

# Appropriating the Internet for Social Change:

Towards the strategic use of networked technologies by transnational civil society organizations

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## Foreword

This report was prepared for the Social Science Research Council's (SSRC) Information Technology and International Cooperation (ITIC) program. The ITIC program exists to explore the relationship between information technology and civil society. Its goal is to build knowledge about the use and governance of information technology by civil society actors - from NGOs to alternative media - especially at the transnational level. The program brings international groups of scholars and practitioners together to collaborate at meetings, online, and through the exchange of writings.

One of two initial 'knowledge reports' released by the program, this document focuses on the issue of how civil society organizations are using information technology. In conjunction with this report, SSRC has organized a research network in order to expand on the knowledge and analysis on this topic. The network is engaged in writing papers, discussion and collaborative projects related to IT governance.

A companion report published at the same time as this one focuses on the international governance of information technology and its implications for civil society networking. A similarly structured research network has been formed on this topic.

The International Telecommunications Union (ITU) will hold the first World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in Geneva in December 2003, marking the end of the first phase of this international process. The two ITIC research networks will meet in Geneva directly following WSIS to discuss "IT and the Politics of Civil Society."

## Acknowledgements

In our interconnected world, a report like this is never solely the work of one or two minds. Dozens of people all around the world helped make this report a reality by sharing insights, experience, statistics and feedback. As the authors of the report, we wish to extend our deepest gratitude to all of these people. We would especially like to thank those who contributed the case material that brings this report to life. In particular, thank you to the Association for Progressive Communications for sharing unpublished research on the experience of those who are working to improve the strategic use of network technology within civil society. Also, thanks to Robert Latham and Marcela Sabino at SSRC who provided tremendous intellectual and logistical support through the process of writing the report. And, of course, the biggest thank you goes to our friends and families for their support - your contribution is incalculable.

## Executive Summary

As civil society, we are confronted with an opportunity – to use the Internet and other emerging network technologies to support our quest for global peace and social justice. Consider that we live in a world where almost anyone located in an urban centre can share their message globally with a free *blog* and a few dollars spent at an Internet café. Access is not– or will not for much longer be – a major communications stumbling block for civil society organizations. The more pressing need is for civil society to learn how to appropriate the technologies that we now have access to, bending and molding them so that they can be used more strategically and politically. While we can point to examples of innovative civil society applications, most organizations have not moved much beyond e-mail and basic web sites – and they have certainly not moved on to what might be called the ‘strategic use’ of these technologies. Put simply, the tools are in our hands, but most of us have not yet decided what to build.

### Using technology strategically

The primary question addressed by this report is: what will it take to catalyze a broader trend of appropriation and strategic use of networked technologies within civil society?

The stakes are high with these tools. The ability of civil society organizations to control their own communications, and even their relationships and networks, is intimately intertwined with the question of appropriating networked technologies. Given this, the issue of appropriation – using networked technologies strategically, politically, creatively – is amongst the most pressing that civil society faces in the information society.

By looking at organizations which are at the forefront of strategic use – IndyMedia, the Sarai / Waag Exchange, OneWorld, Jubilee 2000, the movement against corporate globalization – it is possible to see a world where technology is at once central and forgotten. E-mail lists, web sites and databases are so deeply ingrained into the DNA of these organizations that they are no longer the point, or the problem. The fluidity and flexibility of these tools has become the natural raw material from which much more important things are built – coalitions, campaigns, knowledge, networks.

Unfortunately, this appears to be exception and not the rule. There is growing informal consensus that most civil society organizations – especially larger, more conservative NGOs – have not made it to the appropriation step on the ladder. They have not yet dipped their toe into the pool of cultural and organizational change that comes when a group molds networked technologies in its own image, making these technologies a part of their very fabric and being.

### What is civil society doing online?

Looking at the terrain, there are four major areas where we see the strategic use of networked technologies taking place within civil society. In order to understand both the potential and the challenges of these technologies, it is important first to look at what is happening in each area:

- **Collaboration** – The cheap, global, many-to-many communications offered by network technologies provide an excellent platform for collaboration – especially for organizations working on a global scale. As our Friends of the Earth, Jubilee 2000 and Summer Source case studies show, the success and value of this collaboration is much more about clarity of purpose and sound social process than it is about software and networking protocols. They also show that while running virtual organizations and campaigns can increase reach, effectiveness and responsiveness, becoming virtual – even in part – can be a difficult process. There is a need not only for trust and social capital, but also for both network platforms that balance the different needs of northern and southern organizations and collaboration skills such as patience, clear writing and facilitation. There is clearly much potential for

online collaboration within global civil society, but this success is tied up in the ability to develop more equitable networks and better online collaboration skills.

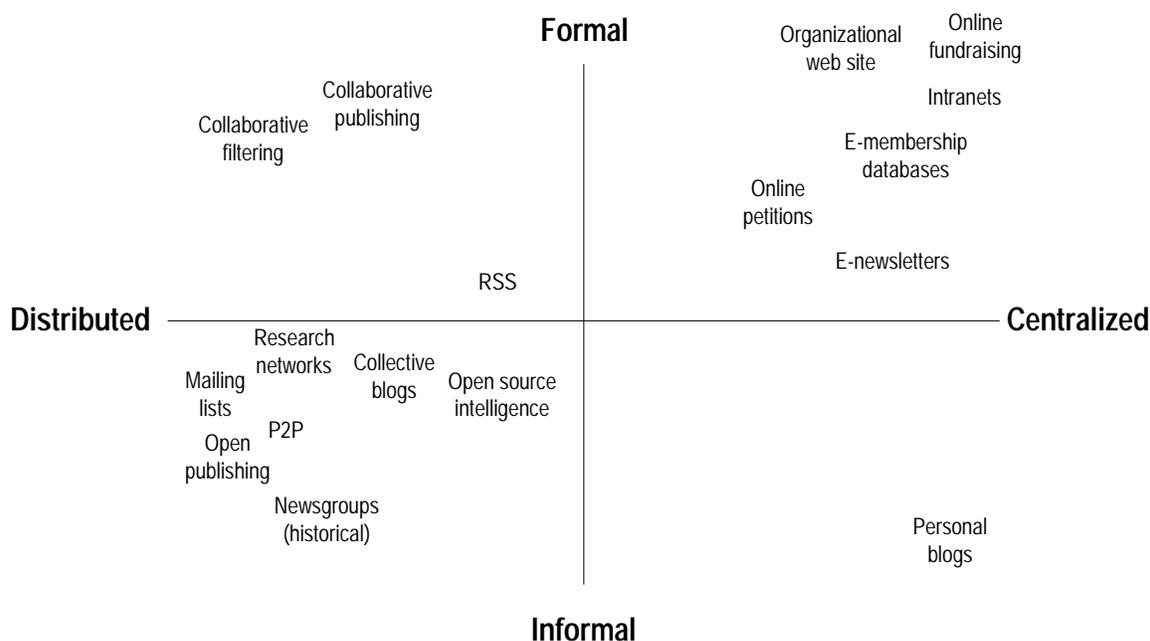
- **Publishing** – It is not being overly dramatic to speak of an ‘online publishing revolution’ within civil society. While we often take it for granted, the ways that transnational civil society organizations produce and distribute information are very different than they were 10 years ago. As we see with cases like OneWorld and Indymedia, some civil society organizations have not only taken advantage of the lower cost and higher speed of electronic publishing, but they have also developed innovative approaches to working with others, generating revenue and promoting media democracy. However, online publishing also brings its challenges – issues with financial sustainability, the problem of making publishing more strategic, equity between North and South, and the real impact of alternative media. As we move forward, there is a need for much better impact research and more innovative approaches sustaining civil society online publishing efforts.
- **Mobilization** – One of the most widely discussed uses of networked technologies within civil society is online mobilization and activism. The use of e-mail and the web for the Seattle WTO protests and the global fight against the MAI show how successfully the net has integrated with traditional campaigns and protests. Some even argue, that the role of the Internet in these events led to the development of a new kind of ‘hub and spoke’ social movement able to draw in a highly diverse collection of issues and organizations. The BiWater censorship case illustrates how mobilization and activism have also taken completely new and wholly virtual forms. Amidst all of this, a tension between grassroots and centralized organizing has emerged. This is exemplified by the fact that some groups are still relying on the simple e-mail lists used to organize events like Seattle while others are moving to complex organizing databases built on the model of corporate e-mail marketing. Also, questions are emerging about the effectiveness of certain kinds of online organizing, especially online campaigns that use petitions and e-postcards to target policy makers.
- **Observation** – Network technologies have opened up a whole new world of research and intelligence gathering to civil society organizations. Not only is information available more quickly and cheaply than in the past, but new kinds of research and information sharing have emerged. As the OLISTICA and Sarai / Waag Exchange cases illustrate, the Internet has the potential to act as a platform for more equitable research approaches that both involve grassroots organizations in research design and move beyond the traditional paradigm of ‘rich country help poor country’ development research. At the same time, informal, e-mail based collective intelligence networks have formed across civil society to act as filters and radar systems amidst a world of information overload. And, as the CitizenLab SecureScan project shows, whole new kinds of research based on the dramatic repurposing of corporate and state technologies like online surveillance have begun to emerge. However, there are challenges with many of the online research techniques that have emerged in the past five years. Of most import is the perennial research issue of ‘who gets to frame the questions?’

Of course, the boundaries between these categories are fluid – open publishing is a combination of publishing, collaboration and even mobilization. Also, there is often a relationship between observation (information in) and publication (information out). As with the concept of civil society itself, the terrain of strategic use must be seen as a multi-dimensional continuum and not as a fixed set of ‘things’.

### **Together or apart?**

Looking across the strategic use continuum within civil society, a tension between ‘working together’ and ‘working apart’ is clearly emerging. In each of the main chapters of this report, major uses of the Internet are mapped on two axes – distributed vs. centralized and formal vs. informal. With key elements of all four diagrams overlaid together, it is possible to see that those technologies that have received the most attention within civil society of late fall strongly on one side of this diagram or another:

### Strategic uses spectrum



The tools that fall in the formal / centralized quadrant tend to be used primarily by large NGOs, unions and political parties. Tools in this areas such as e-newsletters, organizational web sites and e-membership systems, are based on a 'broadcast' model, with a high degree of value being placed on control over message, targeting and audience segmentation and ownership over information. More often than not, the dominant software in these areas is commercial. The simpler examples in the distributed / informal quadrant tend to be used more heavily by informal social movements, research networks and 'virtual organizations'. They reflect the many-to-many communications model of the Internet, stressing the importance of collaboration and multiple voices. In many cases, the dominant tools in this area are open source.

Internet activism researcher Graham Meikle would frame this tension in the context of the battle between Internet 1.0 (network as open system) and Internet 2.0 (network as closed, commercial channel). We see the fight of these models taking place in the private sector as companies like Amazon.com rail against cable and telephone companies who are trying to control which content is carried on their networks. It is interesting to observe that this same tension may be emerging in civil society as well. This tension could well be a defining factor on the road ahead.

### The challenges ahead

Electronic networks have become the platform on which much of civil society operates. As such, organizations and activists must increasingly come to terms with the networked realm in which they now live. This is not about rushing out to buy a modem or get e-mail training, although some organizations still need these things. It is, as we say throughout this report, about gaining the skills and perspective to be able to appropriate these technologies – to use them strategically and politically. Both the anecdotal tales from practitioners and the small bits of research that we have tell us that civil society has a long way to go in this regard. Yet, at the same time, the case studies and other examples in this report show that there is a

rich world of strategic practice surrounding us. It is in looking at these existing examples that we can see the most significant challenges that lay ahead:

- **Equity:** The biggest challenge to the strategic use of network technologies remains one of equity. Online networks promise – and sometimes deliver – inclusion. Yet there is a need for more conscious and concerted attempts to develop online spaces that are inviting and equitable.
- **Impact:** While there are good examples of organizations that are publishing and organizing online, there is little research on the broader social, political and cultural ripples these activities are having. In order to use these technologies to their potential, we need better information on the impact we are having.
- **Trust:** So much of what we have achieved – and hope to achieve – with networked technologies is tied into our ability to collaborate. As we move forward, there is a need both to preserve the social capital of civil society communities and to develop more effective cultures of collaboration online.
- **Sustainability:** With new media, as with old, sustainability is a challenge. While old strategies such as grants and volunteerism continue to have value, there is also a need for new models to support civil society media projects. Donors and information producers alike must be willing to research and experiment with such new approaches.
- **Enclosure:** A number of trends are emerging to threaten the open nature of the Internet – closed and proprietary networks, repressive intellectual property regimes, increased use of surveillance. Alongside their efforts at strategic use, civil society must work against these threats.

Intuitively and collectively, we already know these things. In our knowledge of these things – however intangible and unfocused – there is a feeling that a movement is emerging. This is a movement of what might be called ‘social tech’ organizations and activists. This emergent grouping is focused on a diversity of issues – internet rights, technology assistance, ICT4D, geek volunteering, strategic use. It also takes on a diversity of forms, ranging from small local volunteer groups to transnational networks. However, there is a common belief amongst these groups that the Internet and related technologies hold great potential for civil society. Certainly, these groups face many challenges, including their ability to work with each other and to become more broadly integrated into civil society. However, if these challenges can be overcome, it is possible that they play a key role in helping to address the issues outlined above and promote the widespread strategic use of networked technologies.

### **A way forward? (aka recommendations)**

As we have noted above, the stakes are high with networked technologies. Yet, the strategic use of these technologies within civil society is not sexy or urgent to most. There is no single issue or proposal that can be thrown down on the table to gather attention or galvanize support. And so it is that the recommendations in this report is not about some big policy idea, but rather to encourage the diverse and quietly radical actions necessary to nurture the ecosystem that is civic cyberspace. Specific recommendations include:

- **Build the social tech movement:** There is a need to further build and support the 'social tech' movement that is emerging, both creating better connections within this movement and, more importantly integrating more holistically with other spheres within civil society. One way to do this is through more events based on the principles demonstrated at SummerSource, where civil society organizations and techies have a chance to work together in person. At the same time, efforts should be made to create more cohesive platforms for collaboration on the development and appropriation of networked technologies within civil society. Finally, there is a need for more research and documentation about the practices and potential of social tech groups. Very little work has been done

here and, as a result, it is difficult for most in civil society to understand what is happening in this arena, where we are headed and why it matters.

- **Focus on goals not gizmos:** As a step towards appropriation, civil society organizations should put a concerted focus on strategic technology planning. The important point here not the technology, but rather the strategy. Too many attempts at non-profit technology planning end up as a list of hardware and software. Or, they produce 'neat' technology projects that are not driven by the political or social goals of the organization that produced them. Real and useful technology planning starts with the question 'what are we trying to do in the world?' From there, it is a process of mapping mission and goals on to clear, practical and flexible ideas about how networked technologies can (or maybe can't) play a role. This kind of mapping and planning is an essential (and ongoing) first step towards strategic use and appropriation.
- **Experiment with more equitable network models:** While online networks have changed the dynamics of collaboration within global civil society, they most often continue to reflect uneven and inequitable power flows. There is a need for more experiments like Sarai / Waag Exchange profiled in this report. Such experiments provide an opportunity to try out new approaches and to address problems organically as they emerge. Hopefully, the end result is a model, or at least inspiration, that can be drawn on by others. Also, there is a need for more software development initiatives that consider questions of equitable communications flow in the systems they are designing. The Friends of the Earth intranet project provides a model here, with a redesign of the software taking place in response to feedback about exclusion and other difficulties created in the first version of the software.
- **Collaborate with both thought and passion:** Simply put, we do not take collaboration seriously enough. We have put a great deal of hope in the idea of online collaboration, yet we have invested very little in it. At an organizational and coalition level, there is a need to think through and plan online collaborative initiatives just as well or better than other projects. This means having clear answers to questions like: 'what are we trying to achieve together?' and 'what's in it for us?'. In this, it is essential to keep in mind that successful collaboration is based on the principle that there are both collective benefits and benefits for individual participants. Goals and clarity of purpose are key. There is also a need to consider issues of effective collaboration at the personal level, building better skills in working with the limited emotional bandwidth of text and e-mail. Few of us have the essential skills here – listening, avoiding assumptions, sharing, suppressing our egos. We need these skills for online collaboration to work.
- **Embrace open source culture:** There has been much talk about using open source software within civil society. Certainly, there are benefits that open source software can provide to civil society organizations. However, there is a bigger opportunity available to civil society – the ability to embrace open source culture and values. As Geert Lovink writes: “We have entered a crucial period, with free software and open source on the brink of leaving behind the 'geek culture' of IT and spreading in a multitude of directions, both as software and as a set of attractive, 'infectious' ideas and concepts” (Lovink, 2003). Both the SummerSource and Sarai / Waag cases show this change in process, with attempts to apply open source ideology in spheres that are more social than software. As the values of open source begin to be imagined and implemented beyond software, there is a great opportunity for those within civil society to explore new models of collaboration, resource sharing and political actions. This opportunity should be embraced.
- **Experiment and stretch:** Civil society organizations need to be willing to experiment a little and stretch themselves in figuring out how to best use technology to support their political and social goals. In doing this, they can tap into practical strategic technology uses such as the ones profiled in this report. The problem, of course, with looking to these practical and informal examples is that they are both poorly documented and constantly shifting. One solution to this is the development of a larger body of case material on the use of networked technologies by civil society organizations. There is also

a need to look constantly beyond civil society, watching both the technology press and the streets. Hopefully, the 'ICT and Civil Society' research network being created by the Social Sciences Research Council to facilitate advances on this front.

- **Push the sustainability envelope:** In civil society, we seem to have a hard time thinking deeply and honestly about sustainability. Maybe this is because we think that money is evil. Or difficult. Or both. Whatever the case, our efforts to build new platforms for collaboration, media and knowledge take resources. We can rely on old sources for some of these resources, but most likely not for all. There is a pressing need for both experimentation and research into new sustainability models that will support civil society communications and technology initiatives. Both organizations and donors must create the space for new ideas. They must be willing to try them out in small ways, and to consider failure as learning. At the same time, effort must be put into researching and examining what has worked in other contexts in order to come up with proposals for new approaches to sustainability that can be used in the context of civil society media and communications projects.
- **Fight to keep networks open:** Amidst all of these efforts to promote the strategic use of networked technologies, there is the constant threat of 'enclosure' on the Internet. New technologies, network designs and legal frameworks are emerging that threaten the open '1.0' version of the Internet that provides the flexibility necessary for the effective appropriation of these technologies by civil society organizations. It is in this realm of 'Internet rights' that policy work is most important. There is a need to advocate for open frameworks and technologies at forums like WSIS, within the context of international trade agreements and at the national level. There is also a need to lobby against corporations who are implementing technologies and network infrastructure that limit the openness of the Internet. More detailed recommendations in this area are presented by Sean O'Siochru (2003) in his companion to this report – *Global Governance of Information and Communications Technologies*.
- **Create better maps:** Finally, it is important that we create better 'maps' of civic cyberspace – frameworks for analysis, case studies that illustrate models that work and data that paints a picture of the overall landscape. If this report demonstrates anything, it is that we know very little about the broad question of 'how transnational civil society organizations are using networked technologies.' There are bits and pieces of case material. There are frameworks to be borrowed and bent from elsewhere. There is weak data from a handful of countries. In order to advance the cause of the strategic use of networked technologies within civil society, we need a better picture of what is going on. At a basic level, this includes data about access to and use of these technologies by organizations in all parts of the globe (especially those not typically represented in international CSO networks). However, there is also a need for more in depth and ongoing exploration in the form of case studies documenting what groups (both wired, and not) are actually doing on the ground.

In all of this, we should remember that we will never 'arrive' in the land of strategic technology nirvana. The appropriation of technology is a process and not an outcome. Becoming skilled at this process is the point, with our skills giving us the ability to mold the technologies as issues and political strategies change. As noted in one of the Sarai / Waag documents: "the techno-civic maze always remains under construction." The way forward requires us to learn how to build, create and work together in this ever changing maze.

## 1. Introduction

*Every technological innovation is ambiguous, with the potential for both utopia and dystopia.*

*Gustavo Lins Ribeiro*

*It is not just about building the tools anymore. Now it's about what people use the tools to do.*

*Howard Rheingold*

As civil society, we are confronted with an opportunity – to use the Internet and other emerging network technologies to support our quest for global peace and social justice. Consider that we currently live in a world where almost anyone located in an urban centre can share their message globally with a free *blog* and a few dollars spent at an Internet café. Access is not– or will not for much longer be – a major communications stumbling block for civil society organizations. The much more pressing need is for civil society to learn how to appropriate the network technologies that we now have access to, bending and molding them so that they can be used more strategically and politically. While we can point to examples of innovative and exciting civil society applications, most organizations have not moved beyond e-mail and basic web sites – and they have certainly not moved on to what might be called the ‘strategic use’ of these technologies. Put simply, the tools are in our hands, but most of us have not yet decided what to build.

Certainly, the battle for access is not completely finished. Yet, it has changed to the point where the concept of the digital divide as gulf between access haves and have-nots has become far too simplistic a concept to have any value whatsoever. A document by the Sarai / Waag Exchange – a South Asian / European new media research collaborative – states this case eloquently: “We have passed the stage of the one-way ‘technology transfer’ and arrived in the age of global collaboration. This is not to say that worldwide economic inequality has all but disappeared overnight due to the arrival of the computer. However, the image of the ‘digital divide’ is a much too passive description for the titanic turmoil caused by proliferation of new technologies on a planetary scale. The drive to communicate and exchange, even under the very difficult circumstances (wars, ethnic conflicts, economic crisis, poverty) is such a powerful one. It is creating instant ‘cultures of access’, either in the urban sprawls or in the deprived remote areas.” (Sarai / Waag, 2000) Amidst this pleasant chaos, there is no question that threats to our networks exist. We no doubt face attempts by large private ISPs to enclose the Internet (Meikle, 2002 and Rheingold, 2003), the strengthening of regressive intellectual property regulations and the emergence of online surveillance regimes<sup>1</sup> (O’Siochru, 2003). However, these are not simple issues of access as presented by those who are screaming about the urgency of addressing the digital divide. Rather, they are aspects of a complex cultural and network ecosystem that includes not only access but also the process of adopting and appropriating network technologies.

This issue of appropriation – using networked technologies strategically, politically, creatively – is amongst the most pressing that civil society faces in the information society. The big question is: what should we do with these networked technologies now that we have access to them? Looking at the limited research available about the use of these technologies by civil society organizations, one can surmise that most civil society organizations have some sort of access to computers, word processors and e-mail (*see Chapter 2 for more on this*). But how are they using them? By all accounts, the broad majority of civil society organizations are struggling with the issue of how to mold these tools to meet their needs – to increase the impact of campaigns, projects and programs using networked technologies. Or, in many cases, they are simply using them without any thought about where and how these technologies fit into the political work for which they feel so much passion. It is not that these organizations use networked technologies completely without question or critique, but rather that they don't take the time to consider how they can be using these technologies most strategically.

Looking back at past media such as radio underscores the importance of the issue appropriation and strategic use. Like the Internet, radio started out as a two-way, many-to-many medium – a place where anyone could chat, tell stories, share music with friends. Yet it quickly became a one-way, broadcast medium, where the state and big corporations got to speak and the rest of us got to listen. It was neither a change in the base nature of the technology nor the issue of access to radio sets that created this world of one-way broadcasting. Rather, it was a social decision – a process of appropriation led by corporate giants like RCA's David Sarnoff – that corralled radio to the role of selling soap and government propaganda (McChesney, 2000). Certainly, many creative and important forms of alternative radio have emerged in the 80 years since the 'enclosure' of radio – the global community radio movement, pirate radio and micro radio. Yet even these grassroots voices are limited to the broadcast paradigm imposed by Sarnoff and friends. Early social and political decisions about how to use radio narrowed its potential applications forever.

While the Internet is a different medium, there are clear similarities. Like radio, the Internet is a many-to-many medium at the base technical level and also it is the target of corporate attempts to turn it into a more profitable, one-way medium. Radio showed that early appropriation by powerful information producers defined future uses. Information consumers had nothing to say in the matter. The same is – and had already been – true of networked technologies. With networked technologies, focussing on access as the on 'big issue' that needs to be addressed leaves us as information consumers. On the other hand, ensuring that we also look at the issue of appropriation allows us to carve out terrain at the level of information producer and participant. It is essential that we carve out and hold this terrain now – thinking and showing how we can use networked technologies strategically – if we do not want the Internet to become just another way to sell soap.

