projects in the Acacia website. By so doing, the administrator obtains access to an easy-to-use tool that presents data as if they were on the Acacia website. In fact, the data are also being entered in the AI-AIMS database at the same time and are thus available not only on the Acacia website but to all collaborators via AI-AIMS.

## **Follow-up Needed**

This technology makes it much easier for organizations to share their data with little extra effort. The work they do to maintain their own data serves also to make their information available to others. Bellanet should continue to promote this database development to those institutions and partnerships that want to share information on an on-going basis. This dynamic database is a concrete example of how ICTs do make it easier to share information resources. Little more development work is required. This technology provides a good way to “hook” users on a system that gives them an easy way to manage their own database requirements while seamlessly sharing information with others. This technical advancement is a perfect complement to Bellanet’s mission of promoting transparency and improved collaboration in development work

through the use of ICTs. But, those who own the data resources must be committed to sharing them with others.

### **Case Study 3: Pipeline/Program Information Management**

#### **Problem**

If organizations are to share information effectively to improve collaboration in program development, they require access to a common data-management system. Ideally, such a system would capture, integrate, and make available information about all stages of project development: projects ideas; planned activities; proposals; ongoing and completed projects; and information on evaluations and lessons learned.

#### **Activities**

Bellanet started a project in November 1996 to examine the possibility of unifying the information resources of various development agencies. This project involved not only technical questions related to the database such as cost, security, and ease of use, it also involved policy issues such as: What is private and what is public information? How does an agency report its activities? Will organizations adopt a standardized way of reporting project/program activities? How do agency staff currently create and manage information? and How do decision-makers use information from outside agencies? A mailing list was created to discuss the development of a sustainable methodology to collect and make accessible pipeline and program information.

#### **Potential Impact**

This project addresses the fundamental mission of Bellanet, which is to increase the impact and relevance of development program planning and collaboration through more effective use of ICTs to promote greater collaboration, stakeholder participation, transparency of action, and knowledge diffusion. However, it has proven very difficult to gather information from organizations that have limited buy-in to the idea. Such a project can have little or no impact within donor agencies until they change their ideas about the value of sharing information. In contrast, some of the collaborative initiatives that Bellanet has assisted have been

built around the desire to share information and be more transparent in their operations. In these cases, Bellanet has been able to both propose a model for thinking about using ICTs in this information-sharing process and provide the tools needed to accomplish prestated goals.

### **Follow-up Needed**

Electronic dialogue on this activity is on hold because several of the organizations are in the process of reorganizing their information management systems and some complex issues related to cooperation among organizations are involved. If the donor community values such a pipeline information system they must be prepared to change how they manage information for forward planning. So far, there is little evidence of a willingness to change. Major impediments for Bellanet in trying to bring about this change are their small size, limited resources, and lack of influence on senior policymakers in these organizations. This will be a slow process because the donors appear to be reluctant to actually share planning information. New groups that come together to work collaboratively on a problem offer much more fertile ground for Bellanet. These players have already decided to work collaboratively (the largest hurdle to overcome) and Bellanet has proven it can play a facilitating role in both explaining and encouraging an approach to the use of ICTs to manage information flows and provide the web-based tools that allow this sharing to happen easily. This case study illustrates Bellanet's difficulty in altering donor behaviours and attitudes and suggests the prudence of Bellanet's decision to work instead through collaborative initiatives among committed partners.



## Discussion and Recommendations

Bellanet is over half way through the pilot project. Therefore, it is an opportune time to take stock of its accomplishments to date and identify areas in which it may need to make modifications to achieve longer-term success. This review summarizes views collected from Bellanet staff, Bellanet's funders, and Bellanet's partners in various activities. In some cases, the suggestions and recommendations that were made cover things that Bellanet is already doing. This reinforces the need for Bellanet to improve its communications with its key stakeholders. In general, **the review presents a picture of an organization struggling to have an impact on the donors it was designed to help and succeeding to have an impact on a range of partners through collaborative initiatives.**

