

# Focus on Information and Communication Technologies



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*Jennifer McCue*

Photo caption: At a telecentre in Uganda. (IDRC Photo, Peter Bennett)

At the G8 Summit in Japan in 2000, G8 leaders agreed to establish a special initiative to address the digital divide between industrialized and developing countries. Later that year, the Digital Opportunity Task Force (DOT Force) was formed, bringing together representatives from G8 and developing country governments, private and not-for-profit sectors, and international organizations. Canada has taken a leading role in the Dot Force; Industry Canada currently chairs the task force and IDRC and Telesystem Ltd., a Canadian telecommunications company, serve as members. The Dot Force officially ends in June 2002, when Canada presents a report card of the initiative's progress to the G8 leaders meeting in Kananaskis. (*Comprehensive information can be found on the [Dot Force website](#).*)

IDRC's contributions to the Dot Force were shaped by the Centre's long commitment to information and communication technologies (ICTs) for development and by its partnerships with researchers and institutions in the South. [Connecting the Dots](#) highlights the Centre's work in ICTs through links to feature articles, videos, a map, and research programs.

The following collection of articles, news, and resources focuses on the question: how can information and communications technologies (ICTs) contribute to development?

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## Features

[A Robin Hood for the Digital Age](#), by Chantal Srivastava

RITS, the *Rede de informações para o terceiro setor*, is a nonprofit organization, based in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, that has been working since 1997 to make computer technology and its powerful communication tools available to the poorest sectors of the population, largely bypassed by the digital revolution. RITS' ultimate aim is to set up a genuine information network.

[SIPAZ: Peace Journalism in Rural Colombia](#), by Angela Castellanos

Violence has taken a devastating toll on Colombian culture and society. SIPAZ is part of a grassroots movement to counter the culture of violence.

[Planet Radio: Sharing Community Programming Over the Internet](#), by Keane Shore

An international broadcasting association is helping community radio stations in the South use the Internet to strengthen their programming. The World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters created its Internet initiative, Moebius/Planeta Radio, to counter unequal access to telecommunications. The goal is to democratize the airwaves by helping small, often low-powered, community radio stations around the world produce and share radio programs featuring different viewpoints than those of mainstream media.

[SchoolNet South Africa: Accessing a World of Learning](#), by Sheila Riordon

Sizwe Ngcobo is a 17-year old special-needs student attending a school for the mentally disabled in KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa. He is Zulu-speaking and, until just over a year ago, had never seen a computer. Last year, Sizwe gained international recognition for the artwork he contributed to a collaborative student-designed web site that earned a silver medal in the ThinkQuest competition, an annual Internet challenge.

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## **News**

[Business e-tips for Rural African Women](#), by Lisa Waldick

A new information tool offers direct access to information for women who are among the most marginalized in development — poor women with little or no reading ability.

[Net Gains With Somos@telecentros](#) , by Keane J. Shore

A two-year-old Latin American and Caribbean co-operative that joins community Internet access centres, or telecentres, across the region stands at about 1,500 members and growing.

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## **Interview**

[In Conversation: Richard Fuchs](#)

Richard Fuchs joined IDRC in January 2001 as Director of the Information and Communication Technologies for Development Program Area. He came to the Centre with broad experience in academia, the public service, and the private sector. Dr Fuchs served as the Executive Director, and later as a Commissioner, for the Newfoundland Economic Recovery Commission. He was also the founder and CEO of the Enterprise Network Inc., a Crown corporation that established Canada's first rural online and telecentre services. In 1996, Mr Fuchs set up Futureworks, a firm specializing in the development of distance technology systems and services.

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## Commentary

["In a bookless society, why start with books?"](#), by Richard Fuchs

The USAID officer, committed and caring fellow, said to me: "Richard, computers in schools? Uganda is still a bookless society. They need books, not computers!" I had to think about this before replying: "In a bookless society, why start with books?" — a digital variant of Wayne Gretsky's injunction to "skate to where the puck is gonna be!"

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## Resources

Web videos: The community telecentre is one way in which developing countries can accelerate their participation in the information economy. These three videos, viewable on the Web, each present a short telecentre "life-story" from Senegal, Paraguay, and Uganda.

Senegal: [english version](#), [french version](#)

Paraguay: [english version](#), [spanish version](#)

Uganda: [english version](#)

Mapping the digital divide — The Internet: Out of Africa

IDRC Booktique: [Writing for Change](#)

In *Writing for Change*, you will learn the core skills of effective writing, how to write for scientific publication, and how to write for advocacy. *Writing for Change* will prove useful to researchers, campaigners, scientists, fundraisers, project managers, social activists, and especially trainers in writing and communication skills.

IDRC Booktique: [Assessing Community Telecentres](#)

Telephone, fax, email, Internet; telemedicine, distance education, news distribution, telecommuting: these are some of the services offered by the community telecentre. But do telecentres truly respond to the communication and information needs of the communities they are intended to serve? What impact do they have on social equity and economic development? As community telecentres become more commonplace across Africa and in other developing regions of the world, these questions take on an increasing urgency. This guidebook will assist researchers as they assess and evaluate the role and impact of community telecentres.

IDRC Booktique: [Gender and the Information Revolution in Africa](#)

Information is universally acknowledged to be a lynchpin of sustainable and equitable development. In Africa, however, access to information is limited, and especially so for rural women. The new information and communication technologies (ICTs), centred mostly on the Internet, provide potential to redress this imbalance. The essays in this book examine the current and potential impact of the ICT explosion in Africa.

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## **Links to explore**

[Bellanet International Secretariat](#)

IDRC Program Initiative: [The Acacia Initiative](#)

IDRC Program Initiative: [The Institute for Connectivity in the Americas \(ICA\)](#)

IDRC Program Initiative: PAN [Americas](#)

IDRC Program Initiative: PAN [Asia](#)