### **Mapping out strategic use**

The goal of this report is to explore the question of how civil society can use – and is using – networked technologies strategically. More specifically, the report reviews a number of current strategic uses of these technologies by transnational civil society organizations with an aim to understanding both the potential and the challenges ahead. By extension, the report does not look at local civil society groups, nor does it explore 'information and communications technologies' such as desktop publishing or CD-ROMs that are not networked or interconnected with each other. The terrain we are exploring is decidedly global and networked.

In an attempt to paint a picture of what 'strategic use' looks like, the bulk of the report focuses on the work of transnational civil society organizations that might be considered leaders and innovators – groups that *are* effectively appropriating network technologies to serve their own ends. The body of the report is divided into four main chapters that profile organizations like these within the context of four clearly emerging areas of strategic Internet use:

- **Collaboration:** Some would say that the Internet created global civil society in its current form. Whether this is true or not, it is clear that the nature of the Internet has made it possible for organizations to work more collaboratively at a global level.
- **Publishing:** The ability of civil society organizations to publish and share information has increased – and costs have dropped – dramatically with the introduction of network technologies.
- **Mobilization:** Organizations are increasing latching on to networked technologies to support advocacy and move people to action. E-mail and cell phones have been especially effective at getting people out, both online and on the ground.

- **Observation:** Network technologies have also affected the ability of organizations to get information, and have begun to transform research and observation.

In looking at these four areas of ‘strategic use’ we hope to gain insight into what is needed to more broadly encourage the appropriation of networked technologies within civil society. Of course, understanding these uses is not simply a matter of simply stating that ‘organization *x* is doing e-learning’ or ‘organization *y* has set up an online coalition’. It is necessary to dig deeper, asking questions about the organizational vision, content, planning, funding, staffing and, of course, technology that have gone into a particular online project. It is through a review of all of these factors that we can best understand both the ways organizations are appropriating technology and the challenges that they face.

With the aim to both digging deeply and exploring of broader trends, this report looks at the terrain of civil society Internet use in three ways – through visual maps of network technologies, short case studies and reportage on broadly used approaches. The visual maps plot organizations and technologies broadly on two axes: formal vs. informal and centralized vs. decentralized. These are meant as loose categories that help us to see both civil society and networked technologies are fluid concepts containing elements with differing, often contradictory properties. Drawn from existing literature and interviews, the case studies allow us to dig deeper into this landscape, exploring 12 examples of transnational civil society organizations that are balancing innovation with the challenges of using network technologies strategically. The reportage sections of the report allow us to paint a picture of the broad, undulating landscape that is civil society Internet use. With new tools, approaches and campaigns emerging almost weekly, ‘civic cyberspace’ is a hard thing to put your finger on. However, it is possible to identify clusters of use and where there are emerging trends in applications of networked technologies.

The report – and the case material in particular – also helps us to build a framework for identifying and understanding the major challenges that we face as we move towards more strategic use of networked technologies. This framework looks at issues such as: trust and network capital; community and political impact; funding and sustainability; equity in global networks, and the potential enclosure of the Internet. The framework also looks more broadly at the question of appropriation with the aim of helping us to continually reflect on and refine what we mean by strategic uses of network technologies. This framework is used to pull out key points from the case studies and also helps us to explore the major barriers to strategic use in the conclusion of the report.

### **What would the world look like?**

It is interesting to ask: what would the world look like if more civil society organizations were using networked technologies strategically? Certainly, it would not look like the flowery dot-org fantasies of the late 1990s tech boom. Riding on the coat tails of mainstream dot com hype about the Internet, there was much hurrah in North America and parts of Europe about the power of the Internet to make fundraising and service delivery a breeze for non-profits (although advocacy was not surprisingly often left out of this vision). There was also a movement afoot to make dot-orgs more like ascendant dot-coms. In an article entitled ‘Nonprofit Motive’, *Wired* gleefully reported that: “The new breed of Silicon Valley philanthropists would make Mother Teresa crunch the numbers” (Kirsner, 1999). At the same time, fear was a popular technique used to get organizations to pay attention to this vision. The Philanthropy News Network (PNN) Non-profits and Technology conference advertised itself by asking the questions: “Are you working the Web? Is your organization seizing the Web's unprecedented opportunities? Are you in a position to know how to begin?” (Philanthropy News Network, 1998/1999) Organizations who answered the call were herded into windowless conference halls filled with dozens of companies selling online donations software and giving out free pens. This was a civil society technology vision that was more nightmare than dream.

A better place to look for a vision of the future is at organizations and movements like those profiled in the case study sections of this report – IndyMedia, the Sarai / Waag Exchange, OneWorld, Jubilee 2000,

the movement against corporate globalization. In these examples, we see a world where technology is at once central and forgotten. E-mail lists, web sites and databases are so deeply ingrained into the DNA of these organizations that they are no longer the point, or the problem. The fluidity and flexibility of these tools has become the natural raw material from which much more important things are built – coalitions, campaigns, knowledge, networks. And, with these things come new forms of organization and ways of working together that are changing the terrain of civil society. As this terrain starts to emerge and come into focus, we see glimpses of the future.

Yet, the organizations and movements profiled in this report are the exception and not the rule. There is growing informal consensus that most civil society organizations – especially larger, more conservative NGOs – have not made it to the appropriation step on the ladder. They have not yet dipped their toe into the pool of cultural and organizational change that comes when an organization molds networked technologies to in its own image, making these technologies a part of their very fabric and being.

So, the question is also begged: what would it take to get there? Certainly, it takes a recognition that there is no there there. Appropriation is a process and not an outcome. It will also take a clear and honest understanding of the challenges we face in our attempts to use networked technologies strategically. As outlined in detail throughout this report, these challenges include:

- **Equity (north + south):** The biggest challenge to the strategic use of network technologies remains one of equity. Online networks offer the promise of inclusion, yet they often fail to reach this ideal.
- **Impact:** We have changed the mediascape with online publishing and invented new ways of organizing online. However, we know little of the impact of these things on audiences and decision makers.
- **Trust:** While civil society communities are often rich with the kind of social capital needed to make online collaboration work, this asset is fragile. Also, many civil society organizations have yet to develop the social skills and work habits needed to collaborate successfully online.
- **Sustainability:** Despite assumptions by donors and information producers alike, 'new media' has not meant 'new business model'. Much more needs to be done to explore innovative sustainability models for civil society communications projects.
- **Enclosure:** A number of trends are emerging to threaten the open nature of the Internet – closed and proprietary networks, repressive intellectual property regimes, increased use of surveillance.

Addressing these challenges will require broad awareness and understanding across civil society. It will also require a cadre of people committed building up skills and pushing the envelope of strategic use within organizations. This cadre could emerge from the growing number of 'social tech' organizations that have emerged to provide civil society with everything from basic network support to open source training to strategic advice. There are dozens, or possibly even hundreds, of such groups now – the Association for Progressive Communications (APC), eRiders, BytesForAll, Kibassa, IndyMedia tech support teams. As this list grows, it increasingly feels like a movement is afoot. But a movement for what? It is sometimes hard to tell. Certainly not for the promotion of tech toys and widgets. Maybe it is a movement for a new, more fluid vision of civil society.

How can we use network technologies more strategically? What will this look like? How will we get there? These are huge questions. Hopefully, this report can begin to explore these issues while at the same time encouraging others to dig deeper. In the process, we will probably inspire, confuse, anger and provoke people. That is okay. The idea here is not to stop the conversation, but rather to start one.

**Research note:** *Due to the nature of this subject matter, we have at once had to accept limitations and be creative in the research for this project. The pool of literature on the use of networked technologies by transnational civil society organizations is thin at best. In many cases, we have had to rely on quick key informant interviews, web site reviews and informal and draft documents. In other cases, we have had to ignore worthy examples altogether because we simply could not find the information we needed in ready fashion. A series of research recommendations are included at the end of this report.*

## 2. Landscape

The terrain covered by this report is both large and complicated. It is hard to nail down concepts like civil society and networked technologies. Are we simply referring to NGOs and the web? Or to the broad undulating landscape that is everything beyond government and business and all that is electronic and connected. In many ways, the value of a project like this is derived from leaving these boundaries fuzzy. However, it is important to at least sketch a loose picture of the boundaries in which our discussion takes place. In this section we define our terms and the parameters of the report by discussing the meaning of civil society, the difference between access, use and appropriation of the Internet, and the major applications of networked technologies by transnational civil society organizations.

### Reaching for a civil society

*It is universally talked about in tones that suggest it is  
a Great Good, but for some people it presents a problem: what on earth is it?  
Unless you know, how can you tell if you would want to join it?*

*John Grimond in The Economist*

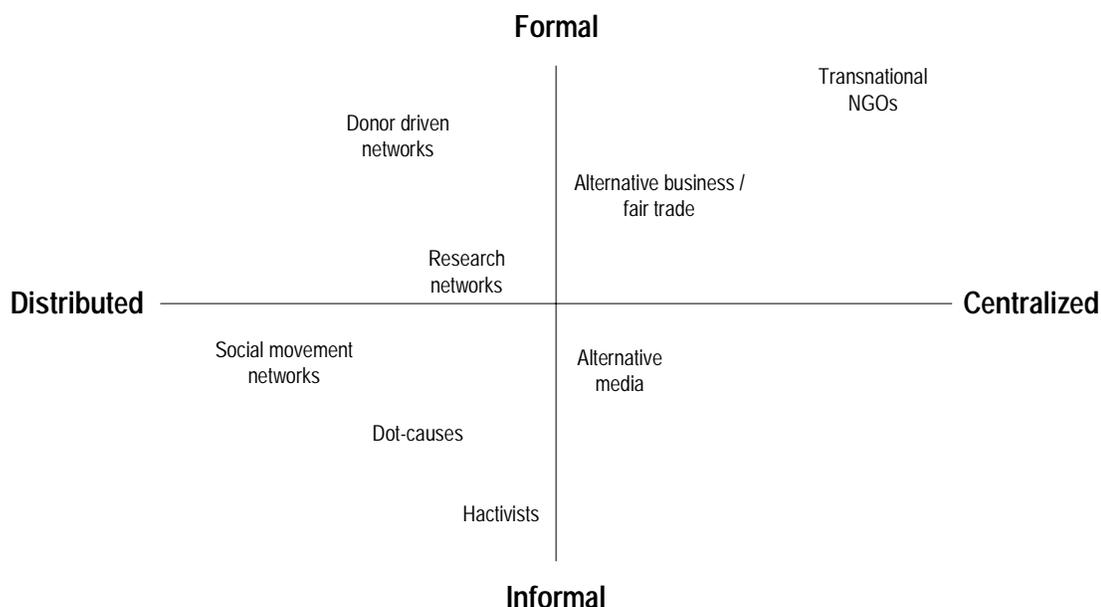
This report is about transnational civil society organizations. The ‘transnational’ piece of this concept is reasonably easy to explain – we are looking at any civil society organization working across national boundaries and especially those working at a regional or global level. For the most part, local organizations and organizations working within the boundaries of single country are not considered in this report. We focus on relationships between organizations on the international stage, and stay away from relationships between international processes and local processes, or discussion on the role of nationally or locally oriented organizations in global processes. Of course, lines like these are tough to draw, as the Internet has made it easy for local organizations to connect and support each other across borders. Just think of the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC) where a local organization supporting slum dwellers in Mumbai has grown into a network of local organizations with members throughout Asia, Latin America and Africa. Still, we can draw a line and say that it is the organizations that actually cross borders of which we are speaking here.

The broader construct of ‘civil society’ is more contested, surrounded by questions of who is included and who is not. The most current formal definition is that of the London School of Economics’ global civil society research program: “Civil society refers to the set of institutions, organisations and behaviour situated between the state, the business world, and the family. Specifically, this includes voluntary and non-profit organisations of many different kinds, philanthropic institutions, social and political movements, other forms of social participation and engagement and the values and cultural patterns associated with them” (Glasius, 2002). But it should be recognized that this definition was established to set the basis for empirical research on global civil society. As a result, it is very functional, and abstracts from the richness of civil society life.

In contrast, Munck (2002) argues that global civil society is a site of struggle for and over meaning: that global civil society is in the process of constructing itself and generating self-awareness. Networked technologies have an important role to play here, because they facilitate the diversity and representativeness necessary to get beyond the ‘already converted’. They also provide a platform for communication between different types of organizations – religious, trade, social movement, NGO, diasporic groups, local groups/ (Tandon, 2000). In accordance with this view, Harcourt (2003) thinks of global civil society as *meshworks* that are “non-hierarchical and self-organizing. They are created out of the interlocking of heterogeneous and diverse elements brought together because of complementarity or common experiences. They grow in unplanned directions.”

These definitions suggest inclusiveness. We believe it is best to look at the concept of ‘global civil society’ in terms of a spectrum, where organizations like Greenpeace that are more hierarchical and singular in their approach are contrasted against movements like the Roma diaspora that are more fluid and networked. Building on the list of organization types outlined in Sean O’Siochru’s *Global Governance of Information and Communications Technologies* (2003), we have mapped out the type of organizations that we deal with in this report across this spectrum:

**Figure 1: Types of civil society organization**



This diagram is helpful in showing that civil society is not simple NGOs, but rather a broad terrain filled with a diversity of organizations and movements. It allows us to see organizations across a spectrum of formal to informal – a difference that is quite often seen in the comparison between traditional, incorporated NGOs with boards and large numbers of staff on the one hand and unincorporated, volunteer run activist groups on the other. It also allows us to compare organizations with regard to centralization, with single, incorporated bodies on one side and networks of many organizations on the other. Most importantly, the diagram makes clear that civil society is not a ‘thing’ as much as it is a construct or a sphere – something we tend toward, not necessarily reaching. As Rob Gray writes in response to a recent sustainability.com report on civil society: “My overall reactions are primarily driven by a concern that any attempt to explain, formalise or hold accountable the NGO community is dangerous. This is not just because of the immense diversity in the sector but because their very existence - by and large - is chaotic, anarchic and non-hegemonic”(Gray, 2003).

What a diagram like this cannot convey is the many tensions that exist within global civil society we are trying to describe – the contestation of the term and the relationships that exist between organizations. In attempting to organize to work on at the international level, groups have taken different approaches, and this has led to divergences between those that have roots in the community and those that work at elite levels, groups based in the South versus ones located in the North, organizations that are self-sufficient versus those that are supported by donors, and groups that favour conservative approaches versus those that venture down radical paths. A prime example of this is the chasm that exists between formalized institutional NGOs and less formally structured social movements. The “real” NGOs aim to stand for credible social change – gathering the resources and membership necessary to pressure governments on a

particular set of issues or policies. In contrast, more informal movements and loose groups of activists tend to see themselves as the emerging vanguard, developing flexible, creative and responsive approaches to the fact that we are more often than not all but shut out of formal political decision making. Both sides see the other as ineffective at best and clueless at worst, with international NGOs being portrayed as lumbering dinosaur elites, often based in the North and unaware of realities on the ground, while activists are seen as an ineffective rabble that sometimes misrepresents the truth to make political gains. (Edwards, 1999, 2001; Batliwala, 2002; Tandon, 2000; Clark, 2001)

Of course, the battle lines are not usually this black and white. Tensions more often than not arise where there is an affinity at the level of cause yet a disagreement at the level of tactics. Clark and Themudo write: “Established NGOs such as Oxfam, Jubilee 2000, and Friends of the Earth, would say that they are not a part of the Movement (as defined at the World Social Forum) though they may have sympathy with it. They focus on many of the same issues and are to be found at the same global events, often promoting similar arguments, but they are often critical of the more headline-grabbing direct-action components. Yet there is clearly a symbiosis” (Clark and Thumudo, 2003). This concept of symbiosis is an important one – NGOs and activist movements are not necessarily contradictory forms. Rather, they can in many cases be seen as essential and mutually reinforcing parts of a greater whole – civil society – which is required in order to facilitate the diverse and more just society we are trying to build.

The emergence of ‘social tech’ organizations that support the strategic use of networked technologies in civil society provides another case where one ‘movement’ has difficulty fitting to another. The past ten years has seen the proliferation of organizations that essentially belong to civil society yet are focused on technology rather than issues like the environment, gender or human rights. This includes technology assistance providers, Internet rights groups, ICT4D practitioners, hacktivists, open source advocates, tactical media practitioners and digital culture activists. While these groups represent a huge diversity of approaches and politics, they have a common commitment to the idea that networked technologies can help to facilitate the emergence of a more equitable, less corporate-dominated future. Together, they also face problems integrating with other parts of civil society. Certainly, more traditional civil society appreciate the intent of these progressive technologies. Yet, more often than not, they really don’t know what to make of them – it is like the two groups are staring across an empty dance floor hoping that the other will be the first one to ask for a dance.

Definitional problems and internal conflicts aside, there is no question that civil society has become an important player on the global stage – and is becoming more so. “Driven by the emergence of newly democratic market states, the on-going communications revolution, the retreat of government from key sectors of the economy and falling levels of trust in traditional institutions, NGOs – and the civil society of which they are a part – are booming. While definitions of the sector are still problematic, the ‘NGO industry’ is – by most measures – enormous. Recent studies suggest that the sector globally is worth over \$1 trillion and employs 19 million people” (Sustainability.com, 2003).

*Table 1: Global Distribution of International NGOs and Official Development Assistance*

Country Groupings <sup>2</sup>	Population in millions 2002 <sup>3</sup>	INGOs 2001 <sup>4</sup>	INGOs as % of Total	INGOs per capita 2001	ODA millions of US\$ 2001 <sup>5</sup>	ODA per capita US\$
Low Income	2,412.455	887.19	4.95%	.37	23,867	\$9.89
Low Middle	2,484.309	1,158.99	6.48%	.47	14,273	\$5.75
Upper Middle	331.477	888.00	4.96%	2.68	3,019	\$9.11
Upper Income	935.548	14,953.44	83.60%	15.98	na	na

However, as Table 1 illustrates, that the global distribution of these resources is far from even. Figures on financial flows among civil society organizations are hard to come by, but the information available paints a fairly clear picture. The World Development Indicators (2003) tell us that NGOs in the OECD countries channelled almost US\$ 10.5 billion in grants (“net of subsidies from the official sector”) to non-OECD

countries in 2001. US\$7.3 million of this went to “countries eligible for official development assistance”, and US\$3.2 million went to “economies in transition.” We also know that 83.6% of international or internationally oriented civil society organizations are located in the upper income countries as opposed to 11.44% in the middle income countries and 4.95% in the low income countries. And, 100% of official development assistance, much of which gets channelled through Northern groups, comes from the upper income countries. (*See Appendix 1 for full statistics.*)

As a result, while Southern groups arguably have more legitimacy because they work directly with constituencies, they lack financial independence from Northern supporters. Clark (2001) points out that this has led to accusations of “latter-day cultural imperialism.” As Nelson writes: “...charges have intensified that much of the NGO agenda is, like the agendas of consumer organizations and organized labour, an agenda of societies in the global North. Commentators and participants ask how networks are representative of concerns in the South, to whom they are accountable, and whether their continued location in the capitals of the industrialized world is consistent with their global claims” (Nelson, 2001) In an attempt to respond to these issues, the big Northern NGOs in particular have changed organizational structures. Some have moved from a federated to a confederated structure while others have turned into granting or fundraising institutions to support the work of Southern groups. Still other Northern groups have responded by opening Southern offices. In the same vein, Southern NGOs feel that is important to develop their own technical and communicative capacities around networked technologies in order to become full participants in global networks.

The question is: can the Internet and related technologies help civil society in its quest to translate size and presence into the kind of political influence needed to create a more ‘just and peaceful world’? And, can they help to address some of the tensions within civil society – especially where they relate to North / South power flows? To explore this question, we need to look into the ways that transnational civil society organizations are using network technologies.

### **From access to appropriation**

*From where I stand I only see substantial expenses on better, more powerful "gadgets,"  
but I don't see any substantial effort and resources being spent on finding out ways  
and means of getting the most out of these whiz-bang toys.*

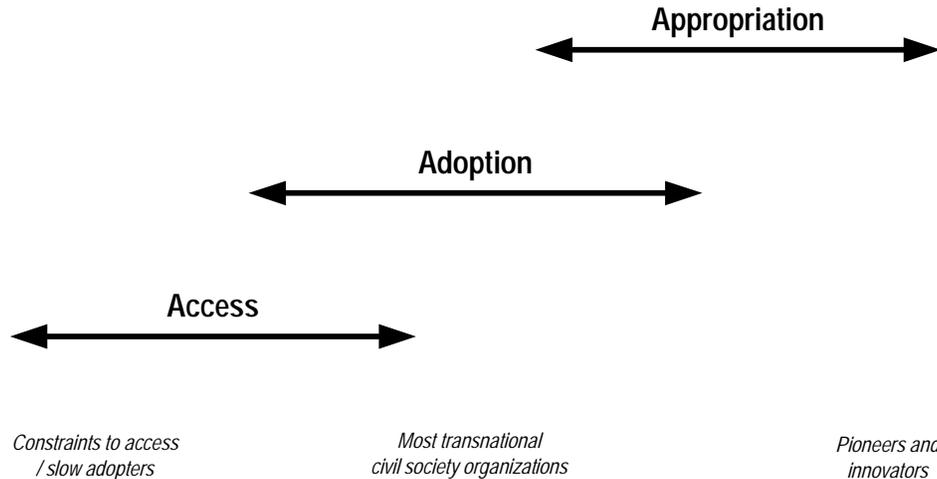
*-- Tony Manipon  
as interviewed by APC*

*... the irony here is some players in civil society are using ICTs far more creatively  
and innovatively than any other sector of society.*

*-- Jennifer Radloff,  
Co-ordinator APC-Africa-Women*

The problem with talking about the ‘use of networked technologies by transnational civil society organizations’ is that ‘use’ means many things to many people. Some people think of physical networks, WI FI and encryption. Others would point to the adoption of basic applications like word processing and e-mail. And, still others, would highlight the process of appropriating and adapting technologies for our own purposes. As the following diagram illustrates, all of these perspectives make sense as they fit along the ‘spectrum of use’ that organizations must travel across as they are exposed to new technologies:

**Figure 2: Access / adoption / appropriation ladder**



Borrowing from Camacho (2001) and Surman (2001), this diagram shows access, adoption and appropriation as steps on a ladder. At the bottom of this ladder is basic access – an Internet connected office computer, a cell phone with SMS, an Internet café. The next step is the adoption and development of basic skills needed to use technology in the ways in which it was intended. So, writing memos and reports with a word processor falls into this category. The final step is appropriation or strategic use, where an individual or an organization turns the technology to their own purposes, and makes it their own. Appropriation includes such things as putting local content on the Internet in local languages, or designing applications to meet specific organizational needs.

**This report is focused almost exclusively on the top step of the ladder – the appropriation and strategic use of network technologies.** This is not because the access and adoption stages are unimportant. As has been made clear in other research – including Sean O’Sioichru’s (2003) companion to this report – access in particular is an important part of the picture. However, it is at the level of appropriation where civil society organizations turn technology to their own ends, creating political and social impact. Historically, it is also at this level where societies make decisions about how technologies are used and what they are used for. The major problem with television is not the lack of TV sets (access), but rather that, early on in the history of the medium, the commercial, broadcast paradigm emerged as dominant (appropriation). Ignoring the question of how we appropriate these technologies – or even subjugating this question to the issue of access – threatens to leave us in the same boat. Unless we move beyond the role of information consumers to also act also producers and participants, those technologies that have powerful potential today may quickly become the consumer mush of tomorrow. At a practical level, this means that a much larger number of civil society organizations must learn that the Internet is not only a fast way to send memos and reports to colleagues, but that it also has the potential to be a platform for campaigning, citizen engagement, fundraising, coalition building and other strategic activities at the core of civil society work (Whaley, 2000).

***Access and connectivity***

As a starting point, however, it is important to understand at a broad level what the access and adoption landscape looks like within civil society. At the level of access, the proliferation of the Internet, mobile phones and other networked technologies have begun to change this landscape. Access to the network and to the tools necessary to create media has increased dramatically within the last 10 years – especially within the organizational and institutional contexts within which most civil society activity takes place.

Certainly, there is a huge digital divide between North and South when one looks at individual access to the Internet and mobile phones:

*Table 2: Access to the Means to Communicate*

Country Groupings <sup>6</sup>	Pop in millions 2002 <sup>7</sup>	Internet Users in millions 2002 <sup>8</sup>	Internet Users (percent of population)	Cell Phone Users in millions 2002 <sup>9</sup>	Cell Phone Users (percent of population)	Digital Cell Networks 2002 <sup>10</sup>
Low Income	2,412.455	15.684	0.65%	41.297	1.71%	22.5 / 62
Low Middle	2,484.309	100.368	4.04%	375.098	15.10%	27 / 52
Upper Middle	331.477	32.257	9.73%	102.234	30.84%	11 / 33
Upper Income	935.548	433.126	46.30%	614.856	65.72%	29 / 48

As per Table 2, in the middle-income countries, 4.71% of the population has access to the Internet and in the low-income countries 0.65% as compared to 46.30% in the high income countries. It is worth noting, however, that in almost all of the middle and low-income countries reviewed, mobile phone use far exceeds Internet use. Also, stats are not available for Internet use in places like schools and cybercafes. If one thinks of ‘networked technologies’ as more than just a home or office computer with its own connection to the Internet, then the situation is not as dire as it might at first seem. Nonetheless, there is no denying the massive access divide that exists at the level of personal access to the Internet and other online networks. (See Appendix 1 for full statistics.)