Bellanet was created to encourage the use of ICTs to build collaboration around specific topics related to sustainable development. However, it found itself unable to take the lead on the content side, with the exception of ICTs, and the funders themselves provided little assistance in this regard. Bellanet needed to develop an alternative strategy. It sought to find organizations that shared, or were receptive to, its "philosophy" of using ICTs to change how they collaborated with others. Bellanet formed partnerships with groups that had a mandate to do something and were seeking help to achieve their goals. These groups were embarking on new activities and were open and flexible in their approaches to communications activities. This allowed Bellanet to influence how these partners thought and worked and, as a result, to alter organizational approaches to information sharing and management. **Bellanet should continue to work with groups that share these two important characteristics: they are intent on collaboration and they share, or are open to, Bellanet's philosophy of using ICTs to change how they worked to accomplish their goals.**

These collaborative initiatives have not all been successful. Some have failed to reach their objectives because of a lack of commitment or changes in staff (e.g., Indigenous Knowledge and SIFR) and some have encountered operational difficulties such as lower than anticipated participation in dialogues on listservs, but in general the collaborative initiatives have been

successful. **Perhaps the most successful has been the evolution of PICTA (Partnerships for ICTs in Africa), which reflects and characterizes the Bellanet philosophy toward collaboration among a broad range of partners.**

**Donors continue to be Bellanet's major conundrum. The representatives of the funders endorse and support Bellanet's mandate, but the institutions demonstrate very limited buy-in to the philosophy of transparency and sharing of information.** The donors appear to see the benefits of the concept, but perhaps face institutional barriers that limit their ability to adopt such an approach to broader information sharing. As was pointed out during the interviews — “donors are competitive not collaborative by nature.” The question remains: Can Bellanet realistically expect to bring about changes in organizational behaviour among its funders?

BISC and Bellanet must address this question to determine how best Bellanet can apply its resources and energies to best effect. **The funding representatives support Bellanet placing more energy into increasing the returns to its funders. What BISC and Bellanet need to decide is how to define these “returns.”** The funders do not support direct involvement in policymaking in the donor community, but support continued experimentation with new tools and an expansion in the range of contacts outside the donor community. **Bellanet should make recommendations to BISC and seek clarification and agreement on where its priorities should lie.**

**Given Bellanet's experiences to date, emphasis should be placed on collaborative initiatives and the development of projects to address needs that Bellanet identifies.** Although long-term changes in donor actions are to be encouraged, **it may be more realistic for Bellanet to work at the project level with its funders.** This may entail providing advice on connectivity, facilitating access to the web, or providing database tools that promote easier information sharing. Nonetheless, Bellanet should not lose track of its objective of trying to change the institutional behaviour of its funders.

**To have long-term impact, Bellanet must ensure that its collaborators and funders do not perceive it only as a source of technical support.** Many organizations, both public and private, can offer such services. **Bellanet's strength, and niche, is its vision and philosophy.** However, it may be necessary to continue to work “at arm's length” from its funders to obtain fertile ground within its collaborative initiatives for the seeds it is trying to plant.

**Bellanet must make efforts to expand its influence beyond a range of activities associated with IDRC.** This is a cause for concern because it reflects the limited participation and buy-in by Bellanet's other funders. As well, it reinforces the perception that Bellanet is strictly an IDRC initiative. This may have both positive and negative impacts. But, if Bellanet is to be seen as a neutral and unbiased source of informed opinion and advice it must develop as broad a base of operations as possible. Increased effort is essential to seek out activities with other donors. **One or two members of BISC must step forward to help such initiatives find a foothold within their organizations.** Without such active programs, Bellanet will continue to be marginal to their organizations and will have little hope of changing institutional thinking with respect to the use of ICTs to encourage new forms of communication and information exchange.

**BISC must share responsibility for Bellanet's shortcomings in being able to change donor actions and behaviour.** The concept was for BISC representatives to be Bellanet “champions” in their organizations — to serve as a source of information about Bellanet, to seek opportunities for collaboration, and to play an advocacy role for a new institutional approach among donors for information sharing. Unfortunately, this has not been possible for a variety of reasons such as lack of time, taking on other responsibilities, and changes in perceptions of the need for Bellanet.

Bellanet and BISC need to seek solutions to this problem. Senior staff can be expected to have broad demands on their time. As well, Bellanet is only a limited part of their total time commitments. If Bellanet is to make inroads into these funders it will need support from within. **One possibility is that BISC members recommend to their organizations that a staff member be seconded to be a full or part-time Bellanet representative within their**

**organizations.** This person would thus have the time and resources to liaise with Bellanet, review Bellanet material, prepare internal briefings and make presentations on behalf of Bellanet, and look for ways for Bellanet to contribute to the work of groups within the donor organization. **Another option would be for Bellanet staff to spend time (6 months to a year) at the organizations to promote concepts, identify opportunities for collaboration, and set up technical solutions to make things happen.** Perhaps if some BISC members feel that their time commitments are too high, they could consider suggesting a new representative for BISC from their organizations.

**These suggestions in no way reduce Bellanet's major responsibility to its funders to improve its efforts to inform them of its activities, their results, and possible uses in their own programs.** Without better knowledge of positive impacts of their investments in Bellanet, donor support for its activities will erode. In fact, it is not too early for Bellanet to expand its marketing to a broader range of donors in case some of its original funders are not prepared to renew their commitments for a second phase. This issue needs to be discussed with BISC.

Bellanet uses a combination of electronic and print media to deliver information to its funders. It is difficult to assess the value of the newsletter. **It would be useful to review the distribution and impact of the newsletter.** It does not seem to have reached a sufficient number of people in the funding organizations to have increased awareness of Bellanet. Neither has it been effective in introducing new collaborators to Bellanet. Perhaps a readership survey should be considered to define user expectations and uses. Consideration should also be given to producing only the electronic version of the newsletter or perhaps the information in the current newsletter could be better delivered as brief "news releases" issued whenever something needs to be shared.

**The webpage is a convenient way to make information available, but posting information is no guarantee it will be accessed and read. Bellanet should investigate ways of using listservs or modified "push" technologies to advise its constituents of changes to the site or to introduce others to the site.** As webpages continue to proliferate, users are much less likely to find sites unless they are encouraged to visit and are given the URL. Bellanet should seek new

ways to market and promote its site. For example, links should be available from the webpages of all its funders and collaborators. Perhaps there are ways to use these links to post notices on these other pages to indicate that new information is available on the Bellanet site. Reciprocal agreements with other like-minded development organizations could also be explored. Simple things might also be useful. For example, all Bellanet staff should include the Bellanet URL in their “signature” that can be attached to all email messages. BISC staff and Bellanet collaborators might also include this URL as well in their own email to help promote Bellanet.

**Bellanet should continue to collaborate in international meetings such as Global Knowledge 97 to ensure that the opportunities presented for better collaboration among donors remains in the consciousness of the donor community.** It is likely too early to expect evidence of follow-up activities as a result of contacts made at Global Knowledge 97, but it did provide an opportunity to present Bellanet’s message to a large donor group. Focussed presentations of ways Bellanet could help individual groups within its funding institutions might be considered.

**Bellanet might also become more proactive by preparing discussion papers to stimulate dialogue and debate on issues related to ICT usage in both donors and collaborators.** These “papers” might be provocative or simply present short case studies of on-going activities (both successful and not) with potential areas for follow-up or requests for additional partners. These papers could be posted to the webpage as well as mailed to a select list of policy and decision-makers. BISC could help identify the appropriate recipients both from within their organizations and from their own range of contacts.

Bellanet is likely to struggle in its efforts to directly influence donor policy with respect to information sharing, but its strengths are evident in its collaborative initiatives and projects. Bellanet has had success in demonstrating how special-interest groups and organizations can collaborate effectively and also in identifying technical tools that can enhance collaboration and sharing. **Bellanet should continue its efforts to be on the forefront of both thinking about**

how ICTs can be used and to develop tools to facilitate changes in organizational behaviour.