However, if one looks at transnational civil society organizations – which are the topic of this report – the numbers are quite different. While the data is extremely limited, there is evidence that civil society organization access to the Internet is much higher than among the general population in both the North and the South. For example, Camacho’s (2001) study of Internet use by 102 Central American civil society organizations found that 75% have kind time of access to Internet, while 25% do not have any access to the technology. In contrast, access amongst the general population is less than 2%. Friedman’s (2003) study of 100 gender equality organizations in Argentina, Brazil and Mexico found that 58% have at least one computer connected to the Internet. In these countries, access amongst the general population ranges from 3% to 10%. In the UK, civil society Internet access had already reached 83% by 1999 (Surman, 2001) while access in the population was only 57% in 2002. While broader research is certainly needed, available data suggests that the digital divide that exists within general populations is far less dramatic within civil society. By extension, access is not the largest communications issue facing most civil society organizations – especially where they are using network technologies for coordination purposes or to communicate with populations in areas with reasonably high Internet access.

***Adoption and skills development***

This situation at the level of ‘adoption’ is much more concerning. In order to get to the level of adoption, one must not only have access to a technology but also have the skills to use it for its intended purpose. However, the little evidence that exists points to the fact that many organizations are still struggling to get even basic skills. Alice Munyua of the African Women's Development and Communication Network states: “CSO ICT use is largely confined to e-mail, and the interactive applications are limited, also due to technical problems and the high costs of access, lack of training and knowledge, the WWW is usually frustrating and inaccessible.”<sup>11</sup>

Unfortunately, there is no sound data on the technology skills of transnational civil society organizations. Where there is data, it is limited to traditional NGOs and to Northern countries. However, within this limited frame, it is clear that there is still a ‘skills gap’. The most compelling evidence of this gap is the lack of skilled information technology support staff in most voluntary organizations. A 2001 Canadian review of information management expertise in the voluntary sector noted that “most small organizations

do not have a dedicated person on staff" (Prairie Research Associates, 2001). TBC's 2001 study showed that 69% of British voluntary organizations have little or no internal information technology staff. The lack of management knowledge about the potential of the Internet is also a major gap. A significant number of the studies have shown that there is a limited appreciation amongst non-profit executives of the mission-based benefits and the potential that can be derived from the strategic use of networked technologies. One study demonstrates that voluntary sector leaders are aware of this weakness, with only 43% of executive directors stating that they are happy with their knowledge of current developments in information technology. Of course, these statistics say nothing about more informal and grassroots social movements. We know that skills and access exist in these movements, but there is absolutely no data that lets us understand the pervasiveness or depths of these skills.

There is clearly an interconnection between this skills gap and the difficulty that most organizations have in moving on to more strategic uses of networked technologies. APC African Women's Coordinator Jennifer Radoff states: "There is a very basic usage of ICTs. For example, reliance on email as a basic communicative tool but not used effectively for online meetings, advocacy etc. Web sites are built but are usually inappropriate, do not reflect the depth of the organisations work, are not updated and are not linked. There is no integration of effective ICT strategies into organisational work. ICTs seen as add-ons rather than woven into an overall media/information strategy." The bottom line is that basic skills issues need to be addressed alongside questions of strategic use. Flowing from a variety of social tech organizations, there are a number of emerging models that can facilitate this, including peer-support, skills shares and e-riding. The approaches have the potential to accelerate the process of moving organizations beyond the adoption level and on to the process of appropriating network technologies and using them strategically.

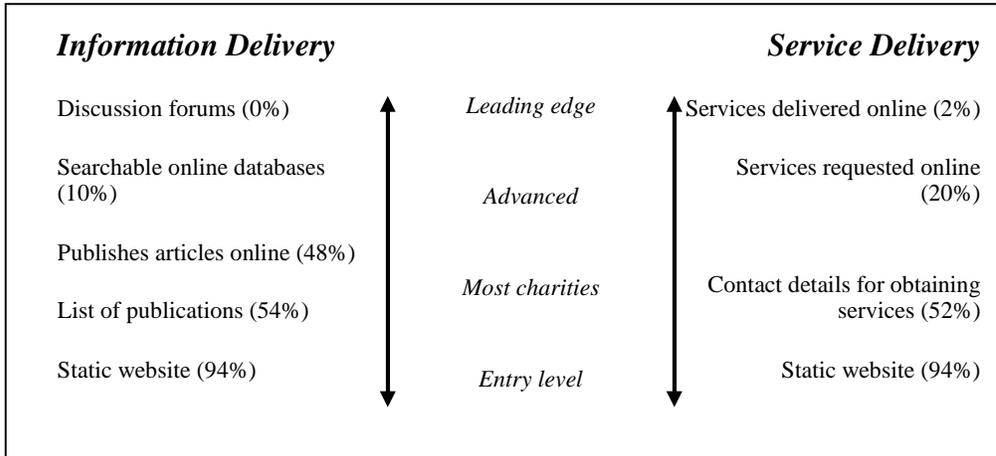
### *Appropriation and strategic use*

By most accounts, those civil society organizations that are using networked technologies strategically are the exception rather than the rule. At an anecdotal level, practitioners promoting the strategic use of networked technologies within civil society argue that, while there are a few examples of leaders and pioneers, most organizations are still stuck at the 'adoption' level (APC 2002). Technology researcher Leo Fernendaz argues: "By and large the majority of civil society groups use the technology as consumers. To my mind the principal reason for this is because the upper management of these groups are not tech savvy." The result is that organizations never move up to the strategic use or appropriation step on the ladder. According to civil society knowledge management researcher Maja van der Velden: "The lack of understanding of the role of ICTs in our organisations as well as in our external communication and networking activities affects our ability to appropriate this technology in support of the successful implementation of our strategies and the fulfilment of our goals."

Unfortunately, there is very little research on the strategic use of networked technologies amongst transnational civil society organizations. The only existing work is a small survey of transnational organizations undertaken by the APC in summer 2002. In this study, it was clear that even those organizations with good access and skills did not feel that they were using networked technologies effectively. For example, most organizations felt that they were strong in the areas of Internet access and e-mail use (average rating of 7.5 / 9). However, most organizations felt that they were weak in areas such as holding online meetings and running Internet advocacy campaigns (average rating of 4.5 / 9) (APC 2002). It is worth noting that a number of studies of the strategic use of technology by Northern civil society organizations have been conducted and that these studies support APC's findings (Surman 2001). For example, TBC Research's UK 2001 study found that 62% of voluntary organizations have indicated that the link between their mission and information technology strategy is average to poor. Reflecting on this same issue, the Kellogg Foundation's *ePILanthropy 2.001* report went so far as to say: "Technology and Internet-based services are far from being integrated into the day-to-day life of managing the organization and delivering the organization's services" (Clohesy, 2001).

An even clearer picture of this problem is presented in Third Sector's *Virtual Promise* report on the use the Internet by UK voluntary organizations. As demonstrated in the following chart, large numbers of UK organizations have created static web sites but few have moved on to strategic business applications, such as discussion forums and direct service delivery.

**Figure 3: *Virtual Promise Strategic Uses Chart* (UK Organizations)**



*Chart Taken From: Virtual Promise (Saxton and Game, 2001)*

This gap between the potential and the reality of strategic Internet use within the voluntary sector is borne out by a number of other studies. Reports by the Kellogg Foundation, the Pew Charitable Trust, the Economic and Social Research Council and TBC Research all point to the lack of strategic Internet use as a major issue.

Examining the reasons limited appropriation of technology and the opportunities to increase strategic use is especially crucial for civil society at this moment in history. This is not only because civil society organizations stand to benefit from the appropriation of these technologies but also because the way we use these tools today will have a significant influence on the technologies that are available to us tomorrow. In other words, strategic use is about more than using the technology to meet a particular organizational or social goal – it is also about using the technology strategically to enforce define and defend communications paradigms that support the work of civil society. So, while not literally concerned with modems and wires, strategic use is about access – access to tools that are flexible and response to our needs.

**What does civil society do online?**

As outlined above, our main task in this report is to explore the question: what is civil society doing online? It would be easy to use up the rest of the report simply listing off and describing the hundreds or possibly thousands of online tactics and tools used by transitional civil society organizations. E-mail campaigns, friendraising, viral activist comedy, dot-causes, action centres, e-organizing cells, list sharing, collaborative publishing. RSS feeds, content management systems, constituent relationship management systems, mailing lists and, of course, simple web pages. Looking across this landscape, the breadth of activity, experimentation and innovation is dizzying.

In an effort to bring this landscape into focus, we have decided to look at four broad areas of civil society Internet use. These areas include:

- **Collaboration** – The cheap, global, many-to-many communications offered by network technologies provide an excellent platform for collaboration and organization – especially for organizations working on a global scale. Credible transnational civil society organizations can now be run by staff

and volunteers distributed in homes and offices around the world. And, organizations with spread out memberships can consult and make decisions more often without the cost of travel. Despite this potential, most organizations still operate in very centralized or nodal structures that rely on face-to-face contact.

- **Publishing** – All types of civil society organizations publish information of one sort or another – research, manifestos, news, calls to action, policy positions, data, event listings, minutes of meetings. The Internet and other network technologies have unquestionably changed how these organizations publish. At a minimum, the web and e-mail have made publishing cheaper and faster. But network technologies have also enabled new forms of publishing – collaborative, open, distributed publishing – that turn traditional assumptions about the role of the publisher, author and audience on their head. Of course, turning publishing on its head raises all sorts of questions about credibility, information glut and transparency.
- **Mobilization** – For many organizations, mobilizing supporters to protest, volunteer, give money or speak up is a key part of what they do. While network technologies will never replace real world mobilization, they have provided new tools to help with recruiting, engagement and protest. For example, the any-to-any nature of tools like e-mail and SMS help get people out to real world protests like Seattle. Also, some forms of mobilization can happen completely online, with online advocacy and petition campaigns showing potential here. While there are many examples of this kind of mobilization, there are also major questions about effectiveness and impact.
- **Observation** – Both in terms of data-gathering and data processing, network technologies have opened up a whole new world of information to civil society organizations. Not only is more information available simply because of the reach of the Internet, but also the information revolution has brought with it pressure to put more information in the public sphere. As such, the Internet has become a handy tool for monitoring developments in a given field. The challenge is to develop strategies to deal with information overload, and to separate the wheat from the chaff. Some groups have also begun to use the Internet to facilitate ‘observatories’ that track key indicators and support comparative research, for example, around policy issues. Others use network technologies to process policy-relevant data such as the status of landmine survivors, or the details of genocide.

Of course, the boundaries between these categories are fluid – open publishing is clearly a combination of publishing, collaboration and even mobilization. Also, there is often a close relationship between observation (information in) and publication (information out). As with the concept of civil society described above, this fluidity is both a challenge and an opportunity. Certainly, we need a frame within which we can discuss civil society uses of the Internet. However, we also need to be flexible enough to see that it is often the interplay between the sections of our frame where the most interesting action resides.

In exploring the landscape of ‘uses’, it is also important to recognize not only formal approaches such as ‘collaborative publishing’ but also more informal and organic cultures of use such as smart mobs and music file swapping. It is often in these areas – the informal and the accidental – from which the most powerful and innovative examples of technology appropriation emerge. “Lucy Mathai from the Slums Information Development and Resource Centres (SIDAREC) in Nairobi, Kenya recounts how encouraging ‘irresponsible’ behaviour can promote learning. When the notorious ‘I love you’ computer virus was spreading devastation in mid-2000, one of the young SIDAREC users ignored warnings not to open the file. The result was a completely unusable computer. His plea was that he was just trying to see what a virus looked like. ‘And that’s how we learned. You have to let them dissect, and learn from that. Melt, mold and then you make hard. You understand what is inside and play with it. Let people discover by themselves. It is hard, frustrating, but the best way of learning. The guy who opened the virus file is now our computer trainer’” (Esterhuysen).

## *Appropriating the Internet for Social Change*

It is at this nexus that this report hopes to live – a meeting place of formal and informal, planned and unexpected, established and emergent. This place provides fertile terrain to ask questions like: What does civil society look like when it is using technology more strategically? How do we get there? Is there a need for a movement of socially oriented technologists? Does this movement already exist? As both civil society and networked technologies sit this nexus, they provide the perfect backdrop for this exploration.

### 3. Collaboration

While civil society organizations have always made attempts to band together, the past ten years have seen an increased level of excitement about ideas like collaboration, coalition building and partnership (Anheier and Themudo, 2002). This is partly because civil society has always seen great potential for change through collaboration – collaboration makes it possible to create diverse, distributed movements that are more than the sum of their parts. As Steven Johnson (2002) points out in his book on emergent behaviours, collaborative online movements often operate like slime molds, powerless alone but able to accomplish incredible feats when working together. Increased interest in the idea of collaboration has also been driven by those in donor community who see the need – and the opportunity – for organizations to have more impact through collaborative work.

Networked technologies have both driven and benefited from this increased excitement about collaboration. One of the most celebrated features of the Internet in all areas of society is its ability to serve as a platform for collaboration and community building. Online phenomena such as E-bay, music file sharing and open source may not be explicitly driven by the same values as most civil society organizations, but they do demonstrate how people can connect and work with each other at a huge scale using the Internet. (Surman and Wershler Henry, 2000; Rheingold, 2003) On a smaller scale, joint policy development around major UN conferences (O'Brien, 2000) the creation of more fluid, responsive coalitions in response to issues like landmines and global debt, and the coordination of countless anti-globalization protests around the world, all demonstrate that civil society has also tapped into this collaborative potential.

The immediate internal benefit of well-planned and facilitated online collaboration is quite clear. At the level of governance, e-mail and the web allow highly dispersed transnational organizations to engage board members, make decisions and inform members about activities on a regular and ongoing basis. Before the Internet, only the largest organizations could sustain this kind of ongoing communication and collaboration. Operationally, it is now easier to spread staff out across the world and to coordinate the work between multiple 'offices'. It is also possible to share resources (e.g. a web server or an accounting system) and staff (e.g. research team) between many locations. It is now commonplace for new civil society organizations – especially network organizations and organizations working on technology issues – to be completely virtual. The board, the staff, and volunteers can all work together through Internet, telephone and the occasional face-to-face meeting.

While there is also the potential for bigger picture, longer-term benefits from online collaboration – better information, increased public support, tangible political impact – this area is less clear. Certainly, the last ten years have seen a number of highly successful collaborative campaigns and networks that have relied heavily on the Internet, such as the anti-MAI movement, the campaign to ban landmines, the Jubilee 2000 drop the debt network (profiled in detail below). However, it is not yet clear exactly how large a role networked technologies played in the success of these movements and, as a result, how others can build on their success.

Whether thinking at the level of an organization or at the level of a global, Net-based coalition, it is important to understand that successful collaboration is hard work. Networked technologies can provide civil society organizations with a cheap and fluid platform where they can work together. They have not, however, provided the skills or culture necessary to make online collaboration work. It is this aspect of collaboration that is both most difficult and most important. As Wenjun Liu says in his paper about international collaboration amongst civil society organizations: "A successful collaboration depends on the existence of certain social factors like commitment and trust between collaborators. Betting on advanced information technology while ignoring the social side of collaboration will not work" (Liu, 2003).

The social challenges faced by organizations seeking to collaborate online are many – trust, distance, time zones, language, culture. As many social network theorists have pointed out, a social bond needs to provide the foundation for trust before a group can work effectively in the context of an online workspace or community. This foundation of trust can be formed in many ways – through a face-to-face meeting, a reference from an already trusted friend or colleague, membership in an existing network or organization, or virtual *street cred* created by contributing to the group in a useful manner. In the civil society context, the interplay between face-to-face meetings and online collaboration seems to have been key. At least anecdotally, online collaborations that start out with face-to-face contact are more successful than those that are not. The question is: how do we push this further?

There is also a need for common purpose and culture. Participants must have a shared understanding of both why they are collaborating and how they should behave. Without these, the collaborative initiative will fail. As a simple example, a research mailing list where some participants are turned on by postings about the best new academic paper and others are caught up in chatting away about generalities will most likely sputter out and die. This kind of misunderstanding and discontinuity of goals is quite common in civil society online collaborations, even when they have been set up consciously and formally. This is most often due to a lack of planning and goal setting. Many organizations seem to have the unrealistic expectation that if you just set up a mail list that everyone will start working together harmoniously. This is despite the fact that most organizations still find it difficult to collaborate using the Internet at all but the most basic levels (e.g. sending documents around by e-mail). Planning and skills development is needed to get beyond this.

### **What is online collaboration?**

In many ways, collaboration connects into all of the ‘uses’ that we are exploring in this report. Some of the most powerful civil society examples of online publishing, mobilization and observation are collaborative, connecting many individuals and organizations into a single initiative, action or web site. However, there is an area of online collaboration that can be more specifically delineated – the realm of online work, partnerships, or coalitions. It is this aspect of collaboration that we will specifically explore in this chapter.

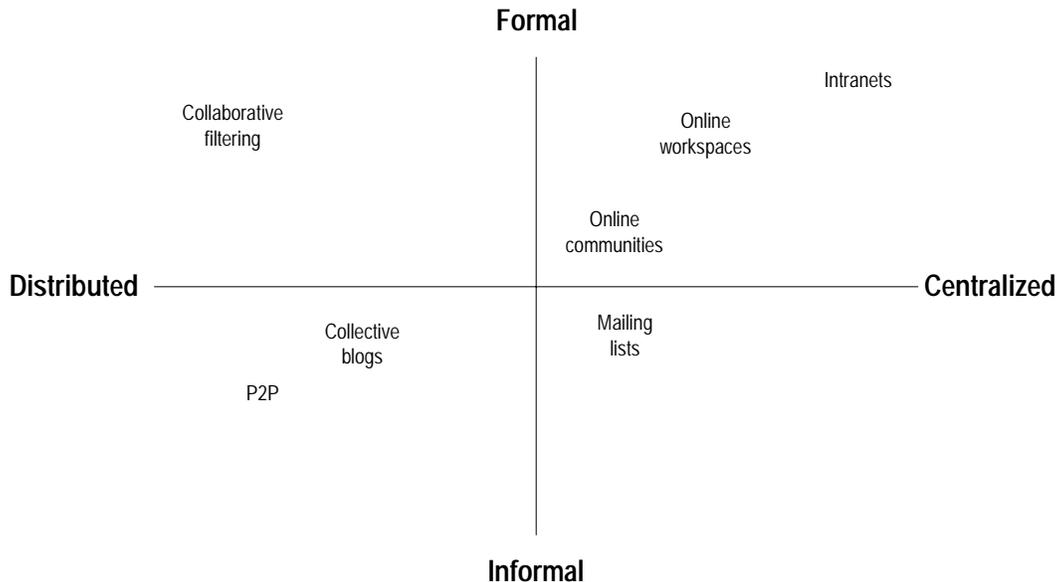
Much of this kind of collaboration happens using the simplest and cheapest of networked technologies – e-mail lists. While many fancier technologies exist, lists remain the most popular and useful platform for online collaboration. As Maureen James and Liz Rykert (1998) write in *From Workplace to Workspace*: “Mailing lists can serve all sorts of collaborative functions: some are used for short-term, concentrated action planning across a closed group; others are available for ongoing general information sharing and discussion on a particular topic.” The power of lists as a collaboration tool stems from the simple yet flexible features that they offer. The ability to control subscribers makes it easy to create reasonably secure, private workspaces for small groups using lists. These workspaces can be used for many types of collaboration including document development, online meetings, and project coordination. The ubiquity and accessibility of e-mail also make lists an excellent mechanism for disseminating information, conducting consultations and organizing participation with large groups of people, especially where this work is happening in both the North and South.

While there are large number of web-based applications to support online work and collaboration, these applications have met with limited success – especially in a civil society context. The simplest example is the discussion forum, a web corollary to mailing lists and newsgroups. More complicated intranet applications that include discussion forums, shared calendars, document repositories, contact directories and other organizational tools are also widely available. The major problem with applications like these don’t exist ‘where people live’ – which is inside their e-mail client. In a work context, people tend to check their e-mail constantly, yet only visit the web when they need something specific. Collaboration benefits from – and maybe even requires – the regular contact and immersion offered by e-mail. Also problematic is the fact that web forums and intranets require a reliable, reasonably fast connection to the

Internet – something that is hard to come by for some civil society organizations in the South and in rural areas. This is not to say that web-based intranets are completely without value. In fact, many organizations use simple, password protected web sites quite effectively to share internal documents and campaign information. Rather, the point is that these web applications are more often than not disconnected from the reality and needs of most users. As such, they provide limited value.

Beyond e-mail and the web, a number of other networked technologies hold promise for civil society collaboration. Online chat and instant messaging are useful for virtual organizations where staff want to have the kind of access to each other that they would have if they were in the same room. Peer-to-peer networks have potential as a way to create ‘where you live’ secure file sharing, where authorized users distribute copies of internal documents automatically to each other’s hard drives. And, where secure collaboration is important, technologies like the Greenpeace’s virtual private network – a completely secure and segregated network infrastructure connecting offices around the world – can be valuable.<sup>12</sup> The following diagram provides an overview of major collaboration applications that are used by civil society organization or that hold future potential:

Figure 4: Types of online collaboration



These technologies enable a wide variety of collaborative practices – coordination, coalition building, research, information sharing, synchronization, and more. With the aim of exploring both the potential and challenges of online collaboration, the following three case studies explore three areas of collaborative practice. Distributed management and decision making is explored through the case of Friends of the Earth International, collaborative campaigns and networks are looked at in terms of Jubilee 2000, and open source development is presented with reference to Summer Source.

### Case #1 – Friends of the Earth International

In the past decade, e-mail and other networked technologies have become commonplace means of communications within most transnational civil society organizations. As outlined above these technologies have made global communications within these organizations cheaper, faster and more frequent. However, they has also, in many cases created a degree of confusions and chaos -- confusion about who makes decisions, what constitutes ‘listening’ to the opinions of others, how quickly things should be done. We regularly hear complaints about the volume of e-mail that people receive, even when

this e-mail is valuable from an organizational perspective. There are also many cases where bad decisions are made or where people feel left out of the process as a result of misunderstandings about how online collaboration should work. These problems stem in part from the fact that most organizations simply have simply adopted these tools without consideration of how work and power structures would need to change to make distributed management and decision making work. Avoiding this chaos – and getting to the point where people within an organization is truly working collaboratively with the Internet as a backbone for their collaboration – requires careful analysis and investment in cultural change within and organization

The case of Friends of the Earth International (FoEI) provides a good example of how an organization might move from this uncritical stance of just ‘using’ e-mail to a place where online collaboration happens consciously and in a manner that is responsive to the needs of participants. FoEI is 30-year-old global network of approximately 60 national environmental organizations, approximately half of which are located in the South. The FoEI network is very grassroots based and committed to democratic decision-making. “The network has a specific structure and decision-making processes. The network aims to make all decisions by consensus, but allows for a democratic vote when agreement cannot be reached among all members. Campaign *co-ordinators* are not campaign *managers*. Every national group has equal weight within the network, with one vote per member.” (AideEnvironment, 2003) As a result, members of the network need to be able to stay in constant contact in order to make decisions and coordinate work.

Over the past 10 years, FoEI has used email as the main communication tool between face-to-face meetings. E-mail would be used for discussing issues for future campaigns, coordinating campaign implementation and general information sharing within the network. By 2001, many network members had begun to feel that e-mail was creating as many problems as it was solving. The sheer volume of e-mail had become overwhelming, with discussions becoming hard to facilitate. It had become more and more difficult to successfully generate broad participation in online discussions. (AideEnvironment, 2003) Also, the fact that e-mail lists would include a mix of coordination issues and content such as reports and other documents made them confusing and difficult to use.