**Bellanet is highly valued by its collaborators.** All aspects of their input were considered to be valuable. As important as it is to ensure that donors are well informed about progress of these collaborative initiatives, **Bellanet must ensure that it is not only valued for technical assistance with webpages, listservs, and databases. They must continue to be seen as promoters of a philosophy for information sharing — as champions of the “networking age.”** The new tools, such as web-to-email gateways and dynamic database tools, must continue to be seen as “hooks” to encourage collaboration. But the real story for Bellanet is a new vision of sharing and collaboration — the process rather than the tools.

With this caution, however, it is important to note the potential applications of some of the tools that Bellanet has developed through its collaborative initiatives and projects. The case studies point to two — the web-to-email gateway and the use of dynamic database tools for easy sharing of information resources. **Bellanet should continue to pursue innovative tools and methods and look for increased opportunities to promote these to both the donor and more general development community.**

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# Bellanet Staff Questionnaire

Name:

Position:

Primary Responsibility:

## Background

1. What is Bellanet's overall goal?
2. What strategies does Bellanet's use to achieve this goal?
3. How have these strategies changed since Bellanet started?
4. What types of services and activities have been undertaken and what outputs have been produced?
5. Which of these services, activities, and outputs receive the greatest proportion of Bellanet's resources?
6. How are ideas and partners for collaborative initiatives identified? What criteria are applied when selecting collaborative initiatives?
7. How are ideas and partners for Bellanet projects identified? What criteria are applied when selecting Bellanet projects?

## Effectiveness

8. Are the strategies that are in place producing the results expected by Bellanet? If not, how might they be improved?
9. What are the obstacles to fuller collaboration among Bellanet's partners?
10. What are the factors you feel lead to good or full collaboration?

## Reach

11. Who are the direct and indirect beneficiaries of collaborative initiatives?
12. How many people are participating in these collaborative initiatives and how many organizations does this cover?



13. Who are the direct and indirect beneficiaries of Bellanet projects?
14. How many people are participating in these Bellanet projects and how many organizations does this cover?
15. How does Bellanet promote its activities and services to each of its funding partners?

## **Impact**

16. How many of Bellanet's funding partners embrace the concept of information sharing?
17. What information is now shared that was not shared before?
18. What information is not shared?
19. What impacts have Bellanet's activities had on how its funding partners cooperate?
20. What impacts have Bellanet's activities had on how its funding partners plan their development activities?
21. What impacts have Bellanet's activities had on how its funding partners implement their development activities?
22. How have the technical skill developed in collaborative initiatives produced changes in partner organizations?
23. How have collaborative initiatives encouraged broader use of ICTs to support cooperation or new forms of partnerships among organizations?
24. What evidence do you have that participation in collaborative initiatives and Bellanet projects has improved the speed or effectiveness of collaboration or reduced the cost of such collaboration?
25. How have Bellanet projects contributed to the activities undertaken within the collaborative initiatives?
26. What do you consider to be Bellanet's most successful activity? Why?
27. What do you consider to be Bellanet's least successful activity? Why?
28. Do you think that there have been any unintended positive or negative effects of Bellanet's activities, outputs, or strategies?

## **Future**

29. In future, where do you think that Bellanet should focus its resources?

30. Does Bellanet promote its activities and services to others in the development community (e.g., USAID, UNEP, WHO etc.)? Is this something that might be considered in future to extend donor collaboration?
31. Are there any other comments you would like to add?

## Collaborators Questionnaire

Dear:

I have been asked by Bellanet to undertake an evaluation of its activities. My report will be tabled at the Bellanet International Steering Committee (BISC) meeting in November; therefore, I would appreciate your reply to this survey by 14 October. The purpose of this evaluation is to provide input that will help BISC make decisions about the future of Bellanet, help Bellanet refine its strategies and services, and collect baseline data for future evaluation activities.

All evaluation documents, including this questionnaire, are available on the Bellanet website <<http://www.bellanet.org/>>. Responses are invited there as well. All individual responses will be confidential.