In March 2002, FoEI joined forces with Dutch environmental consultancy AideEnvironment to develop an intranet aimed at improving internal decision-making with respect to the network’s international campaigns. The aim with this project was to create an ‘appropriate technology platform’ that addressed the problems FoEI was experiencing with e-mail. Combining both e-mail and the web, the intranet included tools for both communication and document development. The ability to develop documents collaboratively was provided by FreeText, a web based platform that aims to emulate to process of writing and discussion that would happen if people were working together face to face. The communication aspect was provided by a combination of FreeText and mailing lists. There is also an online document repository that allows campaign coordinators to provide all of the documents relevant to a particular campaign such as a workplan, budget, progress reports. The document repository includes two separate sections – one for coordination materials and campaign materials.

Using a ‘social context model’ of technology planning, FoEI aimed to develop an intranet that was driven by the needs and culture of users and not by the latest whiz bang technology. (Kleef and DeMoor, 2003) A major need expressed by network members was the creation of a more structured process for online decision making about campaigns. It was felt that one of the biggest problems with the e-mail lists was the fact that they did not actually reflect the decision making structure and culture of the network. In response to this need, the project team built a ‘campaign workflow’ on top of the e-mail and web tools that had been included in the intranet. This process included steps for everything from the generation of a specific campaign idea through to implementation at the public and media level. A very clear process and flow for the development of campaigns was developed to guide work that was happening online. (Kleef and DeMoor, 2003)

At a certain level, FoEI’s intranet project had all the ingredients necessary for successful online collaboration. As a foundation, the network had a well established community and culture based on 30

years of working together. They also had a clear understanding of the social and cultural barriers that need to be overcome for online collaboration to succeed. One of the project leads wrote: “The introduction of internet-based tools for collaboration in a worldwide grassroots network involves dealing with a delicate mix of challenges in intercultural communication, the digital divide, community-based collaboration, technology, transparency and accountability. We adopted two main principles to address these issues: the intranet cannot be “enforced” and the network itself should become the “owner” of the technology.” In theory, this mix of an established community, a well thought through social process and a commitment to helping users appropriate the technology should have led to a perfect online collaboration initiative. (AideEnvironment, 2003)

Nothing, however, is ever perfect – especially the first time around. Even clear goals and established culture of collaboration, the initial pilot of the intranet ran up against many of the common challenges faced in online collaboration. Most of the problems cropped up not at the planning stage but at the implementation stage. For example, facilitators and evaluators felt that there were major barriers to doing their work – they were often unable to access the people and documents they needed in order to move the network along in its work or review the outcomes of a campaign. On the other side of the table, broader network participants complained that transparency and accountability dropped during the implementation stage of a campaign. While they had been adequately involved through the intranet when the campaign was being planned, campaign coordinators had not kept them up to date once the campaign was underway. This problem may have stemmed from the fact that campaigners and participants saw the campaign intranet systems as ‘too bureaucratic’ during the implementation stage. (Kleef and DeMoor, 2003) The rules for interaction that had made sense at the decision-making stage seemed too constraining and onerous once the campaign was underway.

Most of these problems seemed to stem from the fact that, despite clear recognition that there would be challenges, the cultural and organizational issues were more complex than anyone had anticipated. The introduction of the new technology and ideas for improving decision-making processes in FoEI needed more time and should have grown more organically than was allowed for. In other words, sufficient time was not allowed for the process of learning and appropriation within the network. Furthermore, there was a concern amongst some members – especially those in Africa – that the technology did not in fact reflect their decision making culture. They felt that the system was biased towards the rational aspects of the organisation at the expense of interpersonal relations. Common collaboration issues such as information overload and connectivity also cropped up.

For example, many network members, especially those with fewer resources and less staff, found it nearly impossible to follow the online debates and as a result felt excluded from the decision making process. It was taken for granted that this problem – first experienced with e-mail – would be solved by the intranet. However, the problem was in some cases perceived to be worse with the intranet as the volume of communication remained high yet, the speed of the code means that email is still a preferred, if not perfect, solution for many groups. (Kleef and DeMoor, 2003)

FoEI and AideEnvironment are currently working together on the next phase of this project, with aim of addressing the issues uncovered in the pilot phase. The software development component will address a number of interface and usability issues, especially where they relate to culture and language. For example, personal profile features will be enhanced and web logs will be added in order to ensure that the social side of communication can balance off rational components like workplans and budgets. The next phase will also include more user input, tighter feedback loops and longer timelines to allow for the full appropriation of the technology by FoEI network members. At the same time, a team of network process facilitators is being formed to support the social model in future regional online workshops and campaigns. Once the software had been improved and the social model refined, the tools behind this project will be released as open source with the hope that other organizations will be able to both appropriate the technology for their own needs and add their own ideas back into the code.

## Case #2 – Jubilee 2000

Coalition building, partnership and other forms of collaborative campaigns and networks have a long history in civil society. Organizations come together to deal with a common issue, share resources and learn from each other. Traditionally, however, this kind of collaboration has been slow, cumbersome and expensive. Organizations have entered into coalitions and partnerships only through long negotiations and in cases when the benefits of collaboration are both clear and dramatic. With the advent of networked technologies – as well a reduced belief in the idea that all organizations working on an issue need to follow the same party line – this picture of collaboration as a lumbering beast is changing. There is more fluidity and diversity in how collaboration happens, with organizations moving in and out of alliances more quickly than in the past. We see this especially in the anti-globalization movement where there is a common but open and embracing tent under which a broad diversity of groups is able to co-exist.

Jubilee 2000 provides a good example of this new kind of collaborative network, using the Internet to move rapidly and achieve significant victories in a relatively short period of time. In its own words: “Jubilee 2000 (was) an international movement in over 65 countries advocating a debt-free start to the Millennium for a billion people... Jubilee 2000 calls for the unprecedented opportunity of the millennium to be celebrated in a meaningful way – by cancelling debts and giving a new start to the world's poor.”<sup>13</sup> In existence from 1996 to the end of 2000, there are two factors that set Jubilee 2000 apart from many other campaign networks. The first is that it was backed by tens of thousands of civil society organizations, most of them involved through Jubilee networks in their own countries (Buxton, 2002). The other was the strong involvement of organizations in the South. “Indeed, a major facet of Jubilee 2000 has been the growing participation and importance of Southern campaigns in the global effort and their growing role in redefining goals and strategies” (Collins et al., 2001).

By all accounts, the Internet played a major role in the success of Jubilee 2000. Jubilee2000's launch coincided “...with an explosion of Internet use that would provide an essential vehicle for communicating (the issue of debt). For the first time, the computer terminal would play a central role in carrying global issues on the street” (Buxton, 2002). The network was well known for using the Internet for information sharing, arming local and national members with the information they needed to make a case for debt relief. “Central to Jubilee 2000's success as a global movement has been its effectiveness in marrying strong public action to high quality analysis and well defined policy alternatives” (Collins et al., 2001). The network was built in part on the idea that people all over the world – but especially in the South – needed to have better access to information about debt and its impacts. Relying primarily on e-mail lists and a simple web site, many in Jubilee 2000 was hoped that the Internet would provide information to people who had never been able to access it in the past. Jubilee 2000 chronicler Buxton writes: “The Internet has the potential to reverse the information poverty in the South” (Buxton, 2002).

Interestingly, the Internet also played a role in defining Jubilee 2000 as a ‘network organization’ rather than a traditional, centralized NGO. “The first reason that the Internet played such a crucial role is that its structure as a system of networked computers fitted closely with Jubilee 2000's central strategy of reaching networks and individuals who could pass the campaign message on to larger networks” (Buxton, 2002). At least in theory, Jubilee's structure was very Internet-like, with no international secretariat and with national sub-networks acting as nodes that connecting smaller groups into the bigger whole. Arguably, it is this structure that was key to the growth of the network. The national networks were able to grow quickly because they already had trust and relationships with other civil society organizations on the ground. A more centralized, international NGO would have taken much longer to build these relationships and as a result would not have been able to build such a large network so quickly.

In terms of technology, e-mail was the primary tool for Jubilee 2000, much more so than the web. “Jubilee 2000's online work centred around e-mail, the only Internet activity which some campaigns in indebted countries could participate” (Buxton, 2002). E-mail was used both for information dissemination and for coordination. “In November 1998, the first conference of nascent Jubilee 2000 national campaigns

decided against setting up an international secretariat in favour of maximizing communication. Consequently, organizers established an e-mail listserv of more than 300 key campaigners which became the linchpin of the international movement's communication and coordination" (Buxton, 2002).

By its very nature, the fluidity of communications and collaboration that comes with a decentralized, net-enabled campaign makes the boundaries of organizations fuzzier and more permeable. In the past, communication between organizations in a coalition has tended to happen at the leadership level. There was a tight sense of control over who spoke to whom about what. In the case of Jubilee 2000, these links happened more at the grassroots, organization to organization level. For example, the Uganda Debt Network (UDN) worked closely with Oxfam and other Northern NGOs to gather information the debt situation in Uganda. At the same time, UDN's on the ground perspective on the issues helped to inform and redefine the policy positions of its Northern partners. (Collins et al. 2001).

This kind of equal North / South cooperation happened regularly with, with Jubilee 2000 members from the South engaging actively in both the overall direction of the network and individual initiatives. In the follow on the Jubilee 2000 – the Jubilee Movement International (JMI) – the overwhelming majority of network members are from the South.<sup>14</sup> Clearly, the Internet has played a role in helping Southern organizations to take this position. According to research carried out by Buxton: "...nearly all of the campaigners in the indebted countries stated that the Internet greatly assisted their campaigns and involved them further in international decision making. ... Sharing information and perspectives cheaply and efficiently with the international movement, as well as being able to access previously hidden information, made a dramatic difference for Southern campaigns" (Buxton, 2002).

However, the centrality of the Internet in the network also threw into sharp relief the power inequities between North and South – even in the Jubilee 2000 movement. In a number of areas, limited Internet access has stood in the way of participation by Southern partners. Partners in countries like Haiti and Uganda regularly experience problems with their Internet service providers, with their e-mail being blocked for several days (Buxton, 2002). And, as with the case of FoEI, there are issues with different information cultures and abilities to process information. "For example, when a Northern campaign e-mails a consultation document, the deadline to respond tends to be only a few days. For Northern campaigns, a short deadline is easy to organize because it can be e-mail to coalition organizations for consultation. However, for Southern campaigns, seeking a response is inevitably a longer process, and therefore valuable feedback may not be received. The Ugandan campaign reported that any information received via the Internet, as valuable as it was, had to be simplified, translated into at least five languages, and delivered in segments before it could be used publicly" (Buxton, 2002).

This speaks to the fact that: "The greatest challenge for Jubilee 2000 as a movement is that it continues to reflect the same North-South imbalances that it criticizes in international economic policy, in terms of access to resources, information and global decision making." (Collins et al. 2001) Looking at this issue within the context of online collaboration, Barbara Crowther, formerly of Cafod, says, "There is legitimate worry that Northern agencies will increasingly prioritize communications with those southern NGOs with resources to keep up with online partnership models, and [that others] might get further excluded" (Buxton, 2002). There is clearly a conscious balance that needs to be made between the potential for inclusion and the potential for exclusion. Online collaboration should be used to involve and integrate organizations that could not have participated in international networks before they had access to the Internet. However, this should be done with an awareness that those organizations without sufficient Internet access also need to be included through other methods.

### **Case #3 – Summer Source**

Much has been made of the potential of open source software – software that is freely redistributed and that can be analyzed and modified by anyone – within civil society (See Perins, 1997 for the Open Source definition). At first glance, one might think that the attraction here is related to cost. Civil society

organizations don't need to pay licensing fees to use open source tools because they are distributed for free. Yet it is not this 'free as in beer' argument that has attracted those who are advocating most for the marriage of open source and civil society. Rather, the connection is political. As the Open Society Institute's Jonathan Peizer (2003) says in his paper *Realizing the Promise of Open Source in the Non-Profit Sector*: "Open Source development methodology promotes an ethic of collaboration and philosophy of openness more common to the non-profit environment than proprietary development does not." In addition, the 'open' aspect of open source provides a perfect environment for the appropriation of technology by civil society organizations – with the help of knowledgeable techies, open source can be more secure (avoiding 'spyware'), adaptable (adding local languages) and flexible (modifying software for the needs of a specific project).

The case of the September 2003 'Summer Source' camp offers an interesting backdrop against which to explore the potential and attraction of open source within civil society. Held on the island of Vis off the coast of Croatia, the event represented a global gathering of people with connections to the NGO world, the open source developer world, or both. According to the event's web site: "The Summer Source Camp brought together a focused group of stakeholders and allies working to foster Free and Open Source Software (F/OSS) solutions for the non-profit sector across Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia" (Tacticaltech.org, 2003). Summer Source drew participants from over 30 countries including Brazil, Croatia, the Czech Republic, India, the Netherlands, Mongolia, Mozambique, Taiwan, Tajikistan, Tanzania, the Ukraine, and Zambia.

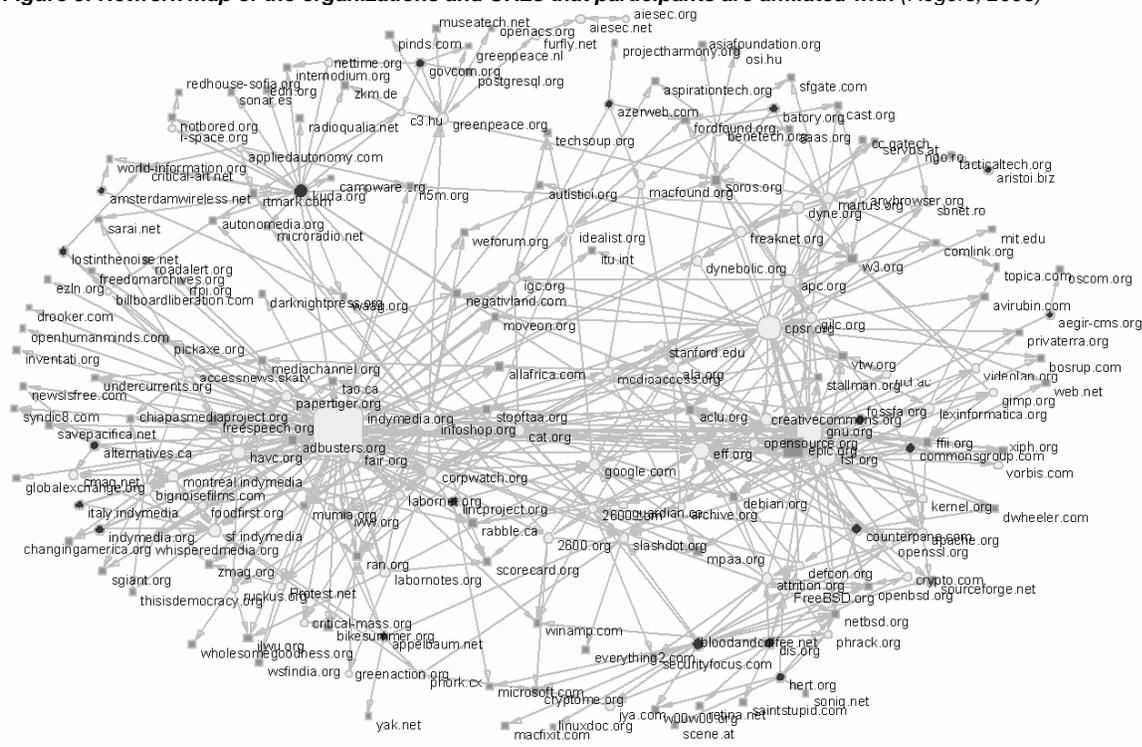
The primary purpose of Summer Source was to bridge the divide between people working directly with civil society organizations to implement technology solutions and hardcore developers of open source software. An article from IndyMedia states: "The Summer Source Camp was an attempt at bringing together people from the open source/free software world with activists from the non-profit sector and to promote dialogue. It offered hands-on workshops and talks by experienced non-profit activists talking about their successful projects and giving away ideas" (Indymedia, 2003). All of this on a former Yugoslavian army base turned salon. As one participant reported back to the readers of *Linux* magazine: "Lying on rugs, drinking Turkish tea, participants exchanged Open Source ideas, projects and visions, trading in currencies of creativity and learning" (Lin, 2003).

Summer Source was organized around a shared vision– that NGOs will make the switch to open source if they can just understand it. From the Summer Source site: "A critical barrier in this transition is the lack of information about practical implementations, coupled with a lack of connection between implementers of open source solutions and the F/OSS developers with whom they need to work" (Tacticaltech.org, 2003). With this in mind, the workshops ranged dealing with strategic issues such as 'working with NGO's: how you can make a difference' and 'NGO ICT needs assessment' to nitty gritty access and infrastructure issues, such as 'deploying the GNU/Linux operating system' and 'security for NGO's'. According to, co-organizer Marek Tuszynski (2003) from Tactical Tech, the aim of these sessions was to give NGO very concrete skills that they could take home and use within a very local context. In Tuszynski's words: "By the time they leave, implementers will have the practical skills to set up a small NGO office entirely using open source solutions. For these participants, the camp will create a practical awareness of FOSS choices; they will leave understanding clearly what works, what doesn't, and how they can help their organizations to make informed choices."

The camp also explored broader topics related to the strategic use of networked technologies. It is through addressing such topics that there is the most potential for bridging the NGO / techie divide. Unfortunately, this potential is difficult to tap – many discussions stuck to the finer points of technology even when organizational and social issues were on the table. As Summer Source participant, Jason Diceman (2003) states, "There was a focus on free licensing, software choices, developer cooperation, security and technical installation, which is all important, but does not ensure effective implementation within an NGO. The next step would be to have sessions on user training and user centred design."

The even bigger barrier to success was in many regards the same barrier that brought everyone to Vis in the first place. Participants were from two different worlds – the civil society world and the developer world. During the conference, participant Richard Rogers prepared a social network map of participants.

Figure 5: Network map of the organizations and URLs that participants are affiliated with (Rogers, 2003)



It showed URLs of and interlinkages between the organizations with which participants were affiliated. The diagram, shown below, had an activist oriented cluster around Indymedia.org and a techie cluster around GNU.org, and a huge gulf in between. As Rogers (2003) states on the Summer Source Wiki: "This is a 'social network map', revealing most significant web linkages from camp participants' sites, positioned and clustered according to 'centrality'. One reading is that the clusters reveal a divide between NGOs and F/OSS Developers, with a few 'brokers' in between."

Of course, a single event like Summer Source cannot bridge this gap completely. However, connections were built to some degree, with new personal relationships forming and new understandings about language and culture emerging. As participant Rolf Kleef (2003) states: "From both sides you were more confronted by the other world. Listening to developers helped the NGO people see that the developer world is values based. On the other side, developers learned about the complexity of an organization and perhaps also that it is not always about the 'best' technology. Often, NGOs just need what works – especially under a fast campaign deadline." In an article on IndyMedia, Marco Matic recounts observations that participants made during the closing circle about what they had learned at the camp. They included: 'the synergy between NGOs and the open source world'; 'the beauty of commonality' and 'the realization that hackers are not virtual' (Matic 2003).

Yet, this kind of connection can only be expected to come so far in seven days. Rolf (2003) continues: "On the other hand, a key area in which Summer Source was lacking was getting beyond the religious arguments and to making a hard case for where open source provides a strategic advantage for an organization. In some ways, the differences between developers and NGOs were reinforced rather than broken down." Summer Source is not alone in facing this challenge. This is the core challenge that faces 'social tech' organizations who are promoting and supporting the strategic use of networked technologies.

There are many good ideas floating out there in the techie corners of civic cyberspace. There has been a recent call for a 'Social SourceForge' that would support the development of strategic open source applications for civil society. Groups like APC and CRIS are working to raise civil society attention about the WSIS and Internet rights. And, what's even more impressive is that hundreds if not thousands of techies are toiling away daily in the hope that their tools can make a difference for activists and social movements. Yet, looking across the cultural divide, many civil society organizations don't understand what all the fuss is about. It's just the Internet, isn't it? In the answer to this question lies the bridge across the divide and the potential of this emerging movement of socially oriented techies.

## **Conclusion**

Looking at civil society experiences with online collaboration, three issues come to the fore – the difficulty that organizations have making strategic use of the technology, the importance of trust and network capital, and the differences between North and South. Increasing the effectiveness of online collaboration within civil society requires an understanding of all three of these issues. It is also important to keep in mind that collaboration does not just come naturally as soon as you set up an e-mail list – it is hard work.

### ***Appropriation – collaborating with clear intent***

While there are clearly examples of civil society organizations that collaborate effectively online, most organizations still find all but the simplest forms of collaboration difficult. It is not that they are unable to use e-mail or send documents back and forth. Rather, it is that activities like online meetings and the coordination of complex online partnerships seem difficult, ineffective or both.

This is the gap that stands between 'use' and 'appropriation' – doing what is obvious and easy with the technology versus turning the technology to serve your own purposes, ensuring that it reflects your own goals and culture. As the FoEI case illustrates, this is not easy. Even with a clear plan, including user needs into the design of a collaborative system does not guarantee success. However, it does provide a framework for assessing success and for improving tools so that they continually improve in their ability to meet users on their own turf. Also, conscious planning provides a clarity of intent that keeps collaboration focused. In the case of FoEI, the intent was to make campaign planning more effective and to involve a broader cross section of the membership. Discovering that this goal was only partly met, the FoEI intranet team is able to go back to the drawing board with a clear mission – address the issues that made decision making too cumbersome and discouraged people from participating. In most cases, civil society organizations have neither the commitment nor the skills necessary to do this kind of planning and self reflection – at least not yet.

### ***Trust – building network capital***

There is a broad consensus amongst those who study such things, that trust and network capital are essential ingredients of successful online collaboration and community. Rheingold (2003) writes in his book *Smart Mobs*: "... network capital - the ability to use the technological network to contact social networks and to make use of them to one's benefit - becomes important in a mobile and pervasive world, along with financial capital and social capital. Those who know how to tap into smart mob social network capital will gain advantages. Those who know not, have not." In other words, it is not only connectivity, hardware and software that determine access to a collaborative network, but also who you know and how much they trust you. This is true not only of the mobile social networks of which Rheingold speaks but also within more traditional Internet collaboration and community spaces.

As all three of the cases above illustrate, transnational civil society organizations often have ready access to existing social capital that can be channelled into the network. In the case of the FoEI intranet, the organization was able to draw on its existing relationships that had been built through 30 years of yearly

face-to-face meetings and joint projects. Jubilee 2000 grew quickly and collaborated effectively because it was built on top of national 'node' organizations with established relationships and credibility. And, at Summer Source, we see how a common passion combined with an opportunity to meet in person has the potential to feed into the creation of a virtual social movement.

Clearly, existing relationships within civil society increase access to – and potential for – online collaboration. However, this potential is limited unless we are conscious of the need to build, enhance and preserve existing feelings of trust and credibility when working online. Also, there is a need to be conscious of the fact that the individual and factional conflicts that exist within civil society have the potential to undermine the trust necessary for online collaboration. One loud and angry participant in an online space is often all that it takes for everything to crumble into chaos or – worse still – silence.

***Equity – the language / culture gap***

Both Friends of the Earth and Jubilee 2000 show that online collaboration can be a double-edged sword, especially for Southern organizations. On the one hand, there are issues of access. Some organizations, especially in rural areas, are still not online – or have only limited online access. Also, access is often limited by the fact the English is the dominant language of online communication and documentation. On the other hand, online collaboration has the potential to include people who would have been excluded if face to face or telephone collaboration were the only options. As the early work of Jubilee 2000 shows, organizations unable to pay for expensive flights and other travel costs can participate using e-mail. Also, many people who have English as a second language are more comfortable 'speaking' in the written world of e-mail than they do in the high-speed conversations that happen during face-to-face meetings. Other organizations, such as Funredes, have had relative success with automated translation software. Funredes mailing list on ICT issues in Latin America is distributed in four languages. The translation is not perfect, but it is good enough for all participants to be able to follow the conversation.

The options at hand are not mutually exclusive – to collaborate only online or only in the 'real world'. Rather, it is a question of balance. We can use online collaboration to increase inclusion, expand our networks and build new types of organizations. But we must do so in concert with other strategies, including regular in person contact.

***Collaboration is hard work***

The most important – and often overlooked – fact about online collaboration is that it is hard work. It is not necessarily harder than effective face-to-face collaboration (although some would argue this). However, it does require the same kind of effort and investment in the social process that would be expected at an in person meeting. If one were simply to rent a room and throw people into it randomly, no one would expect useful outcomes. Instead, face-to-face meetings require careful selection of participants, detailed agenda planning and skilful facilitation.

Walch (2000) sums this issue up nicely in talking about online communities: "... there is no such thing as instant community, either virtual or real. There is no technical 'fix'. Community building takes time. And time, a common history, is perhaps a most important component of any community." In other words, fancy whiz bang intranet tools are not what we need. What we need is trust, a sense of purpose, and each other.