Please return the completed questionnaire directly to me  
<[mgraham@achilles.net](mailto:mgraham@achilles.net)>.

Thank you for your assistance and for replying by 14 October.

Michael Graham  
(Tel: 613-258-2901; Fax: 613-258-1819)

Please type your reply after the question or place an "x" within the brackets () to indicate your answer.

NOTE: If you have problems filling in this questionnaire directly in your email software, you may wish to copy and paste the entire message into your word processor. You can then answer the questions there and reply by sending me your word-processor file as an attachment to an email message.

1. Name:

Organization:

Job Title:

Telephone Number (with area code):

2. Information about Bellanet activities is available through several sources. How did you first learn about Bellanet?

Website	<input type="checkbox"/>
Newsletter	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bellanet staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Referrals	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>

3. What did you expect to achieve from your collaboration with Bellanet, with respect to:
- A. Sharing information?
  - B. Accessing information?
  - C. Building more effective partnerships?
4. Were these expectations met? Please explain how they were met or how they were not met.
- A. Sharing information?    ☐ yes    ☐ no  
How met, how not met?
  - B. Accessing information?    ☐ yes    ☐ no  
How met, how not met?
  - C. Building more effective partnerships?    ☐ yes    ☐ no  
How met, how not met?
5. Bellanet helps develop the following services to allow you to share your information with others and to increase dialogue.

How often do you use them?

Websites

☐ not at all    ☐ a little    ☐ a lot    ☐ not applicable

Electronic communications services (listserv etc.)

☐ not at all    ☐ a little    ☐ a lot    ☐ not applicable

Information management (databases)

☐ not at all    ☐ a little    ☐ a lot    ☐ not applicable

To what extent have they changed how you collaborate with others in the development community?

Websites

☐ not at all    ☐ a little    ☐ a lot    ☐ not applicable

Electronic communications services (listserv etc.)

☐ not at all    ☐ a little    ☐ a lot    ☐ not applicable

Information management (databases)

☐ not at all    ☐ a little    ☐ a lot    ☐ not applicable

6. If you answered "a little" or "a lot" in the previous question, please give an example of how each of these services has changed the way you work with others in the development community.

Websites:

Electronic communications services (listserv etc.):

Information management (databases):

7. What other services could Bellanet provide to help you work more effectively with others in the development community?

8. Please indicate (and give an example of) the extent to which your collaboration with Bellanet has changed how your organization:

Uses information and communication technologies

☐ none   ☐ a little   ☐ a lot

For example:

Interacts with donors and other organizations

☐ none   ☐ a little   ☐ a lot

For example:

Interacts with clients

☐ none   ☐ a little   ☐ a lot

For example:

Shares information

☐ none   ☐ a little   ☐ a lot

For example:

9. Please rate the value you place on help you have received from Bellanet staff.

Technical advice

☐ not useful   ☐ useful   ☐ very useful   ☐ not applicable

ICT expertise

☐ not useful   ☐ useful   ☐ very useful   ☐ not applicable

Links to other interested parties

☐ not useful   ☐ useful   ☐ very useful   ☐ not applicable

Development expertise

☐ not useful   ☐ useful   ☐ very useful   ☐ not applicable

Direct technical assistance (websites and lists)

☐ not useful   ☐ useful   ☐ very useful   ☐ not applicable

10. How could Bellanet better assist you in your work?

11. What other types of activities should Bellanet undertake over the next 2 years to enhance collaboration among development organizations?

12. Do you have any other comments or suggestions about how Bellanet could be improved?

Thank you.

Please reply to <mgraham@achilles.net> by 14 October.

## Funders Questionnaire

Dear:

I have been asked by Bellanet to undertake an evaluation of its activities. My report will be tabled at the Bellanet International Steering Committee (BISC) meeting in November; therefore, I would appreciate your reply to this survey by 14 October. The purpose of this evaluation is to provide input that will help BISC make decisions about the future of Bellanet, help Bellanet refine its strategies and services, and collect baseline data for future evaluation activities.

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Please type your reply after the question or place an "x" within the brackets () to indicate your answer.

NOTE: If you have problems filling in this questionnaire directly in your email software, you may wish to copy and paste the entire message into your word processor. You can then answer the questions there and reply by sending me your word-processor file as an attachment to an email message.

1. Name:

Organization:

Job Title:

Telephone Number (with area code):

2. Bellanet's mission is to increase the impact and relevance of development program planning and collaboration through more effective use of information and communication technologies (ICTs).

Does your organization continue to support this mission?

☐ yes    ☐ no

Why?

3. Bellanet's core objectives in meeting its mission are to play an advocacy role and provide technical assistance in order to build organizational capacity in the use of ICTs for greater collaboration, stakeholder participation, transparency of action, and knowledge diffusion.

How would you rate Bellanet's progress in meeting these objectives?

☐ no progress    ☐ a little progress    ☐ a lot of progress

a) What aspects of Bellanet's work have been successful?

b) What factors contributed to this success?

c) What aspects of Bellanet's work have been unsuccessful?

d) What factors limited success?

e) Bellanet has chosen to work directly with collaborative initiatives rather than solely with funding agencies. What do you think of this strategy?

4. How useful are the following activities in keeping you informed about Bellanet's work:

Meetings

☐ not useful    ☐ useful    ☐ very useful    ☐ not applicable

Telephone conversations

☐ not useful    ☐ useful    ☐ very useful    ☐ not applicable

Listserv discussions

☐ not useful    ☐ useful    ☐ very useful    ☐ not applicable

Bellanet website

☐ not useful    ☐ useful    ☐ very useful    ☐ not applicable

Bellanet newsletter

☐ not useful    ☐ useful    ☐ very useful    ☐ not applicable

Please provide examples:

5. What else could Bellanet do to better inform you and your colleagues about their work?

6. What percentage of the people within your organization who should know about Bellanet and its mandate actually do know?        (    %)

7. Please indicate the extent to which your collaboration with Bellanet has changed how your organization:



Uses information and communication technologies

☐ none ☐ a little ☐ a lot

Interacts with other donors

☐ none ☐ a little ☐ a lot

Interacts with clients

☐ none ☐ a little ☐ a lot

Shares information

☐ none ☐ a little ☐ a lot

Please provide examples:

8. What could Bellanet do to better help your organization meet its goals?

9. How could Bellanet better stimulate the use of information and communication technologies as a tool for collaboration within the donor community?

10. What do you think about the following future directions for Bellanet?

Bellanet should find ways to become more directly involved in policymaking in the donor community.

☐ strongly disagree ☐ disagree ☐ agree ☐ strongly agree

Bellanet should continue to experiment with new tools for information sharing.

☐ strongly disagree ☐ disagree ☐ agree ☐ strongly agree

Bellanet should expand its range of contacts outside the donor community.

☐ strongly disagree ☐ disagree ☐ agree ☐ strongly agree

Bellanet should manage a small-grants fund to support its activities in developing countries.

☐ strongly disagree ☐ disagree ☐ agree ☐ strongly agree

Bellanet should place more energy into increasing the returns to its funders.

☐ strongly disagree ☐ disagree ☐ agree ☐ strongly agree

11. What do you think is most important for Bellanet to achieve in the next 2 years?

Thank you. Please reply to <mgraham@achilles.net> by 14 October.

# Collaborators Interview Guide

Name:

Thank you for taking the time to complete the email questionnaire. I would like to ask you a few follow-up questions to complete my understanding of your opinions and suggestions about Bellanet.

I am particularly interested in the ways in which Bellanet has assisted you in your work and the factors that you think have contributed to Bellanet's successes or lack of success. I would also like to get your ideas on how your activities may be affecting the donor organizations that fund Bellanet.

1. You first learned about Bellanet from \_\_\_\_\_. At that time, what was it that attracted you to the organization?

2. Initially, what were the problems that you wanted Bellanet to help you solve?

3. Have you been able to solve these problems? ☐ None ☐ Some ☐ All

If some or all, how?