#### 4. Publishing

Producing media is a part of the work of almost every transnational civil society organization. Books, papers, reports. News releases, action alerts, policy statements. Pamphlets and posters. Radio programs and activist videos. From the simple to complex, all of these things are – in some way or other – publishing. They must be produced, copied and distributed. They are, at the level of information and culture, the bread and butter of transnational civil society.

What we often take for granted is that networked technologies dramatically transformed the practice – and in some cases the purpose – of publishing in civil society. We don't have to think back very far to remember the smell of ditto machines, the heat of photocopiers working over time and the late nights sitting on the floor manually stapling together booklets and manifestos. Yet, for many civil society organizations, these images have faded into history. Online publishing has not only supplemented print publication but in many cases has actually replaced it. E-mail, PDFs and web sites are increasingly replacing printed newsletters, faxed news releases and even bound reports. While this may seem obvious, it is important to recognize that the boon in publishing has dramatically transformed how civil society produces and distributes information.

Of course, every transformation comes with a mix of benefits, challenges and tensions. Many of the benefits of online publishing for transnational civil society are quite obvious. The media most available to civil society in the past – printed books and reports, photocopied zines and posters, community radio and video – are all expensive to produce and difficult to distribute outside of closed local networks. At the same time, mainstream media have a well-demonstrated penchant for misrepresenting or shutting out civil society altogether. At least theoretically, web sites, e-mail and other networked technologies address both of these problems. They have made it possible for individual civil society organizations to cheaply produce and distribute their materials – globally. They also fed into an explosion in the number of alternative media channels like OneWorld, Indymedia and Guerrilla News Network that tell the stories that don't make it into the mainstream media.

While the ability of groups to publish their own materials and the growth of online alternative media is clearly beneficial at many levels, the online publishing boon has also created its share of problems. The biggest issue is that of info glut – the problem with everyone having the ability to produce large volumes of media is that everyone produces large volumes of media. This issue is exacerbated by the fact that, in a world where it is a matter of a few keystrokes to pretend you are someone else, many users are confused about what media is credible and what is not. Amidst all of these questions about noise and confusion, there is also an overarching question about impact and effectiveness. Are we really breaking through the homogeneous and monolithic din of mainstream media? Or, are we simply creating an activist spectacle that entertains us because we see ourselves reflected on a flickering screen?

Looking at the role of online publishing in the South puts another set of issues into sharp relief. Due to limited access to computers and the Internet amongst the public, Southern civil society organizations often have to do double the work. They are under pressure to do the latest in Internet publishing in order to work globally and impress donors. At the same time, they need to maintain text-based publications accessible to the broadest number of people on the ground (Whaley, 2000). In this case, online publishing is adding costs, not reducing them. The fact that the dominant language of online publishing is English is also an issue, both in terms of cost and information access.

Finally, it is important to note that the fluid, instant access nature of online publishing has created a number of new tensions in civil society – both within and between organizations. At the organizational level, power over publishing is increasingly being distributed to staff and volunteers at lower levels within the organizational hierarchy. This is an important issue within international NGOs, for example. While most see both of these things as positive, the reality on the ground is that the introduction of web sites, e-

mail newsletters and content management systems often leads to power struggles and conflict within organizations. Executive directors and communications managers are often unwilling to hand over the authority to make publishing decisions that is necessary if staff and volunteers are to take best advantage of these new tools. While organizations are almost always able to work through these issues, the process of introducing and expanding online publishing is nonetheless disruptive and distracting for a period of time.

At a broader level, it could also be said that the growth of online publishing has also fed into the tensions and synergies between traditional NGOs and newer, more informal types of civil society organization. This is an issue faced by transnational civil society networks. Grassroots networks, dot causes, culture jammers and other emerging organizational forms have become much more prominent with the rise of the web and e-mail. This is because the low cost of creating a credible web presence has allowed them to 'exist' without the traditional trappings like an office, staff and even funding. This is their strength and their power, which translated into rapid mobilizations of large numbers of people, and the ability to rapidly spread a message around the world. It can be a point of contention with many traditional NGOs. In the minds of many, these organizations don't really exist – they are just a pesky chimera. Yet, they do exist – and their power and impact are growing. Considered in another light, the differing capabilities of civil society groups can be a source of increased capacity in networked organizational forms. Where more traditional organizations produce credible information based on established research networks, media savvy groups can get the world out to a large audience in catchy language. On the other hand, backed by established organizations, mobile flexible groups can experiment with more risky, innovative applications of the technology that could ultimately benefit established groups.

In order to further explore these questions and tensions, it is important to look a little more deeply at what we mean by 'online publishing'.

### **What is online publishing?**

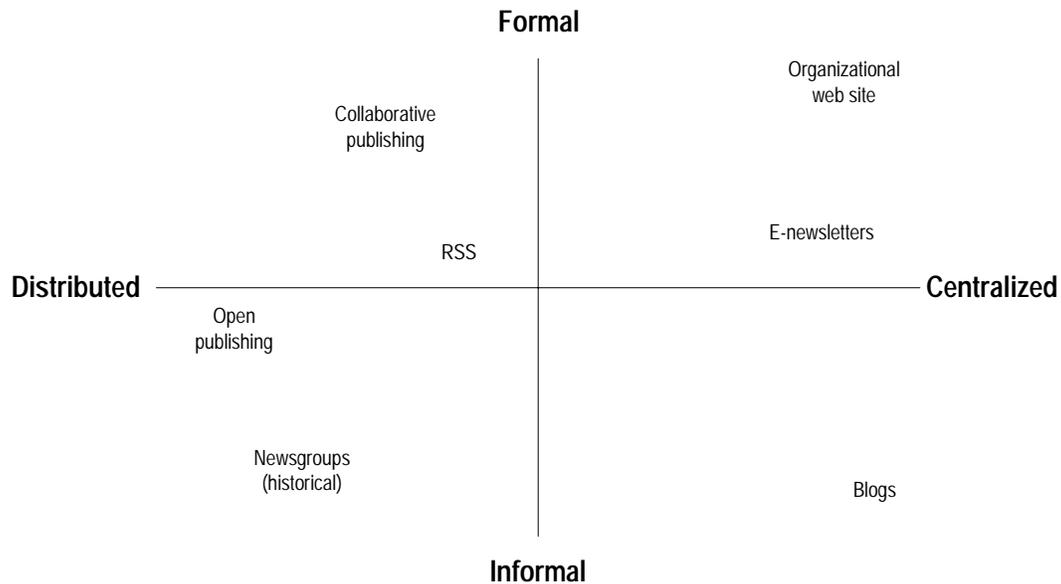
When most people talk about online civil society publishing they are talking about simple, straightforward web sites. Certainly, this is an important part of the story. For countries where data is available, it is clear that the number of organizations with websites has grown from a small percentage to near ubiquity. For example, the number of US non-profits with web sites grew from 31% in 1997 to 87% in 2000. (Surman, 2001) Camacho's (2001) study showed that 46% of Central American civil society organizations have web sites. This represents a huge growth in publishing capacity for civil society. With even the simplest of web sites in place, organizations can publish news releases, action alerts, policy statements, reports and even whole books. More importantly, they can do this at a very low cost while at the same time making their materials available to a potentially global audience.

However, there is a great deal more to online publishing than simple web sites. E-mail, for example, is another big part of the story. E-mail is important partly because of the volume and nature of material published. Newsletters, action alerts, press releases and other timely materials are increasingly produced with e-mail in mind, with the web acting as an archive and print being abandoned altogether. E-mail has been used by civil society organizations to publish this kind of material for at least 15 years – well before the emergence of the web. Recently, there has been a renewed focus on e-mail because it is more ubiquitous, accessible and, in some cases, effective than web publishing.

Beyond the web and e-mail, other forms of online publishing are emerging within civil society. Experiments with collaborative publishing and syndication are beginning to bear fruit, interconnecting civil society publishing efforts and providing an aggregate overview of emerging issues. Personal publishing using *blogs* and diaries is also showing up in a civil society context. And, of course, the publishing of audio and video materials – the online equivalent of community radio and television – is slowly starting to become viable.

Looking across the diversity of practices and experiments that make up the world of civil society online publishing, it is easy to see that we are not talking simply about web sites. Rather, we are speaking of a variety of approaches that vary greatly both in terms of formality and interconnectedness:

**Figure 6: Types of online publishing**



As this diagram illustrates, there is a tension between 'one way' media such as organizational web sites e-newsletters and multi-directional and collaborative publishing forms such as 'open publishing' and RSS syndication. Traditional NGOs and other formal organizations tend to be drawn to the 'one way' approaches as the most closely mimic the control and delivery mechanisms of print. More fluid practices such as open publishing tend to be more common amongst grassroots social movement and informal activist groups. Building on this picture, the following three cases that explore different approaches to online civil society publishing. These cases are intended to both profile important approaches and to bring key publishing issues and challenges to the fore.

### **Case #1 – Instituto del Tercer Mundo (ITeM)**

Most of the material that civil society organizations put online falls into a category that might be called 'centralized publishing'. This includes anything that is produced and published by a single organization – an organizational web site, site for a project and online book. In its simplest forms, this is just an online corollary of offline publishing, with material having traditional boundaries like chapters and sections, beginnings and ends. Nonetheless, centralized online publishing presents both opportunities and challenges that do not exist in the offline world. There is the opportunity to free readers to see documents from their own perspective, using hypertext to make documents more matrix-like and using databases and other tools to make material more 'interactive'. At the same time, the freedom and flexibility of online publishing often also translates into a 'free as in beer' expectation – a feeling that anything that is online should not cost money to use or read.

A good example of the promise, challenges and complexity of this kind of publishing is the Instituto del Tercer Mundo (ITeM) *World Guide* project.<sup>15</sup> This is an interesting case because it illustrates the combination of strategic vision and responsiveness required to but a 'traditional' civil society print

publication onto the Internet. The *World Guide* shows that creating an Internet publication that works is not just a matter of slapping the text up online.

Originally published in 1979, "... the *World Guide* is an alternative reference to the countries of our planet, and challenges the conventional Eurocentric perspective. ... It provides the basic history, politics, economics, statistics and a map for every country" (New Internationalist). The book is published every two years in four languages, with the most recent English edition having a print run of 12,000 and the Spanish edition having a print run of 10,000. The English edition is distributed by New Internationalist in the UK and the Spanish version is published by Editorial IEPALA in Spain. While the *World Guide* is essentially a political publication – using facts and analysis to show global power flows – it is published on a commercial basis. All costs are covered by income from the publication.

Understandably, ITeM and its publishing partners were initially worried that putting the publication online would undercut sales of the printed version. Despite this, ITeM decided to put the complete text of the Spanish editor of the *World Guide* online in 1998 (in Spanish: *Guia del Mundo*). The site includes navigation and searching by country and by region, as well as special online features and reports. It was felt that, given the political and educational importance of the publication, any loss in revenue would be outweighed by the benefits that an online version would provide to civil society. According to ITeM Director Robert Bissio (2003): "Much to our surprise, the online version did not end up eating into sales to any measurable degree." At the same time, the reach of the guide has increased dramatically, with the Spanish *World Guide* now available to people anywhere in the world even if they do not have access to the book.

In contrast, the full English version of the *World Guide* is still not online. A promotional site consisting of small samples and descriptions of how to order the book is online. Also, an 'Internet-style' version of the guide created in HTML and complete with a search engine is available in CD ROM format. However, New Internationalist – the English language distributor – continues to be concerned that putting the whole publication online would undermine sales. While this concern may or may not be legitimate, it points to a major issue confronting many online publishing projects – proven business models for recovering costs from online civil society publishing projects do not yet exist. As a result, most successful projects remain donor supported.

Interestingly, a recent 'accidental' experience with the English version of the *World Guide* has opened the door to a potentially innovative business model. In 2002, the US Methodist Church asked if it could excerpt sections from the CD ROM version of the guide on their site. Bissio (2003) states: "ITeM agreed, assuming that they were only planning to use a few pages. This did not turn out to be the case. The Church ended up posting all of the country sections from the book on its site." Wondering if this was a new opportunity in the making, ITeM asked the Church to pay a licensing fee for the material they had posted – and they agreed. Based on this experience, ITeM has begun the development of a syndication and licensing service for other sites that would like to use *World Guide* content. At least one other client has been secured so far and there is the potential for more in the wings. New Internationalist has agreed to this form of republishing for the English version of the *Guide* as it will receive a commission for any web licenses that it is able to sell.

It is also worth looking briefly at the case of the *Social Watch Report*, another publication produced by ITeM. According to ITeM's website (2003): "Social Watch is an international network informed by national citizens' groups aiming at following up the fulfillment of the internationally agreed commitments on poverty eradication and equality. These national groups report, through the national Social Watch report, on the progress - or regression- towards these commitments and goals." The full text of both the Spanish and English versions the report has been online since 1997. In addition, users are able to build their own queries to draw data from the raw *Social Watch* database – a function that goes far beyond traditional print publications in terms of the power and flexibility that it gives to users. Why the dramatic difference between the *World Guide* and *Social Watch*? Because *Social Watch* is completely donor funded

and supported. There is no need to cover costs through sales, so publishing online to lower costs and gain audience is a no brainer. In fact, it is likely that ITeM would abandon print publication of *Social Watch* altogether if it weren't for the fact that most politicians and bureaucrats – who are amongst the publication's key target audiences – don't give as much credibility to online publications as they do to print.

Looking at the online approach used by ITeM's two major publications, it is clear that one of the biggest challenges facing online civil society publishing is financial sustainability. This is not a new issue. In fact, it is one of the core problems the non-profit and alternative media have faced since the beginning. The difference is that old solutions to this problem don't seem to be working for the Internet, or at least not yet. More often than not, donors expect online efforts to become self sustaining after an initial pilot period. This expectation is usually founded on the idea that new business models such as ITeM's licensing service will make Internet publishing more financially viable than past forms of civil society media. While this may be true, very little investment or effort has been made in critically exploring and evaluating the potential of new revenue sources. As a result, civil society organizations undertaking major publishing projects are often left to swim, or more likely sink, on their own.

## **Case #2 - OneWorld**

In the mid-1990s, many in civil society realized that they could not only create web sites for a single organization but also that they could use the web as a shared publishing platform for multiple groups with similar perspectives or issues. This approach to using the web might be called collaborative publishing – setting up a site or collection of sites that represents a coalition, network or other broad based grouping of civil society organizations. Using tools such as database-driven web sites and content syndication, collaborative publishing initiatives usually draw content from partner web sites or allow partners to post directly to a central site. They may also provide feeds of content that partners can pick up and use on their own sites. These initiatives may be small and short lived, as we saw with numerous multi-organization web sites that emerged in response to the US-led war against Iraq. Or, they may be longer-term projects with the aim of bringing large numbers of civil society organizations under a single digital tent.

London-based OneWorld.net provides a good example of the second kind of site – a collaborative publishing initiative that aims to create an ongoing voice for a large number of civil society organizations. OneWorld describes itself as: “a non-profit network that aims to harness the democratic potential of the Internet to promote sustainable development and human rights” (OneWorld website). Glancing quickly from the outside in, OneWorld looks like a straightforward news and issues site focused on civil society issues. It contains compelling and professionally presented stories and backgrounders on a wide range of issues championed by civil society organizations – AIDS, sustainable development, human rights, peace and even the digital divide. These issues are covered at a global level in English on the OneWorld.net site. Regional coverage and coverage in five additional languages is provided by over 10 regional and country sites.

Under the hood, however, OneWorld is a very different kind of site – it is a network of civil society content producers from around the world all working to paint a collective picture of a better world (and of the injustices that we face in our current world). Almost 100% of the content is drawn from the web sites of OneWorld's 1500 partner sites. In creating 'the news' for a particular day, OneWorld editors pull the best material from this pool of partner sites, write new headlines and précis, and publish the material to the front page. At a technical level, OneWorld combines a web-content management system that is able to produce multiple editions in multiple languages with an advanced search engine that tells editors when new material appears on partner sites. The result is a shifting gestalt or daily snapshot of what is happening within certain sectors of transnational civil society.

This approach to collaborative publishing allows OneWorld to tell stories in a manner that is different from that used on individual civil society organization web sites. Where most civil society web sites tell

stories from the perspective of a single organization, OneWorld presents the perspectives of multiple organizations according to theme. “By organizing materials according to concepts and subjects, and providing a variety of multiple-sourced topical paths that visitors can traverse, the site takes an innovative approach to providing online services” (Warkentin, 2001). The result is material that contains the diversity of opinion traditional expected of journalism while at the same time the content remains driven directly by the work and content of civil society organizations.

At a simpler level, OneWorld’s collaborative publishing model simply represents good – although not radical – form of alternative media. According to co-founder Peter Armstrong, OneWorld was created because traditional media like television and print journalism did not provide the ‘right’ kind of platform for the sustainable development and global justice issues that he and his colleagues wanted to cover. When the Internet came along, Armstrong felt like it was ‘a dream come true’ (Warkentin 2001). This dream has grown quite significantly in scale since OneWorld was initially set up in 1996. The site covers a wide variety of topic areas from the environment to human rights to peace, with dozens of new articles being posted to the network every day. OneWorld is also widely respected amongst both funders and civil society partners alike. With this credibility and volume of material, OneWorld in many ways has the ingredients necessary to become ‘the CNN of civil society’.

The problem with this sort of big vision is that the audience reach just isn’t there. The reach of civil society web sites, even sites like OneWorld, is puny compared to the mainstream online media. In September 2001, Yahoo has 210 million unique visitors in a month and MSN had 270 million unique visitors. Neither site reports page views. In contrast, OneWorld has 4.25 million page views in a month (Saunders, 2001). On many levels, this kind of comparison is meaningless – no one ever said that OneWorld wanted to be CNN, especially the people who work there. Yet, these numbers do highlight how far even the most successful civil society online publishing projects are from reaching a mass audience. OneWorld has tried to counter this trend by providing some of its partner content to the international news section of Yahoo, leading to an additional 340,000 page views per month. While this growth is promising, it may well be that the mass audience is not really what we should be after. Certainly, building the strength of civil society requires bringing more people ‘into the fold’. However, it also requires constant encouragement, information sharing and connection amongst those who already understand the need to address issues such as human rights and global justice. It may be that the potential of sites like OneWorld is as an information channel and meeting place for people like these.

Questions of audience aside, OneWorld has also faced other challenges. One of the most significant and long lasting issues is the perception in some circles that, as an organization based in the North, OneWorld is disconnected from the reality of the Southern communities and NGOs that it aims to serve. The leadership of the organization has been aware of this dynamic since very early on and, as Warkentin points out: “...has made conscious efforts to increase the participation and political efficacy of people and organizations in the global South” (Warkentin, 2001). An early effort in this regard was the creation of the Southern Partners Program, initiated by OneWorld in the mid-1990s to help NGOs in the South increase their presence on the Internet (Warkentin, 2001). More recently, OneWorld has expanded its OneWorld Radio program with the intent of both putting more decision making power in the South and of using radio as a way to get online information out to audiences who are not connected to the Net. While the overall coordination of radio efforts still happens in London, the African component of the radio network operates on a reasonably autonomous basis out of OneWorld Africa in Zambia, with regional and thematic coordinators based in Senegal and Uganda (Lubelsky, 2003). Nonetheless, questions remain, both internally and externally, about OneWorld’s ability to truly integrate Southern participants and partners (Rebick, 2003). Of course, one can see this ongoing struggle with North South power dynamics either a cynical ‘this will never work’ perspective or an optimistic ‘this is a complex problem and they are working on it’ perspective. Only time will tell which is correct.

As with other online civil society publishing projects, OneWorld has increasingly had to confront the issue of sustainability. Arguably, the organization has fared better than many others in terms of financing and

donor support for their efforts. In fact, it is only with significant donor support that OneWorld has been able to grow so quickly and effectively. However, there is increasing pressure from donors to come up with independent revenue sources. Unlike many other sites, OneWorld considered the issue of independent income right from start up, charging a partnership fee to civil society organizations profiled on the site since early on. It has also developed a multi-tiered approach to generating income, with much of the core operating costs for OneWorld International coming from the country centres who are directly in touch with partners and local donors. Despite these innovative approaches, both OneWorld International and the country centres are highly depended on project funding from donors. If all of the donors pulled the plug tomorrow, OneWorld would find it difficult to remain sustainable. There just hasn't been enough time to fully develop independent business streams.

It is important to note that OneWorld's work includes more than just collaborative publishing. In fact, many of the organization's activities are focussed on building the technology and communications capacity of members. According to OneWorld US director Mike Litz (2003): "... the South Asia centre does lots of grassroots training, US does peer learning, Spain is big on conferences. The local OneWorld centres take the global principles – collaborative publishing, partnership, shared social values – and apply them in different mixes and with different emphases to best serve the needs of the NGOs in their country." This on the ground work is not only directly helpful to NGO partners but is also a key component of creating a strong network that feeds material into the collaborative publishing model. These support activities also position OneWorld firmly with the emerging 'social tech' movement of organizations using networked technologies to facilitate the work of civil society as a whole.

### **Case #3 - Indymedia**

The ease of getting words and ideas online has done more than just increase access for NGOs and allow for collaboration – it has also spawned the concept of open publishing. In the open publishing paradigm, anyone is able to publish without editing or moderation. In its purest form, it is libertarian freedom of speech taken to the extreme. The idea of free and open publishing is, of course, not a completely new idea. However, the Internet is the first medium that has made open publishing possible at any significant scale. We first saw open publishing explode with UseNet newsgroups, everyone could post and few groups were moderated. Since then, a wide array of sites – from collective blogs to special interest Wikis to activist news sites – have taken up the open publishing banner.

The most obvious, well known and widespread civil society example of the open publishing paradigm is Indymedia.org. Best described in its own words, Indymedia is: "... a grassroots organization committed to using media production and distribution as a tool for promoting social and economic justice. It is our goal to further the self-determination of people under-represented in media production and content, and to illuminate and analyze local and global issues that impact ecosystems, communities and individuals. We seek to generate alternatives to the biases inherent in the corporate media controlled by profit, and to identify and create positive models for a sustainable and equitable society" (Shumway, 2003). Since starting as a single website and media production store front set up for the Seattle WTO protests, Indymedia has grown to over 100 sites covering all continents.

Indymedia's online presence consists of both locally run sites as well as a single international site that collects the best content from all of the locals. While completely autonomous from each other, a typical local Indymedia site consists of a 'news' column that presents the best local stories and a 'wire' section that presents open publishing material automatically as it is posted to the site. Headlines tend to reflect the activist spirit of Indymedia. *World Rallies Against U.S. War and Occupation. Dozens Killed in Ongoing Insurrection. Earth Liberation Prisoner Free At Last.* Whether news or wire, all of these stories come from grassroots media activists. "What makes the concept of Indymedias different than many online alternative news sources is their focus on grassroots reporting and online publication. While other online alternative news sources often fill their Web pages with editorials, commentaries, and news analysis (and Indymedia often links to these and other sources), Indymedia's primary emphasis is in providing a Web

outlet for filing original, first-hand coverage online through print, photos, audio, and video” (Hyde, 2002). Compared to radical media projects of previous decades, Indymedia is like a candy store full of everything an activist media producer could ever want.

Open publishing is deeply embedded in the cultural, political and technical DNA of Indymedia. “When the first Indymedia opened in Seattle, stories were published to the Web with little editorial oversight. Following an “open posting” policy, anyone could file a report” (Hyde, 2002). For this reason, early versions of Indymedia’s Active software included very little control for editors and site managers. And, for a number of years, Indymedia activists defended open publishing as if it were true and pure religion. Certainly, there was a logic to this position. Unlike more generic open publishing tools like blogs or personal web sites, Indymedia sites represent a collective space for openness – they are not primarily about ego or singularity. There was – and in some circles remains – a strong belief that this collective openness needs to be protected at all costs.

Over time, however, open publishing ran into a number of problems – especially irrelevant and offensive posts by spammers, right wingers and run-of-the-mill idiots. Also, it issues of quality arose, with the considered work of talented activist journalists being drowned out by the din of mediocre material. These issues have led most Indymedia centres to adopt the ‘news column + wire column’ approach, where material selected by editors is placed in the prominent centre column and all other material falls into the narrower wire column on the left. Some centres have even gone farther, adding a ‘hidden folder’ that allows editors to pull offensive content out of the main wire column without deleting it altogether. In a recent interview with the Columbia Journalism Review, Indymedia pioneer Chris Anderson stated: “Personally, I started out as a total free-speech libertarian. My thoughts were that people were smart enough to know what’s trash and what’s not. Is it our business to tell them what is acceptable? Two years later, I was the one pushing for more moderation of the wire. So I guess there was an evolution, which does mirror the evolution of the movement” (Beckerman, 2003).

Another aspect of ‘evolution’ that Indymedia has had to deal with is money. For its first three years of operation, the Indymedia movement fiercely resisted donor funding. Most work was done by extremely committed volunteers and with small personal donations. This has set Indymedia apart from the more formal part of the civil society world and has allowed it to stay firmly in the activist camp. However, all of this was put up for debate in 2002 when Indymedia applied for and received a \$50,000 grant from the Ford Foundation. The grant was intended to underwrite the costs of international meetings that would strengthen the bond between and improve the operation structures used by Indymedia centres around the world. Despite strong agreement about the intent of the grant, a number of centres – especially those in Argentina – felt strongly that the network should not be receiving money from corporate-backed sources. Eventually, the money was “... returned because no one could agree on whether to accept it or how to spend it (Beckerman, 2003). Subsequently, a number of efforts have emerged to raise money to cover the costs of international meetings and other aspects of the larger Indymedia project. Some centres have tried this through small scale asks for PayPal donations and by offering premium services for individual donors have emerged (Shumway, 2003). Others, including a group calling themselves the Tactical Media Fund, have sought grants outside Indymedia-proper in the hopes that they could hack around the initial controversy (Tactical Media Fund, 2002). However, this attempt at approaching donors has also met with major resistance.

Both the challenges of open publishing and the conflict over the Ford grant point to the fact that Indymedia’s greatest strengths may also be its greatest failings. In his entitled *Democratizing Communication Through Community-Base Participatory Media Networks: A Study of the Independent Media Center Movement*, Indymedia chronicler Chris Shumway (2003) outlines three challenges that the Indymedia movement will face in the coming years. The first two challenges are ‘structurelessness’ and ‘local vs. global’. Part of Indymedia’s success stems from the fact that it values organic growth, local autonomy, decentralization and consensus. However, these values also have the potential to tie the hands of the global network as it tries to make decisions and acquire resources as was the case with the Ford

grant. Also, there is the risk that the current structure will lead to the creation of an ‘activists old boys network’ of Indymedia insiders who do not welcome new blood. The other challenge facing Indymedia is open publishing itself – with the battle between openness and irrelevance remaining a constant struggle. And then, there is the fact that the external environment is far from friendly to sites like Indymedia, especially as Internet providers in the North move towards more closed network architectures. Shumway writes: “Whichever direction the Internet takes, it is clear that in even if universal access were miraculously achieved in the short-term, there’s no guarantee that new web surfers would find IMC Web sites or even venture far from their commercial portals and “gated” online communities.”

## **Conclusion**

It is not being overly dramatic to speak of an ‘online publishing revolution’ within civil society. While we often take them for granted, the ways that transnational civil society organizations produce and distribute information are very different than they were 10 years ago. The three cases included in this chapter clearly illustrate this change. In fact, they show that some civil society organizations have not only taken advantage of the lower cost and higher speed of electronic publishing, but they have also developed innovative approaches to working with others, generating revenue and promoting media democracy. Looking at these cases, several problems and challenges are also apparent – issues with financial sustainability, the problem of making publishing more strategic, equity between North and South, and the real impact of alternative media.

### ***Appropriation – publishing with intent and vision***

When looking things from the perspective of technology appropriation, the three organizations profiled above are exceptions rather than the rule. The broad majority of civil society organizations publish online in a manner that is far less strategic and visionary. They seem simply to accept the fact that fast and cheap online publishing is a good thing, throw their documents up on their web sites and hoping that someone will look at them. A much more strategic approach is required. As Cronauer (2002) states: "It is true that up-to-date information can quickly be put up on websites or sent out via email, and more and more people can obtain cheap access through, for example, community networks and library facilities. However, the ability of sending out information quickly does not necessarily mean that the intended audience accesses that information in due time, if at all. ...If one wants to effectively use the Internet, one therefore needs to be careful not to overvalue the high speed and low costs associated with it, but ask oneself: How fast can one reach others through the Internet realistically, who can one reach, and who cannot be reached through the Internet?" (Cronauer, 2002) In other words, organizations must appropriate the technology, molding it to their strategic goals, before its real potential emerges. This does not mean that organizations need to spend large sums of money on web content management systems – even a simple e-mail newsletter can be strategic. It is a question of the vision and clarity of intent with which an organization comes to the task of publishing online.

### ***Trust – collective story telling***

As the previous pages illustrate, much of this strategic potential lies tied up our ability to abandon our egos and embrace online civil society publishing as an exercise in collective story telling. Taking this step requires a great deal of trust and openness. For example, engaging in a collaborative publishing effort like OneWorld requires trust amongst partners that the central portal site will represent them well. Also, it requires faith in the idea that, over time, we can build a bigger and more valuable audience together than we can apart. Similarly, the future success of Indymedia will require deep levels of trust within the network – trust both that those with responsibilities at the international level will act in the best interests of the network and that centres with differing perspectives are acting in good faith and with common values. The question is, can civil society organizations build and sustain this kind of trust – despite their bumpy track record.

***Sustainability – effective business models***

All three of case studies provided above point to the fact sustainability is an issue for online civil society publishing projects – just as it has been a problem with other media. Looking at the situation optimistically, it is clear that innovative sustainability experiments and non-profit business models have emerged. Both ITeM’s syndication model and OneWorld’s partnership model represent new ideas that hold potential to sustain important civil society media efforts. Even IMC attempts to gather PayPal donations represent a creative take on the old idea of audience supported media. Yet, these are all experiments and none have had the time or support necessary to be considered proven models. Furthermore, none are fully supporting the work of the organizations who have implemented them. Donors and civil society organizations who are truly interested in seeing new sustainability models emerge need to invest in such models – and at the same time undertake rigorous research and evaluation of which models are working. Without this investment and research – or a long term commitment from the broader donor community to simply keep providing support – many successful and innovative online civil society online publishing efforts that have emerged in the past 10 years will be left to die a slow and painful death.

## 5. Mobilization

*Despite theoretical deliberations, there is no contradiction between the street and cyberspace.*

*Lovink + Schnieder*

One of the most widely discussed uses of networked technologies within civil society is online mobilization and activism. Media has been a central element of mobilization reaching back to the days when Gutenberg's printing press facilitated Luther's Protestant revolution. There is no doubting that the Internet has become the next wave of mobilization technologies. What is it about Internet that makes it different from previous mobilizing information technologies?

When we look at transnational civil society protests, we can see that what sets networked technologies apart is their ability to mobilize globally, directly and quickly. The Internet allows civil society to take direct control of mobilization media. Individuals and groups no longer have to rely on manipulating the content of mainstream media channels. More importantly, new media – e-mail, protest sites, mobile phones, text messaging – allow online organizers to combine the advantages of broadcast and one-to-one media. It is possible to quickly and affordably reach a large group of people while at the same time targeting your communication to interested or relevant parties. It is also possible for activists and others to talk back, responding with e-mail that includes questions, elaborations and personal contributions. This combination of going global and doing much more through civil society media has meant a partial move from 'face-to-face' to 'faceless' tactics, with protest happening anonymously online as well as in coordinated yet physically separate protests happening around the world at the same time.

Many herald the potential for networked technologies to reduce and shift the resources required for mobilization. In certain cases, the Internet may actually be a lower cost way to mobilize constituents than other methods. For example, the use of e-mail lists as a central organizing tool for the Seattle WTO protests certainly represents big 'bang for the buck'. But it should be noted that this potential cannot necessarily be controlled; examples like Seattle tend to emerge from informal, distributed coalitions and movements and not from individual NGOs on a mobilization cost cutting spree. Also, it is rare that Internet organizing happens in isolation. The success of mass events like the Seattle protests is driven by the use of multiple media and organizing tactics. What we can say with certainty is that online organizing tools have the potential to increase the scale of certain kinds of organizing efforts while keeping costs low. The obvious example is the difference between direct mail and targeted e-mail. With e-mail, it is possible to send out 100,000 announcements, calls to action or donation solicitations for the price of a few dozen direct mail letters.

As e-advocacy researcher Rob Stuart points out, these changes are starting to impact the terrain on which advocacy organizations operate. "The Internet challenges conventional issue advocacy organizational structures. Rather than rely on hierarchical, centralized communication technology supported by their "members", the Internet can be used to foster a more de-centralized and distributed organizational structure where any number of people can learn about and support an organization in varying activities" (Stuart, 2003). Even at the grassroots, organizing techniques such as phone trees and canvassing have required a rigid, somewhat hierarchical approach. In contrast, mailing lists and eventually peer-to-peer technologies flatten this relationship, making it possible to organize quickly with very little logistical coordination. Also, word-of-mouth can spread much further and faster using the viral power of the Internet.

This changing terrain has fed into changes in the organizational structure, speed and reach of transnational protest. In the late 1990s, through the MAI, Seattle, and the many other protests against corporate led globalization, transnational civil society learned a great deal about appropriating the Internet to protest on

the world stage. In fact, it is sometimes argued that, by protesting globalization, civil society itself became global. But since the terrorist attacks on September 11, the globalization movement has slowed as groups around the world have struggled to come to terms with the changing international landscape. Since this time, we have seen anti-war protesters use the techniques developed in the anti-globalization movement to organize global vigils for peace. But, recent advances in the use of networked technologies for global protests are refinements to existing practices, rather than fundamental innovations. These have tended to occur in the area of tactical media – improving stunts aimed at focusing the mainstream media’s attention on global protests. For example, Indymedia’s PIMP system (Phone Indy Media Patch) allows protesters to submit a report to Indymedia from via cell phone from the thick of the action.

The quickly shifting terrain of online fundraising also provides an interesting backdrop against which to look at trends in mobilization. For Northern NGOs with a tradition of expensive but effective direct mail fundraising, there is a struggle to figure out where the Internet fits into generating income. Early – often simplistic – approaches to online fundraising bore very little fruit. However, recent attempts to directly mix online fundraising with advocacy activities – so called advocacy fundraising – have started to point out that there is potential for fundraising online. For example, Amnesty Spain’s most successful online fundraising solicitation was a follow up to a high profile online petition (Johnson, 2003). In the US, Moveon.org has shown that online donors are much more interested in action than they are in a charitable receipt. Both of these examples point back to the cost savings that the Internet can provide in the process of mobilization – success comes from generating huge e-mail lists that organizations can communicate to quickly and at low cost. Some also think that examples such as these point to a more general opportunity to politicize fundraising and tie action to fundraising.

But while Internet has caused upheaval in civil society, most online mobilization to date has tended to be oriented towards the adaptation of traditional tactics. Echoing McLuhan's rear view mirror, Graham Meikle calls this phenomenon 'backing into the future'. He argues that we tend to modernize old ideas first and then innovate later. – “.. so far, there's little evidence of entirely new tactics developed specifically to exploit the unique properties of the Net” (Meikle, 2002). The proliferation of e-postcards to politicians, online petitions, virtual sit ins and the like brings us to the conclusion that the Internet has not provided us with innovative forms of mobilization, but rather that it has innovated these traditional civil society activities.

There are, of course, exceptions to this rule. A number of experiments have created what might be considered embryonic ‘new forms’ of mobilization. Site hijacking and other forms of playful hacktivism. Rapid response networks and other forms of censorship evasion. Advocacy fundraising. Smart mobs and flash mobs. Certainly, all of these examples have some link to traditional methods of mobilization – civil disobedience, letter writing and direct mail, street protest. Yet they have qualities that make them unique and that provide the raw material for further innovation. There are also important lessons for civil society to learn in the areas of place-based technology and email marketing. Campaign directors have started to consider combining GIS, ratings information, and cell phones to mobilize their campaigners more effectively as they go door to door during an election. How can civil society make use of place-based technologies like these to coordinate protest activities? And businesses are developing sophisticated direct marketing tools that combine email, sales data, and customer relations management technologies to target messages to particular clients. How can civil society use these technologies to raise funds, mobilize people for a protest, or raise awareness?

As Gurak and Logie point out in the introduction to their book, *CyberActivism*, these new forms of mobilization bring forth a number of issues and challenges for civil society. For example, web-based protest suffers credibility problems that stem from both anonymity and the potential for spoofing, hacking, and co-option. It can be difficult to locate the author of a petition, and the speed of Internet protest can be achieved at the expense of verification and vetting. In the current environment of mass online petition and e-mail campaigns “... companies and governments alike take electronic correspondence, including electronic petitions, with a grain of salt” (Gurak and Logie, 2003). The bottom line is that what have been

the simplest forms of online mobilization quickly become the least effective, losing credibility and impact because everyone can easily use them.

There is also the fact that many civil society organizations lack – or fear – the kind of quirky creativity required to garner attention in the online media environment. Arguably, creating a successful viral advocacy campaign is much harder than garnering mainstream media attention by unfurling a banner from the side of a building. The most successful examples of viral memes – All Your Base, I Love to Kiss You, the Star Wars Kid – have tended to be banal, hilarious, unexpected and, in many cases, offensive. Traditional NGOs have a difficult time producing materials that work on this level, no matter how irreverent they think they are being. Yet, they know that there is the potential for a big mobilization payoff if they can generate a high level of viral interest. The Star Wars Kid meme – an amateur video of a teenager pretending that he is in one of the Star Wars movies – has garnered over 100,000 online petition ‘signatures’, all with no central organizing or campaign budget. This is the kind of online mobilization that most civil society organizations can only dream of.

### **What is online mobilization?**

When we speak of ‘online mobilization’ we are talking primarily of online efforts to move people to action – to protest, intervene, advocate, support. Such efforts are much more about relationships and community than information. Given this, it is not surprising that e-mail has been the key tool for the most successful examples of online mobilization. It is more intimate, direct and targeted than the web. Primarily, the tendency has been towards relying on simple technologies, like email lists, to mobilize participation in real-world protests, or coordinate global actions. However, the use of simple technologies has not meant that online mobilization has been without innovation. It is just that the innovation has been social and not technical. The terrain of mobilization and advocacy has begun to change, with hierarchies flattening and – more importantly, the size, location and interconnection of actions changing.

All of this said, technical innovation has begun to become a topic of interest in relation to e-mail advocacy. The past few years have seen a significant increase in the number of e-mail membership, fundraising and recruiting tools available to civil society organizations. Most of these tools are from commercial companies located in the US such as GetActive, Convio and Kinterra. However, at least one open source option – eBase – exists and others are rumored to be in development. Typically, these tools combine the functions traditionally associated with a direct mail database with e-mail software. With these tools, organizations are able to send out targeted e-mail messages based on the location, interests and past action track record of activists. They also facilitate the process of getting activists to forward messages to others – a practice that has been dubbed ‘friendraising’. The introduction of these e-membership and e-newsletter tools represents a shift back toward hierarchical mobilization techniques like direct mail, something that seems to sit well with larger, more conservative NGOs. However, some are using these tools in ways that include other tools that facilitate many-to-many interactivity.

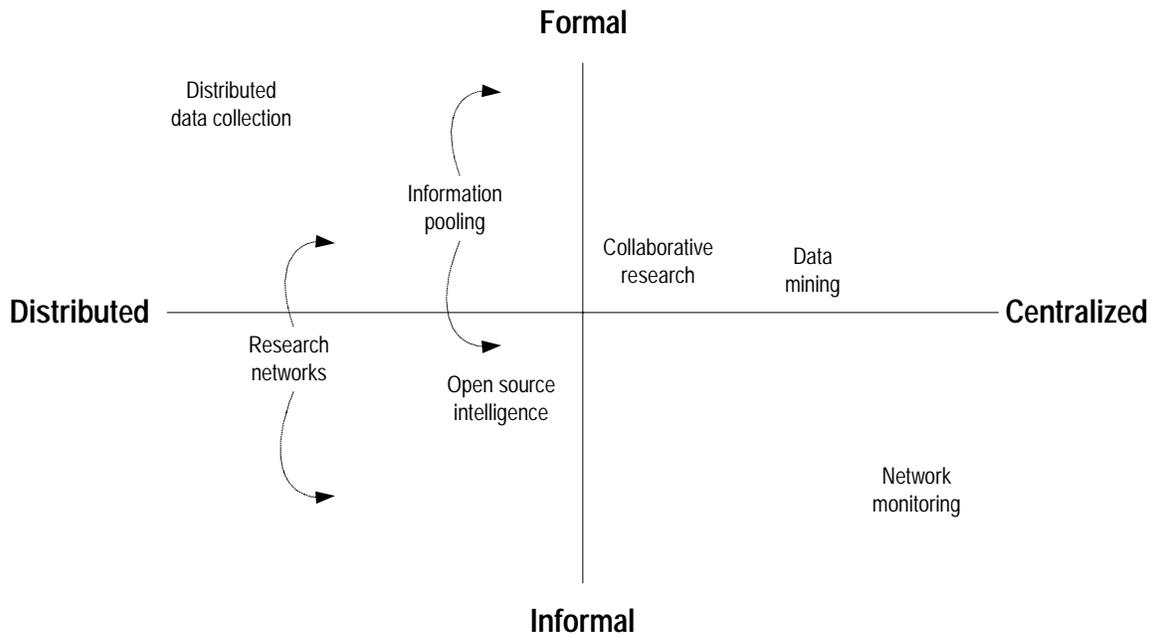
There have also been many attempts to ‘virtualize’ traditional campaign and protest models. Virtual sit-ins, online ribbon campaigns, online petitions, virtual benefits, website boycotts. To some degree, organizations are using campaigns like these as a gimmick to get users to pay attention. The logic goes like this: ‘these are easy to comprehend and proven campaign concepts, so we know they will work, and people will pay attention and participate’. Sometimes, this has been true, and other times not. In either case, it is important to note that these techniques tend to be used as a part of the broader e-mail campaign strategies described above. For many organizations, the primary reason for setting up an online petition or virtual sit-in is not to directly effect social change but rather to recruit members and add names to e-mail distribution lists.

The other activist technique that has moved online is that of civil disobedience and disruption. Often labeled under the broad concept of hacktivism (The Hacktivist.com, 2002/2003) – the melding of the techniques of hackers and the politics of activists – this area of activity is more about high profile protest

than actual mobilization. At the most obvious level, it includes the playful defacing of corporate and government web sites as well as disruption of web site operations through domain grabbing and detail of service attacks. It also blends into areas such as counter corporate activism and censorship evasion. The intent isn't to harm, but to demonstrate, and in this sense, defacing a website is akin to hanging a banner on the side of a building. Despite claims by corporate media and politicians, hacktivists are not the virtual equivalent of the Unabomber – they are much more like radical pranksters trying to make a point.

Looking across all these techniques, it is clear that online mobilization and activism have all of the diversity of their offline counterparts. As the following diagram illustrates, there are clearly differences and tensions in the online activism world:

**Figure 8: Types of online observation**



A key tension here – as in the broader world of activism – is between centralized, hierarchal approaches and fluid, flat, decentralized approaches. This is exemplified by move towards centralized e-membership and e-newsletter tools by big NGOs, while smaller, more grassroots groupings tend to be staying with open mailing lists. There is also a tension between ‘legitimate’ protest such as online petitions and techniques such as domain grabbing that are clearly meant as playful disruption yet are nonetheless illegal.

### **Case #1: Organizing against the MAI**

The Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) debate, which was a precursor to Seattle, provided an early backdrop for three trends: the globalization of civil society, the use of Internet as a protest platform, and the used of the Internet to force better access to information and participation in a closed process. Here it is an important historical example – it is important because the MAI was very representative of globalization – and in battling against it, civil society itself became global. In particular, it used the Internet as a base through which to develop a set of overlapping protest platforms. It is also important because it was one of the first times where transnational civil society met with success in achieving its objectives. And what's more, through this success, transnational civil society forced international negotiators to recognize them as a force, and to become more transparent and participatory in their processes.

Developed in a stop and start manner through the 1990s, the OECD's MAI aimed to facilitate international investment by ensuring that host governments treat foreign and domestic firms similarly. With early reaction against the agreement from Southern countries, the OECD began formal discussion behind closed doors in 1995. In February 1997, an early draft was leaked to *Public Citizen*, Ralph Nader's DC based public interest group. He published it on the web, and an "ambush" ensued in which "600 organizations in 70 countries [began] expressing vehement opposition to the treaty, often in apocalyptic terms" (Kobrin, 1998) This began a period of protest that lasted until the negotiations were terminated in 1998.

Kobrin (1998) notes that "the anti-MAI forces could not take all the credit for tabling the talks; the participants' inability to agree also played an important role." But, it can be argued that without civil society protest, these hurdles would have been overcome eventually, one way or another. By making the negotiations public, transnational civil society pre-empted the possibility of an eventual deal. This process was intimately tied in with networking – especially online networking. In April 1998, Toronto's *Globe and Mail* wrote: "The success of that networking was clear this week when ministers from the 29 countries in the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development admitted that the global wave of protest had swamped the deal. 'This is the first successful Internet campaign by non-governmental organizations,' said one diplomat involved in the negotiations. 'It's been very effective'" (Drohan, 1998).

As the MAI demonstrates, networked technologies have given civil society organizations the tools they need to collaborate globally on political actions and campaigns. "The battle was waged primarily on the World Wide Web, where not only successive drafts of the MAI but also accompanying analyses, position papers, fact sheets, and calls to action were posted on websites." And "networking relationships ... were relatively weak and loosely defined at best. However, although each organization essentially pursued its own "MAI agenda" and engaged the agreement on its own terms, implicit cross-pollination of ideas did occur. This was evidenced particularly by the way in which information and analysis produced by the various protesting NGOs was extensively linked via their websites" (Warkentin and Mingst, 2000).

The Internet provided a platform that allowed civil society organizations to knowingly (and sometimes unknowingly) frame the MAI issue in an implicitly collaborative-way, playing off of each other's analysis. The messages from this process were clear and simple. Economic globalization has gone too far. Corporations have too much power. Globalization compromises national sovereignty. With both the Internet and these messages in hand, civil society was able to present a complex process in a digestible way that would make the issue relevant to the general public. Kobrin (1998) writes: "The reason that opposition to the MAI has been so successful is that the treaty has been presented on the Internet in terms that are immediate, meaningful, and threatening to a very large number of disparate individuals and groups." In this sense, the MAI case is about civil society outmanoeuvring its opponents in terms of reaching out to the public. The opposition combined simple, direct language with simple, accessible technologies. In contrast, the OECD stuck to technical economic discourse.

The Internet also had an important impact in terms of bringing the immediacy of campaigns home. In an interview with the *Globe and Mail*, Council of Canadians Chairwoman and MAI, campaigner Maude Barlow said: "We are in constant contact with our allies in other countries, if a negotiator says something to someone over a glass of wine, we'll have it on the Internet within an hour, all over the world" (Drohan, 1998). Many believe that this increased speed of information flow forced the OECD to be more transparent, eventually leading to the downfall of the talks. "The days of negotiating international treaties behind closed doors are numbered, if not over. A much broader range of groups will have to be included in the globalization debate, and much more thought will have to be given to how non-participants will interpret international negotiations and agreements" (Kobrin, 1998).

The MAI provides an example of how – with a clear target – collaborative mobilization can happen. It is also worth noting that the MAI campaign relied on very simple technologies – private e-mail lists, simple web sites. The strategic use of the technology flowed not from the latest new gadget, but from smart use of

things like e-mail to make strong people to people connections and share information widely. The fact that it all started with use of Internet to leak one key document, shows how big an impact the Internet can have on mobilization.

From this increased speed of information flow and ease of collaboration arises a question about the true meaning of “global action”. Capling and Nossal (2001) argue that, while distance has been reduced by information technologies, local factors still hold sway. For example, in the case of the Seattle protests, they argue that Australian support was not as strong because trade is not a particularly important local issue in Australia, and also, because Seattle is far away. The MAI, however, was different. Here Australian support was strong, because Australians perceived it as a flawed initiative that would impact them. This raises questions about the equity of global movements. Are they truly global, or are certain groups more interested in the issues than others? Are certain groups better represented than other?

## **Case #2: Organizing Seattle**

As mentioned previously, successful mobilization in the Internet era does not mean the abandonment of offline protest and campaigns. In fact, there has been a close relationship between the Internet and the mass anti-corporate protests we have seen in recent years. From Seattle to Genoa to Cancun, networked technologies have played a key role in mobilization. So much so that some argue that the Net has helped to shape and define these movements. As Naomi Klein writes: “... the communications technology that facilitates these campaigns is shaping the movement in its own image. Thanks to the Net, mobilizations unfold with sparse bureaucracy and minimal hierarchy; forced consensus and laboured manifestos are fading into the background, replaced by a culture of constant, loosely structured and sometimes compulsive information swapping” (Klein, 2000). The simplistic portrayal of such protests as 'street protests' by the media, belie their true nature: a complex conglomerate of offline and online protest.