If none, why not?

4. Are there still related problems that you would like to do that Bellanet could help you with?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, what?

5. Do you think that the donors who fund Bellanet are aware of the work you are doing with Bellanet?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, how are the donors made aware of your activities?

If no, what could be done to improve their awareness?

6. Do you think that the donors who fund Bellanet have been encouraged to change how they share information or collaborate as a result of the activities you are undertaking?

☐ Yes ☐ No Why?

7. I am interested in understanding the factors that you think have contributed to Bellanet's success/lack of success?

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Bellanet is well managed.

☐ disagree ☐ agree      Why do you feel this way?

Bellanet has a clear focus and direction to its activities.

☐ disagree ☐ agree      Why do you feel this way?

Bellanet is very well-known in the donor/development community.

☐ disagree ☐ agree      Why do you feel this way?

Bellanet provide me with enough information about its other initiatives and their results.

☐ disagree ☐ agree      Why do you feel this way?

8. If you could change one thing about Bellanet to make it more effective, what would it be?

How would this make Bellanet more effective?

9. Do you have anything else you would like to add?

## Funders Interview Guide

Name:

Thank you for taking the time to complete the email questionnaire. I would like to ask you a few follow-up questions to complete my understanding of your opinions and suggestions about Bellanet.

I am particularly interested in the factors that have contributed to Bellanet's successes and those factors that might be limiting its success. I will be covering aspects of Bellanet's management and approach as well as the ways in which your organization has participated in Bellanet's activities.

1. BISC approved a change in Bellanet's approach from working exclusively with donors to working with collaborative initiatives.

In retrospect was this a good idea? ☐ Yes ☐ No Why?

What was this change expected to produce?

Did this change produce the results that were expected? ☐ Yes ☐ No Why?

2. Bellanet's core objectives are to play an advocacy role and provide technical assistance in order to build organizational capacity in the use of ICTs for greater collaboration, stakeholder participation, transparency of action, and knowledge diffusion.

Do you think that Bellanet plays an effective advocacy role? ☐ Yes ☐ No  
Why?

Do you think that Bellanet is effective in providing technical support? ☐ Yes ☐ No  
Why?

Do you think these are the correct objectives for Bellanet? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If No, how should they be changed?

3. I am interested in understanding the factors that you think have contributed to Bellanet's success/lack of success?

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Bellanet is well managed.

☐ disagree ☐ agree

Why do you feel this way?

Bellanet has a clear focus and direction to its activities.  
☐ disagree ☐ agree      Why do you feel this way?

Bellanet is very well-known in the donor/development community.  
☐ disagree ☐ agree      Why do you feel this way?

Bellanet provide me with enough information about its activities and their results.  
☐ disagree ☐ agree      Why do you feel this way?

I provide sufficient feedback to Bellanet to make my views known.  
☐ disagree ☐ agree      Why do you feel this way?

4. You indicated that      % of the people in your organization who should know about Bellanet actually do know.

Is it important that more people should know about Bellanet? ☐ Yes ☐ No  
If yes, how could that be done?

Have you referred others in your organization to Bellanet for advice?  
☐ Yes ☐ No  
If yes, what was the outcome?

How often have you discussed Bellanet with colleagues in other donor organizations?  
☐ never ☐ sometimes ☐ often

Have any of these colleagues used Bellanet's services in their own work?  
☐ Yes ☐ No  
If yes, what was the outcome?

5. Bellanet seeks to increase collaboration and information sharing among donors. You indicated that there has been no/little/lot of change in your organization as a result of your dealings with Bellanet.

What kind of information is your organization prepared to share with other donors?

What kind of information is your organization not prepared to share with other donors?

Do you think that donor participation/collaboration in Bellanet activities is adequate?  
☐ Yes ☐ No

What factors contribute to or restrict participation/collaboration?

6. What services or support do you think Bellanet provides that are not available elsewhere?

7. Do you have anything else you would like to add?