The now famous World Trade Organization (WTO) protests in Seattle provide an excellent example of this nexus between online and offline organizing. From November 29 to December 3, 1999, Seattle, Washington was host the Third WTO Ministerial Conference. In the minds of many, the meeting was a natural extension of the MAI negotiations, which had collapsed in 1998. “The collapse of the MAI negotiations in 1998 raised the fear that the issue of devising rules for investment would simply be passed over to the World Trade Organization, which was scheduled to meet in Seattle in November 1999 to launch a new round of global negotiations. For many anti-MAI activists, opposing a new round under WTO auspices was thus a natural and logical extension of the campaign against the MAI” (Capling and Nossal, 2001). Building on the success of the anti-MAI movement, NGOs, unions, students, anarchists and activists of all descriptions began to organize against the Seattle meeting.

Under the code N30 (November 30) a series of actions were organized using the Internet. Organizing included both web sites and e-mail. The web site, "A Global Day of Action" (<http://www.seattlewto.org/N30/>) called for action in ten different languages and provided a directory of local contacts all over the world. It included slogans like: "Resistance, and Carnival against Global Capitalist System" or "May our resistance be as transnational as capital" (Baldi, 1999). The organizing was broad based, inclusive and heavily online. “It is evident that the whole appeal was based on an extensive use of IT. It is also interesting to note that the aim was to gather as many groups as possible in the protest. Even the wide range of local initiatives suggested is a clear sign of the wish to enlarge and diffuse the protest as much as possible” (Baldi, 1999).

The Internet also facilitated and supported a diversity of opinion amongst those who protested. A comparison between the ‘official’ protest site and a counter site illustrates this well. After the talks failed and the streets were cleared, the official site ([www.wtoseattle.org](http://www.wtoseattle.org)) stated: “We applaud the peaceful demonstrations carried out by thousands in our city - which is a tradition in Seattle. We deeply regret what happened in our city streets as a result of the actions of the very few who were not peaceful. We support the Mayor and the Seattle Police Department who exhibited great patience and restraint in an effort to

preserve the rights of citizens to freely express their views in public, and took action when events began to infringe upon those who live and work here.” Clearly poking fun and criticizing the official protest site, the following statement was posted on counter site [www.seattlewto.org](http://www.seattlewto.org): “The World Trade Organization held its latest ministerial in Seattle, Washington the week of November 29<sup>th</sup>, 1999. The meeting ended at an impasse after the negotiations broke down on Friday, December 3<sup>rd</sup>. Representatives from developing nations stated that the people that filled the streets of Seattle to demand representation and accountability gave them the strength to stand up for their country’s rights.”

The web and e-mail were used to build up a corpus of research, criticism and opinion about the WTO. For example, Global Exchange published the top 10 reasons to oppose the WTO. The WTO responded with their own information campaign: “The WTO website included links to a number of critical sites so that users of the WTO site from around the world can see the differing opinions for themselves. At the same time, the WTO attempted to discredit those accusations which they considered to be based on incorrect information or downright falsehoods” (Baldi, 1999). Alternative media also played a key role. GlobalizeThis.org had live web cams of the protests. World Trade Watch radio did live radio broadcasts five times a day about events. And of course, Indymedia was set up by a series of organisations such as Free Speech TV, Deep Dish TV, Radio for Peace International, Paper Tiger TV, Free Radio Berkeley and Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting. This combination of alternative opinion and reaction from the WTO and mainstream press demonstrated that “...the movements and organisations engaged in the protest succeeded in their objective of stimulating public debate on globalization and its effect on society and the planet” (Baldi, 1999).

As with MAI, one of the strengths of the Seattle protests – and subsequent events – has been their distributed, diverse, network-like nature. Klein and others have referred to this as the ‘hub and spokes’ model of organizing. “What emerged on the streets of Seattle and Washington was an activist model that mirrors, the organic, decentralised, interlinked pathways of the internet – the internet come to life. Just as the internet has been described as a network of hubs and spokes, so the protests have adopted this model” (Klein, 2000). In the specific example of Seattle, opposition to the WTO formed the hub while the dozens of different movements, issues and organizations formed the spokes.

While the mainstream media and politicians point to this as a weakness, many see it as strength. Klein (2000) writes: “The decentralised nature of these campaigns is not a source of incoherence and fragmentation, but a reasonable, even ingenious adaptation to the changes in the broader culture.” She goes on to point out that, with the explosion of NGOs and other groups since the 1992 Earth Summit, there is no other way to accommodate the diversity of civil society than through a hub and spoke organizing model. For better or for worse: “It is a surfer’s approach to activism, reflecting the Internet’s paradoxical culture of extreme narcissism coupled with an intense desire for external connection” (Klein, 2000). It is without question that this decentralized approach led to the mass turnout and media attention in Seattle. By extension, the use of the net also fed into the cancellation of the trade talks. Capling and Nossal (2001) say: “In this, the protesters were largely successful. Thousands of people made their way to Seattle for the protests, and those numbers made a difference to the way in which the ministerial unfolded.”

However, the intervening four years have shown us, the Seattle protests have not given us a ‘magic mobilization machine’. Organizing events like Seattle remains hard work, and turning such events into a clear political vision even harder. “There is no question that the communication culture which reigns on the net is better at speed and volume than at synthesis. It is capable of getting tens of thousands of people to meet on the same street corner, placards in hand, but it is far less adept at helping those same people to agree on what they are really asking for before they get to the barricades – or after they leave” (Klein, 2000). In May 2000, for example, the Czech president, Vaclav Havel, offered to mediate talks between the World Bank and protests at the Banks September 2000 meeting. But there was no consensus among protest organizers around participation, representation and the decision-making process in the negotiations-

What is next in terms of the interplay between networked technologies and protests like Seattle? Certainly, activists and organizers continue to increase the sophistication of technologies used. And, as open source tools that reflect the values and approaches of protest movements emerge, this sophistication will grow even further. Mobile phones and place based mapping technologies like GPS are also likely to play a role.

### **Case #3: Biwater Censorship Case**

While the MAI and Seattle cases could be seen as new iterations of traditional mobilization techniques, one place where networked technologies have clearly enabled new forms of mobilization is in relation to 'internet issues'. Online campaigns including the fight against Intel's Pentium III processor and electronic personal serial number (PSN) by privacy advocates (Leizerov, 2000), the "Haunting" of GeoCities to protest Yahoo's changes in copyright policy (McCaughey and Ayers, 2003), and many others, have used the rapid organizing and media production capabilities of the Internet to create and win purely online campaigns. Through attention grabbing online tactics, these groups managed to reverse corporate decisions in a few short days, as business interests scrambled to avoid negative press. These examples demonstrate that online issues are often best dealt with in an online context.

A good civil society example online response to an online threat is an event that has become known as the 'Biwater Censorship Case'. Biwater PLC is a privately owned British corporation specializing in water privatization. In the late 1990s, Biwater was trying to take control of a number of water concessions in South Africa. Many in South Africa, including the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU), believed that privatizing the water supply would reduce public access to water, especially in poorer communities. They also saw BiWater itself as a threat; it had a particularly bad corporate reputation especially since it was involved with tying weapons to aid during Margaret Thatcher's leadership. A number of organizations had publicly criticized Biwater on this account, including SAMWU, South Africa's *Mail and Guardian* newspaper, and the LabourNet.org web site.

In April 1998, this run-of-the-mill criticism of a corporation by a collection of civil society and media organizations turned into a major internet censorship case. Feeling that it did not want to be publicly criticized, Biwater threatened legal action against the non-profit Internet service providers (ISPs) which hosted the LabourNet and *Mail and Guardian* web sites. CorporateWatch (1998) wrote at the time: "GreenNet, the Internet service provider for LabourNet, a UK labor news website, and SangoNet, the provider for the South African newspaper, the Weekly Mail and Guardian, have both been threatened with legal action by the global corporation in recent weeks." The ISPs were told that they had seven days to remove SAMWU press releases and the *Mail and Guardian* article's criticisms of Biwater or they would face legal action. Unable to afford an expensive legal battle, both ISPs complied with the legal request.

Interestingly, the removal of the pages turned out to be the beginning of the fight against Biwater rather than the end. LabourNet webmaster Chris Baily immediately called on activists to use the Internet to fight back against BiWater's use of restrictive libel laws to throttle democratic debate: "Biwater has the power of money, we have the power of the Internet. We must use this to the full. The pages forced from the Internet by legal threats and intimidation must be given a much wider audience than they would otherwise have had, by disseminating them as widely as possible. This is our ultimate defence of Internet democracy" (Bailey, 1999). Two European ISPs dedicated to working with civil society – Antenna in the Netherlands and Inform in Denmark – responded quickly to the call. Like GreenNet and SangoNet, these two ISPs were members of the Association for Progressive Communications (APC), a global network of organizations promoting the strategic use of networked technologies by civil society. Antenna and Inform believed that the best way to show solidarity with both LabourNet and their fellow APC members was to mirror the removed pages on their own servers. This meant that the pages were still accessible to the public but they were not housed within the British or South African jurisdictions where the cease and desist orders had been served

Realizing that a few mirror ISPs could face the same fate as GreenNet and SangoNet, a multitude of activists soon joined the fight. Another eight APC members agreed to mirror the Biwater material, spreading the articles across servers in Europe and the Americas. With a legal challenge against this distributed group almost impossible, Biwater sent no more letters on the issue.

As CorporateWatch (1998) pointed out at the time, the implications of this case could have been quite wide reaching. “The Biwater case is of particular concern, because a large corporation is seeking to chill speech and undermine opposition by virtue of its economic might.” By quickly mobilizing other Internet activists willing to work against censorship, LabourNet and the APC were able to fight back against this economic might and show that truth is not shut down so easily. Reflecting back on the case in an article written in 2000, Chris Baily wrote: “Biwater’s attempt to censor Internet debate on an issue of public interest was successfully opposed and seriously backfired on them. The article they tried to remove was widely reproduced and publicised in many countries around the world with no legal action taken anywhere” (Bailey, 2000).

However, the Biwater case was far from a permanent or global victory. Clearly, there is a need for a more enduring ability to respond to these kinds of censorship threats. Baily (2000) says: “The Biwater case highlighted a need for a core international network of websites to be able to come quickly to the defence of threatened content. It showed there is considerable strength in numbers, particularly when support is spread widely around the world.” In 1999, APC set up the Rapid Response Network to provide this kind of defence through automated mirroring. This network has since helped with a number of other cases, including a 2002 attack on Korean labour news web sites (APC, 2000). Unfortunately, this has not stopped the libel attacks. APC member GreenNet still regularly receives cease and desist letters under UK libel law and is often forced to take pages down.

## **Conclusion**

Mobilization is about getting people to act – to come out on the street, to volunteer their time, to give money to a cause. As civil society organizations increasingly rely on networked technologies to catalyze these actions, a number of questions arise. Does e-mail-based mobilization empower organizations and reinforce hierarchy? Can online actions have the same impact of other forms of protest? Does the nature of online tools shape and limit the kind of collaborative action we can take?

### ***Appropriation – shape or be shaped***

The question with technology is often one of 'shape or be shaped'. Using it out of the box, activities and approaches are often narrowed by the implied logic of the tool itself. Starting with strategic uses in mind, it is often possible mold technology to your needs and wishes. Spanning the realm from expensive e-marketing databases to fluid, do-it-yourself hacktivism, online mobilization provides an excellent backdrop against which to observe this basic tension between 'adoption' and 'appropriation'.

As noted above, one of the major trends in online mobilization is the integration of e-mail with membership and advocacy tracking databases. These tools – which are built on a model similar to corporate e-marketing systems – hold a great deal of potential. They make it easier to target messages based on the interests of supporters, track the success of campaigns and leverage social capital through techniques such as friendraising. Yet amidst all of this potential, the question is rarely asked: how are these tools shaping mobilization? There is no question that such tools lend themselves to the hierarchal structure of traditional, large-scale NGOs and political campaigns. They work off of centralized lists, costs hundreds or even thousands of dollars per month to operate and lend themselves to one-way, broadcast style communications. While these characteristics are not inherently bad – there is a time and a place for large scale, professional campaigning – there is a real risk that these tools begin to shape our overall definition of online mobilization. If this were to happen, it is possible that flexible and fluid online campaigns like the MAI would become a thing of the past.

Of course, this only happens if e-marketing tools become a monoculture, representing the only platform on which online mobilization happens. Certainly, these tools have garnered a lot of attention recently, especially in North America. Yet they have far from replaced the e-mail lists and simple web sites that have provided an online organizing platform for sites like Seattle. Similarly, actions such as we saw in the BiWater case – where creative, progressive techies turn mainstream tools such as mirroring software to political ends – continue to take place around us. And, emerging platforms such as *blogs* and mobile phone text messaging are being shaped into protest and mobilization tools. In these simpler and more organic examples, there is evidence that civil society organizations will further shape networked technologies to support distributed, grassroots mobilization.

### ***Impact – e-mailing into a vacuum?***

Impact is a perennial question with any kind of mobilization or activism. What will people respond to? What is the right tactic for a given issue or situation? What is the real political or organizational impact of a particular set of actions? These questions are even more important with online mobilization as we are in the midst of defining and shaping the approaches that we will take into the future.

At the level of 'participation', the impact of online mobilization has been clear – online tools can help to bring people out to actions or encourage them to send a letter to their politicians. This was demonstrated by Seattle and countless other protests against corporate led globalization. Northern sites such as MoveOn.org and other 'e-mail you politician' sites also illustrate this point. If the aim is simply to get people to respond, then online mobilization tools are unquestionably a useful part of an organizer's toolkit.

Yet the question of real political impact – and by extension whether online tools are right for the job – remains. Certainly, there are stories of online campaigns putting an issue on the radar of politicians and bureaucrats. In some small part, this is what happened with the MAI. However, there is increasing anecdotal evidence that e-mail campaigns are ignored by decision makers. In November 2002, the New York Times ran an article with the lead: "Flooded With Comments, Officials Plug Their Ears" (Seelye, 2002). The article explains how the US Department of the Interior decided to ignore 360,000 e-mail messages against letting snowmobiles into Yellowstone Park because they were not 'original' comments.

On the surface, the fact that e-postcards and similar messages are being sent straight to the trash puts the value of these tools into question. There is, however, a question of objectives here. If an organization's objective is to directly stop or change a policy, then e-mail campaigning is probably the wrong tool – at least used on its own. But if the aim is to mobilize, create awareness and build relationships with supporters then these tools still hold a great deal of potential. The initial awareness created through e-campaigns can be used to get people to then phone or go to the offices of key politicians. Similarly, the e-mail addresses collected through e-campaigns can be used to invite people out to a real world protest. In the end, it is these more literal forms of 'mobilization' – and not lobbying or policy change – that seem to work best online.

### ***Collaboration – of friends and enemies***

Online mobilization also raises questions about differences between collaborating against an 'enemy' and collaborating to find a solution. With Seattle and the MAI, the process of online collaboration seemed easy. In fact, with so many online organizing efforts happening at once, it is not an exaggeration to say that some groups were collaborating with each other without even knowing it. The reason for this is fairly clear – both the enemy (the WTO) and the goal (getting people on the street for a single day) were clear to all concerned. Using the Internet to collaborate such an effort did not require everyone involved to follow the same strategy or party line. In fact, it is unquestionably the diversity of groups who were organizing online and on the ground that led to the success of Seattle. The question is, can collaborative online

mobilization work this effectively for more positive messages? Will we see examples of online mobilization 'for' something? Or, is collaborative online mobilization only useful as a tool of opposition?

## 6. Observation

Network technologies have opened up a whole new world of research and intelligence gathering to civil society organizations. Not only is more information available, but also the information revolution has led to a push for more transparency on the part of governments and corporations. At least to some degree, this has meant that information that was once hard to find is now available within seconds online. As such, the Internet has become a useful tool for monitoring developments in any given field. The challenge is to develop strategies to deal with information overload – to separate the wheat from the chaff in an ongoing and sustainable manner. Some groups have also begun to use the Internet to facilitate ‘observatories’ that track key indicators and support comparative research in areas like policy development. Others use network technologies to process policy-relevant data such as the status of landmine survivors, or the details of genocide.

One of the most significant ‘observational’ benefits of networked technologies is faster and lower cost access to basic intelligence. A simple example of this is corporate annual reports and government statistics that were once difficult to access yet are now online for anyone to access from anywhere. Similarly, access to research and information produced by other civil society organizations is in most cases more accessible than it was in the past. While this deluge of information brings its own problems, there is no question that – armed with Google – we are able to ‘see’ more widely, broadly and quickly than we could in the past. But while access has grown, this growth has been uneven. As is commonly pointed out, language of publication can be a barrier to information access. Also, formal research is often more available to Northern civil society organizations than it is to Southern groups.

Deeper, and in many ways more impressive, than our simple ability to observe and search is the emergence of often quite informal collective intelligence networks within civil society. These networks allow us to tap into intelligence sources much richer than any corporate or government web site – each other. The thousands of information sharing mailing lists that pervade civil society life provide an excellent example on this. On such lists, small groups of trusted peers and colleagues simply post links to new articles or observations about goings on in relation to a particular issue. Such electronic conversations are so commonplace now that we take them for granted. However, they are astounding as a form of communal radar and shared intelligence. They not only help us hear about events and articles we might not have heard of, but also they reveal to us – often subconsciously – knowledge of trends, directions and patterns. At some level, we come to know ‘what is going on’ through immersion in these online spaces.

This is valuable in many ways, including the fact that it allows civil society organizations to learn of emerging issues early on. And this can help groups to identify windows of opportunity for policy advocacy. In turn, there is an opportunity to frame issues and to test them out with peers. This process of early framing is significant where policy making and advocacy are a concern, since the framing of an issue often determines the range of potential solutions that are considered by decision makers. Another clear benefit of this form of collective intelligence is collaborative filtering. When information sharing lists work well, people only include the most relevant, best and useful materials, by extension filtering out the noise of the Internet.

Networked technologies have also been a boon in the realm of more formal civil society research. Certainly, researchers and academics have a long tradition of collaborating with each other. However, the Internet has both made certain kinds of collaboration easier and made new things possible. For example, there has been a tremendous growth in the number of virtual civil society research networks. These networks are able to do everything from loosely connect peers (Global Knowledge Development mailing list) to facilitate the exploration of a particular issue (Somos@Telecentros) to act as a platform for the development of theoretical frameworks and indicators (OLISTICA). The idea of collaboratively generating research frameworks and indicators is particularly interesting, as it holds the potential to bring

the people who will use the final data into the research process at an early stage. At least in theory, the data emerging from such a process will have more value in terms of the political and policy work.

Networked technologies also have the potential to make it easier for civil society organizations to collect data at a global level. As civil society aims to play an increasingly important role in policy making, there is need for hard data to support positions – data that asks questions from the right angle. Using a traditional approach, this data would need to be collected through an expensive and centralized process. However, networked and decentralized approaches to data collection are emerging – such as the collection of quantitative data around landmines and genocide or the collection of qualitative data through case studies or storytelling. This data needed not, and possibly should not, be collected by a single organization. According to Harper (2001): “By forming alliances with Southern researchers in academic institutions or NGOs, and by using Northern expertise widely, NGOs can influence the flow of resources and ideas across the globe.”

With data produced through such networks and alliances, it is possible to make arguments more convincingly and credibly than in the past. When done well, the data collected through this kind of approach has significant political currency. It can influence governments, bolster policy arguments and flag areas where urgent action may be needed. It can also be used by large international civil society organizations in court cases, or to bring pressure against national governments by demonstrating a systematic case. The global campaign to ban landmines illustrates provides an example of this, with data collected using distributed methods was key in making the case that led to the 1997 Mine Ban Treaty.

Distributed data collection can allow dozens, hundreds or thousands of people around the world to observe and document things like landmine locations, human rights abuses or genocide. This kind of research typically uses simple yet secure web forms that allow participants to enter data at the collection end of the process. Analysis is done in real time using a private web site with access to the database or offline at various intervals using traditional statistical analysis software. This research technique not only lowers costs and increases currency of data, but it also provides the potential to gather data directly from sources that were almost impossible to access in the past – the people actually facing a particular threat or crisis. In some ways, distributed data collection can facilitate research that was literally impossible before.

Of course, new techniques for research and intelligence gathering using networked technologies have brought their share challenges and opportunities for civil society. One of the biggest and most widely recognized issues is simply information overload. As more organizations produce more information, it is hard for most people to know where to start – or possibly more importantly, where to stop. Graham Meikle (2002) writes in his book *Future Active*: “... the Net is not a soft option for activists. Making the most of its potential demands serious skills - not in state-of-the-art design or animation, but in information management and provision. ... First, there can be simply too much information to absorb. Second, information can be so poorly organised that finding any particular piece of information becomes impossible.”

One cause of this problem is the emphasis of data collection over analysis – we have created information producing culture and not an information synthesis culture. As Naomi Klein writes in an article on the role of the Internet at Seattle: “There is no question that the communications culture which reigns on the net is better at speed and volume than synthesis” (Klein, 2000). We are producing more and more data – statistics, case studies, best practices. However, we often see this information thrown out to the world in a fairly raw form with no analysis or even explanation of the framework in which the information can be understood. Similarly, information gathered is often not organized or catalogued in ways that will make it easy and intuitive for people to find it. More often than not, NGOs seem to throw important documents up online with little thought to how they will be found within their web sites or how they will be indexed in search engines.

Another challenge with online research and intelligence gathering is credibility and sustainability. Information produced by civil society is often put into question no matter how it is gathered. According to Edwards, qualitative research undertaken by civil society organizations often lacks credibility because of inherent biases and a perceived lack of research skills (Edwards, 1997). It is conceivable that this issue of credibility may be exacerbated if information is gathered or published exclusively online.

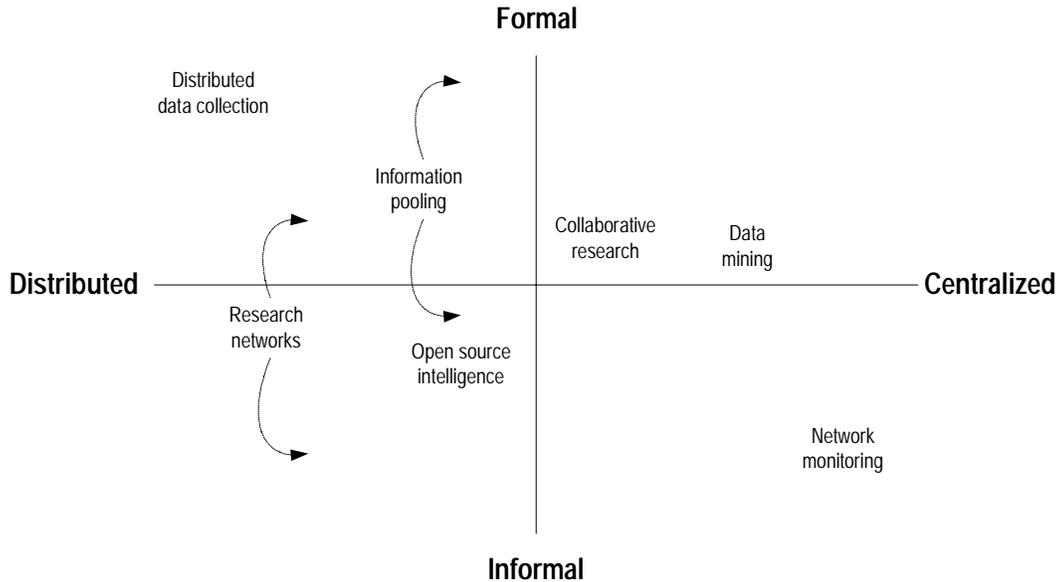
Also, some kinds of online research – often the most useful and credible – are costly to sustain. Certainly, collecting information about landmines or reports about genocide over the Internet is more cost effective than other method by far. However, this kind of research still costs something – especially if you want to ensure consistent data quality over a significant period of time. Often, as things get easier or cheaper than they were in the past, we assume that they are virtually free. This is far from the case, especially with the more organized and formal aspects of online observation. Distributed data collection is still resource intensive – technical skills, promotion, volunteer coordination, quality assurance and other elements are essential to success.

### **What is online observation?**

When we speak of ‘observation’, we are talking of a broad range of activities that span from research to intelligence gathering. A very common form of online observation within civil society sector is the collection and pooling of information. This includes the sort of peer mailing lists and research networks described above that feed into informal collective intelligence networks. It also includes more constructed and conscious efforts at ‘open source intelligence’ – “... the application of collaborative principles developed by the Open Source Software movement to the gathering and analysis of information” (Stalder and Hirsh, 2002). Often, these efforts are hard to tell apart from publishing and collaboration activities. The process of observation is a mix of conversation and posting information online – the creation of collective intelligence through social and information transactions. Perhaps the difference lays in how deliberate the effort is to collect and/or synthesize a particular body of information.

As outlined above, networked technologies have introduced other forms of observation that go far beyond information pooling. The Internet has opened up doors to whole new kinds of research including distributed data collection, collaborative research design and virtual participatory research. Equally important, it has created a platform for more frequent and constant contact amongst researchers. New research networks now pop up regularly, often spanning boundaries between civil society and academia. It is also worth mentioning that the Internet has enabled network monitoring and other forms of ‘stealth research’ that move civil society from a position of being watched to watching back. These types of observation can be best understand by looking at them as a spectrum of interrelated practices:

Figure 8: Types of online observation



As this diagram illustrates, the concept ‘virtual observation’ encompasses a wide diversity of activity. Certainly, there are very formal efforts such as distributed data collection that – in order to gain credibility – are tightly controlled and planned. Often, these techniques are grounded within traditional ideas about research design. In contrast, the concept of collective intelligence is inherently informal and fluid. As depicted on the diagram, research networks sit on the line between formal and informal. This is more because – in practice – they span the whole spectrum of formality and not because all research networks belong in this neutral zone. Finally, it is worth noting that almost all of the observational tools and techniques shown here fall on the ‘many’ side of the diagram. The potential of the Internet as a research tool is most often in areas where collaboration is helpful (research networks) or even required (distributed research).

### Case #1 - OLISTICA

There are many networks out there that bring researchers, practitioners and activists together in thematic groups to discuss common interests or exchange ideas. In many ways this is the extension of the annual conference, which has a long tradition of connecting people and facilitating the sharing of ideas. Just as those annual conferences may have spawned collaborative projects in the past, we are beginning to see this happening through online networks as well. In this sense, for transnational civil society organizations, the Internet can serve as a tool to facilitate collaborative research on a regional or global level. This is about moving beyond the collection or pooling of studies produced independently at the national level, to the realization of coordinated qualitative observation at the regional or global level, so that the combined surveillance powers of the network can be compared across countries and emerging trends can be identified. Like networks of bird watchers that track bird migration patterns, a network of policy observers could bring together the combined experiences of people across a broad region.

There are a couple of potential benefits to realizing observation in this way. First, it has the potential to address the alienation of knowledge from the community by formal academic structures. That is, if networks are plugging into the community, people who need the knowledge can help define and create it. This may make information more visceral for people, and more related to their reality. It is also possible that this way of creating information can distribute the costs of research, which may make the identification of regional trends more attainable for civil society organizations. But it is safe to say that

regional networked qualitative civil society research, while it may hold out lots of promise, it is definitely still in its infancy.

A good example of this kind of collaborative work is the Latin American Observatory of the Social Impact of Information and Communications Technologies (Observatorio Latinoamericano del Impacto Social de las Tecnologías de Información y Comunicación) or OLISTICA for short. What the OLISTICA project attempted to do was realize a comparative study of Internet Policy in several countries in Latin America. The project used an existing regional listserv called MISTICA (Methodology and Social Impact of the Information and Communication Technologies in America) as a base for these efforts. MISTICA, which started in 1998, is the major forum to discuss on social elements of the emerging Internet in Latin America. It has a couple of unique features, including the fact that the listserv is auto-translated into 4 languages, and the MISTICA website which serves as a clearinghouse for documents produced by members of the list. The Network and Development Foundation (FUNREDES in Spanish), of the Dominican Republic runs both of these projects.

During a 2-year period starting in 2000, OLISTICA had as its goal to harness the MISTICA community to realize collaborative policy monitoring and public policy advocacy. The idea was to form an observatory, consisting of a community of civil society actors and experts, which would monitor the impact of national and regional Internet policy in Latin America. According to Daniel Pimienta (2003) the ultimate objective of the project was “to transform the observatory into the obligatory consultation space for governments – with a sufficient number of observations, we could have had a sort of ‘hit parade’ of the public policies and social visions of the various countries -- and maybe, being classified as below the standard in this hit parade could have created pressure for change (and vice versa – the policies of the highly classified countries would have been a model for other countries).”

While this sounds straightforward in principle, the project was not a simple one, especially since they wanted it to be bottom-up and grounded in the reality of local communities. In order to do this, they set out to develop a new methodology to measure the impact of the Internet on communities. This methodology was to be developed through a process of local consultations in order to ensure that the indicators used for the research would be representative of the needs and desires of community members (rather than imposed from above by experts). Then, using these indicators, the network would realize a global analysis of the impact of the Internet on various communities and countries throughout the region. On the other end of things, a framework was also developed to analyze national Internet policies. With these two pieces of information in hand, it would be possible to identify the gap between what was being offered by Internet policies and what people in the community wanted. The overall idea of the project was this: if the indicators of impacts are developed by the community, then they have greater social validity and, therefore, more political impact. And overall, it was hoped that the results of the project would promote the socially responsible use of ICTs for development.

The kicker was the approach to be used for this complicated project. A major objective of OLISTICA was to experiment with innovative uses of Internet to facilitate research. According to Pimienta (2003) “The coordination wanted to use a Funredes concept of “proximity in distance” where intensive use of Internet would permit coordination almost as fluid as in a face-to-face situation.” And then, once the observatory was set up, the MISTICA community, driven by Internet, could be used to create a constant stream of data from the field. It was a very ambitious project – one that was perhaps ahead of its time. Unfortunately, the project did not meet many of its farsighted objectives. But the OLISTICA experience holds important lessons for transnational civil society.

The first task of the network was to establish and agree on a theoretical framework (that is, a common perspective), some categories of analysis (what exactly to look at), and a methodological framework (how to collect the data). Establishing these types of frameworks is necessary background work for producing solid results that can be compared across countries. This work went well, and, through an online

consultation in MISTICA, the group produced *Working the Internet with a Social Vision* (2002), which has become an important document for social researchers in Latin America.

Challenges started to arise with the observation of specific cases. An initial methodology was established to realize a baseline analysis of national Internet policies, and this framework was tested for the cases of the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, and Argentina. On the other end of things, the group began to develop a methodology for community consultation, and an initial survey of community leaders in Argentina was realized to identify Internet needs in that country. In the case of Argentina, therefore, the group began to look at the gap between what Internet policies were offering and what people on the ground were demanding from Internet.

But while these are significant advances, this was as far as the project got; in the end, the project didn't achieve many of the goals it had set out for itself – especially the very lofty goal of impacting ICT policy in a real way. Why did this happen? Two main issues were identified in the final reports of the project. The first problem was related to resources. It turned out to be a much more expensive and intensive process than the team had anticipated. According to Pimienta (2003) "... work in consortium is somewhat innovative and we learned that the cost is not zero. A consortium for a project of this nature with 6 members would receive in Europe a budget of EURO 1 million and 3-4 years. To do OLISTICA with 6 members and US\$150,000 was a difficult challenge."

The second issue revolved around online collaboration. In its self-evaluation, the OLISTICA team said (2003), "globally, we consider the results of OLISTICA to be insufficient. What was lacking was not so much the production of the observatory (methodologies and observations) but not having been able to articulate the planned network of observers, and, as a chain result, having had a level of interaction and feedback with the MISTICA virtual community that was much lower than was desired and desirable." In particular, there was a learning curve related to "the first experience of work in consortium, with all the difficulties that have resulting from adjusting work styles and cultures." And, with regard to the intensive Internet strategy, Pimienta (2003) says "This was possible for members [of the consortium] that had experience [with intensive Internet use], but was too demanding for other members." But overall, the team found that "the OLISTICA process has contributed notably to creating a collaborative culture and the members have learned to improve our capacity to work in consortium [...] The idea of creating an institution that regroups CSOs concerned about the social impact of ICTs has matured."

These two lessons – about resources and network collaboration – are important ones. The OLISTICA project demonstrates that observatories are expensive and labor intensive to establish. You need dedicated researchers on the ground, and they need to be kept on the same page as to what types of information they monitor. And there is a learning curve involved both in terms of process, and in terms of the subject matter, if quality results are to be produced. This case presents an example of just how sophisticated networked civil society efforts could be. And, this is arguably the type of work that needs to be done to support the realization of real impacts at the regional or global level. But, it is one thing to share documents through a list serve, it is quite another to analyze national ICT policy at the regional level using a collaboratively developed research framework. The Internet opens up all sorts of possibilities for transnational civil society, but turning these possibilities into realities is harder than most of us imagine.

## **Case #2 – Sarai / Waag Exchange**

Traditionally, we think of research as a very linear activity with clear goals, methods and outcomes. This is certainly the case with the OLISTICA case that we have just reviewed. With the Internet, we see much more fluid, open ended ideas about research and observation emerging. We see it in concepts like 'open

source intelligence' and collaborative filtering. We see it in e-mail based research networks that connect peers. And, in some ways, we see it in the open source world to where information and investigation flow freely around the often amorphous task of supporting and growing collectively owned software. In all of this, we see emerging something that calls itself research but that does not produce statistics, reports or even conclusions. The research is the network and the network is the research.

A good example of the is a project called the Sarai / Waag Exchange. The Exchange is a research partnership between two organizations – Sarai and the Waag Society – who share a mutual interest in the role of media in chaotic, shifting public spheres which are our cities. Sarai is a Delhi-based new media initiative housed within the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies. Sarai sits the nexus of media theory and practice. As written in a report on the Exchange: “At Sarai, exploring the new media landscape goes way beyond just mapping it and making the results available to all who care to know. Sarai also seeks to change that landscape by organizing workshops, media labs, speaking out on political aspects of media developments, and even providing ICT access in some of Delhi's poorest neighbourhoods” (Hegener, 2003). The Amsterdam-based Waag Society shares this interest in seeing media from a variety of angles, carrying out research, developing software and pointing out the connections between technology and culture. As stated on the Exchange web site: “The Waag Society is a knowledge institute operating on the cutting edge of culture and technology in relation to society, education, government and industry. ... The interplay of technology and culture is the driving force of all Waag Society's activities” (Sarai/Waag, 2000).

The Exchange is a research partnership and series of fellowships between the two organizations aimed at 'knowing' by being immersed in each others experiences, practices and locality. What is interesting about the Exchange is that – like much on the Internet – it is highly practical yet is not primarily aimed at producing specific outputs. As participant Michael Hegener writes about the project: “... in order to understand what makes the Exchange worthwhile, one simply has to accept that when two networks meet a lot of new networking will be generated, which in turn will lead to new ideas and actions - and that the Waag-Sarai Exchange is a good example” (Hegener, 2003). It is research through immersion and relationship -- the network is the research. The question is: what can such research create? Why should we care?

One thing that it can create is a social laboratory where, through immersion and practical experiments, one can explore issues that are sticky or even unresolvable using a distant and supposedly objective theoretical lens. In this regard, the Exchange has focused a great deal on the challenge of getting beyond old school development thinking, creating a partnership that is an balanced match between new media practitioners in two global cities. To the people involved, the equality is more than just an interesting experiment. In the words of Sarai's Hindi expert Rhavikan: "We are not into traditional development mode. It would be too presumptuous to think that Sarai or Waag Society can help other people develop. In Sarai's focus on opening up the public domain, there is an inbuilt critique of development” (Hegener, 2003). Instead of focusing on 'development' as the goal, the two organizations experiment with knowing and building together. People from Sarai go to Amsterdam to share information about grassroots Cybermohalla's (Keller, 2003), and people from The Waag travel to Delhi to share the concept of Tactical Media labs. Of course, simply sending people back and forth to speak does not undermine the development paradigm, but it does provide an opportunity experiment and reflect experience with a network that moves beyond old modes of thinking – something that the Exchange does quite well on its web site.

The informal, open ended research approach of the exchange also seems to lend itself to the exploration of realms that seem intangible to traditional researchers. Both Sarai and the Waag have an interest in the informal and constantly shifting concept of 'the public' that makes our cities. Experimental art. Youth culture. Cafes and places that people connect. While the Waag and Sarai themselves are very much 'organizations', much of the informal world in which they live falls outside of what many people consider to be civil society. As outlined in a report on the Exchange: “... our understanding of 'new' media derives from the particular historical configurations: these include those of innovation under conditions of large

scale inequality, creative uses of existing old media, and thriving informal networks in the societies of Asia, Africa and Latin America” (Hivos, 2003). Yet, it is in these more informal worlds that exist outside of business, government and NGOs where much the public sphere exists. Ravi Sundaram says that it was mutual interest in this idea of the public that led to the Exchange. “In Holland - at least in Amsterdam - more than in any European country, there has been a tradition of public initiatives. Setting up networks of your own. Building communities that are independent of the state. There also was public research, people investigating what is going on around them. That is why the idea of the Exchange started” (Hivos, 2003).

One discovery, however, is that these innovative and informal public new media worlds do not always translate between Delhi and Amsterdam. One of Sarai's most successful public initiatives is the creation of Cybermohalla computer centres, where people in poor neighbourhoods of Delhi records and communicate what is going on around them. “About fifteen women and some five men, most of them in their early twenties, turned barefoot journalists and report about their surroundings: their basti of dust, makeshift houses, corrugated iron, mud walls, narrow lanes, lots of petty trading, smoking fires, noisy roosters, crying babies, playing children and lots of people generally, that is in constant danger of being bulldozed because the entire settlement of a few thousand people is illegal, whatever that means. The main outlet of their work is a wall paper in Hindi that informs about the things the passers by may speak about, but about which they never read” (Hegener, 2003). In a report written in March 2003, participants in the Exchange mused about 'exporting' the Cybermohalla concept to Europe. On the surface, this seemed like a promising ideas. But when one of the people who had set up the first Delhi project went to Amsterdam, it was decided not to proceed with a European Cybermohalla experiment. This was partly because the political climate in the Netherlands did not lend itself to the introduction of new concepts, but also because a number of the ideas central to the Cybermohalla “would make it very difficult to reproduce in Amsterdam” (Keller, 2003).

Of course, many ideas have translated well between Delhi and Amsterdam. One of these is the passion for open source and open knowledge shared by Sarai and the Waag. As Sundaram states: “All our material goes into the public domain. We are building an archive, which anyone can access here, via the net or on CD. That is our mandate. Traditional research will produce a book, whereas we have a commitment to make everything very accessible” (Hegener, 2003). This interest led the Exchange to hold an 'open source and development cooperation' workshop in Amsterdam during the summer of 2003. Bringing together practitioners from both South and North, the workshop provided an opportunity to both learn about how open source is being used in a development context and to explore opportunities for collaboration. The workshop produced a manifesto which, among other things affirmed the importance of open source a platform that lends itself to the appropriation of technology. “The most significant advantage is the right to view and modify the source code as it enables anyone with the required skills to improve or modify such applications thus creating the possibility to tailor Open Source Software applications according to individual, regional or special needs” (Sarai/Waag, 2003).

Clearly, there can be value in the kind of open ended research partnership that Sarai and the Waag have developed. The potential is significant enough that others have asked to join the exchange and the partners have agreed to open it up, albeit cautiously. “On the basis of the experience of the exchange, the system of independent fellowships and the collaboration with worldwide non-exclusion initiatives, we would now like to initiate a process that works towards a multi-nodal understanding of the exchange in its next phase. By this we mean a process, which will go beyond the original partners, into support to a number of new initiatives. The Waag-Sarai Exchange will into transform to a Platform” (Hivos, 2003). This 'Exchange as platform' will explore issues such as: 'globalisation of media at the level of everyday life', 'media creativity and expression in unequal societies' and 'open networks and databases for knowledge and culture commons'. The process of expanding will happen slowly, with only one new organization – the Alternative Law Forum (ALF) joining in 2004. If this goes well, another organization may join in 2005 (Keller, 2003).

### Case #3 - Citizenlab

In many ways, the Internet is the great panopticon with the potential for all of us to be watched all of the time. But, in some small ways, there is a democracy in this panoptic effect – there is not only the threat of being watched but also the opportunity to take the role of watcher. While much still happens in secret, the Internet has increased transparency around certain kinds of information. It is possible to look at what your competitors or enemies are saying to their constituents and what they are saying about you. As outlined above, this can take simple forms such as accessing corporate annual reports and other documentation not intended for use by ‘opponents’ including activists and social movements. It can also take a more covert form, using the techniques of hackers to observe quietly from the shadows. This technique – which might be called network monitoring – is where hacktivism meets human rights monitoring.

Ronald Diebert’s Citizen Lab is involved in a number of network monitoring projects of this nature, including at least one that is actively aimed at supporting civil society organizations. According to its own web site: “Citizen Lab is an interdisciplinary laboratory based at the Munk Centre for International Studies at the University of Toronto, Canada focusing on advanced research and development at the intersection of digital media and world civic politics” (Citizen Lab web site). The Citizen Lab’s projects include the OpenNet Initiative – a project to explore the relationship between censorship, technology and resistance using a technical analysis of state-imposed content filtering, blocking and monitoring schemes – as well as sub-projects that provide software and platforms that monitor censorship at the network level.

Of particular interest is the Citizen Lab’s emerging NGO Secure Scan research project. “The NGO Secure Scan research project is based on a partnership between researchers at the Citizen Lab and world wide NGO’s in order to confidentially assess the current network security status of civil society networks, to detect when, where and how civil society networks are attacked, and to provide solutions to any vulnerabilities discovered within such networks in order to develop a strategy for securing civil society networks” (Citizen Lab web site). Put more simply, the project exists to help NGOs detect hackers and improve security on their networks. The aim of this work is to investigate anecdotal evidence that has been circulating about NGOs being subjected to hacker attacks. There are especially frequent mentions of these types of attacks on human rights organizations. For example, in January 2001, the Argentinean human rights group *las Madres de la Plaza del Mayo* reported being hacked for the third time and having information destroyed on their hard drives. The attacks were attributed to a group called *Jorge Videla* the name of a military official that was one of the heads of the 1976-1983 dictatorship which was responsible for between 15-30,000 disappearances (Unknown, Delitosinformaticos.com, 2001). It is not clear what the extent, type and timing of these types of attacks might be.

At a logistical level, Citizen Lab recruits NGOs in the South to act as project participants. Once an NGO has been recruited, there is a three step process of engaging them in the project (Diebert, 2003). First, Citizen Lab audits the NGO’s network security at a variety of levels -- operating system, servers, and management practices. Any vulnerabilities are then patched up. Finally, Citizen Lab, with the permission of the NGOs, puts in place tool that allows the network monitoring and intrusion detection. So far, Citizen Lab has gone through the first two steps of this process with a number of NGOs in Guatemala. In the near future, they will make a return visit to these NGOs to set up formal agreements for a partnership and to install the monitoring software.

According to Diebert (2003), the motivation for this project is that unchecked power and authority is problematic to democracy and therefore surveillance regimes are very threatening. The US, Canada, UK and Australia have led the way in establishing new legislation that increases government powers of surveillance. This has created an excuse for many other countries to follow suit, raising worries that NGOs doing sensitive work, such as human rights investigations, may be subjected to online surveillance. Diebert hopes this project can both help protect NGOs at a practical level while at the same time building up a body of knowledge about surveillance. The project will collect information over time, and in various different regions, and then run correlations between digital data and real world events. For example, if an

NGO releases a new report, does this correlate with an attack on their systems? In the longer term, the idea would be to use this study as a basis to develop a better understanding of the type of information that can be collected from networks, and to develop better metrics for monitoring NGO network activity. Results will also be published in academic journals, policy reports, and the mainstream media.

According to Diebert (2003), “My sense is that there is a growing recognition of the importance of the issue and as more NGOs get educated about information security risks, more will likely want to get involved.” While NGOs should be as concerned as the average person about information security in online communications, “... there are NGOs that work in particularly sensitive issues that likely require more diligence than others.” The risk “... is likely concentrated among NGOs working in politically sensitive areas such as human rights and in regions and countries at risk, such as in zones of conflict.” While work with these groups is sensitive, the Citizen Lab’s connection with the University of Toronto provides a perception of legitimacy to the project. All the same, Diebert points out that trust takes time to develop. In this sense, the NGO Secure Scan project provides an interesting example of a techie-civil society collaboration.

Apart from this, the major challenge for the project is funding. A project like this requires qualified technical people, travel funding, computer equipment and software, and strong coordination. While these aren’t necessarily out of reach in terms of cost, they are not resources that are immediately at hand. There is also an issue of sustainability. Once the citizen lab begins providing an intrusion monitoring service, skills either need to be passed on to participating groups, or the service needs to become permanent. Either way, there is an additional expense that needs to be taken into consideration.

## **Conclusion**

In many ways, observation is what civil society has taken to most naturally online. The ability to quickly search for and find information on almost any current topic has changed the speed and nature of day-to-day research. Further, the now mundane practice of forwarding interesting links and documents to close peers has created a whole web of civil society collective intelligence networks that span far beyond anything we could have imagined 10 years ago. Amidst all of this, however, there are certainly questions. When information becomes fluid and malleable, how do we test for credibility? How can we better tap into the trust systems on which our collective intelligence networks rest? In the realm of electronic surveillance, should civil society organizations take on the role of watcher as well as watched? As the practices of 'observing' and 'knowing' online fade into the background of the everyday, it is important to stop and reflect on how we are doing these things.

### ***Appropriation – tools that cross boundaries***

As outlined above, civil society organizations are beginning to appropriate and mold networked technologies for research and observation projects, turning mainstream tools around to serve their own ends. Distributed data collection efforts by anti-landmine groups serve as an example here. Simple web databases have been shaped into a tool to address the fact that no one researcher – or even research team – can uncover information in all of the places where landmines exist. Citizen Lab's NGO SecureScan presents another good example, where surveillance technologies that we traditionally associate with state and corporate spies are used to protect NGOs. Of course, projects like this bring their own questions. What are the long term impacts and commitments of engaging in surveillance? Do we raise the stakes in the information war? Certainly, most civil society cannot afford to enter into an expensive surveillance / counter-surveillance arms race with the state. And what is more, in many countries, and with some international organizations, challenging the status quo could easily serve to close up what few opportunities there are to access government information. So research, as surveillance, must be done with care.

***Collaboration – trust as research***

It may be in the area of information sharing that civil society organizations are most effectively – or at least most widely – appropriating networked technologies for research. Informal e-mail based document sharing and more formal online research networks have given civil society access to information that would have been costly or impossible to obtain in the past. What is impressive about these uses of the technology is not the simple tools themselves (mostly it is just e-mail). Rather, it is the social form of collective or open source intelligence that we need to both be aware of and protect. Like other forms of collaboration discussed in this report, our seemingly simple information sharing networks rest on the foundations of fragile social and network capital. These foundations of trust are incredibly important, as they are one of most commonly referenced sources of information credibility online. Material from a trusted colleague is given more weight, in terms of both truth and importance, than information that is simply found floating amidst the flotsam and jetsam of the Internet. In many ways, this 'credibility by association' is replacing or at least competing with traditional approaches to making information credible such as institutional backing or the pedigree of a publishing house.

Of course, not all online information sharing networks are created equal. They range in value from 'essential' to 'useless'. Often, affinity and intimacy are major determining factors here. Small groups of people who know each other well and share a set of values provide the most valuable information filters. The Sarai / Waag Exchange is a good example of this, with only two organizations participating in the original project and only one new organization per year being added as they expand to become a 'platform'. The other major factor here is clarity of shared purpose. If participants on a list or in a research project have a shared understanding of why they are there – the topic, what is good material, what is bad, what is common, what is special – then there is a great deal of value to be gained. If, on the other, participants post indiscriminately, then the value of the list or project declines. Often, there is a relationship between size and shared vision. For example, the well known Global Knowledge for Development (GKD) list has grown so large and has such a diversity of participants that it has virtually lost its value as an information filter.

***Equity – questions as power flows***

If information is power, then the questions we frame ultimately have an impact on the flows of power. All of the case studies provided above are confronted with this issue in some way or the other. In OLISTICA's case, the whole aim of the project was to shift ownership and control over research outcomes by involving civil society organizations and grassroots communities in a the design stage. In the context of online research, this is a valuable goal – but probably ahead of its time. Certainly, networked technologies offer the potential for research that involves those outside of academia in the development of frameworks. Yet, the social and collaborative tools necessary to undertake this kind of project still need more work and experimentation, especially if they are to be used to create the kind of formal research framework proposed by OLISTICA.

The cases of the Sarai / Waag Exchange and CitizenLab highlight the importance of considering North-South power flows in defining frames of research and observation. As outlined above, the Exchange positions itself outside of traditional aid and development models. In terms of research, both partners are presented as actively, equally and organically evolving the framework of investigation. In contrast, Citizen Lab takes a much more traditional North-to-South technology transfer approach. While this approach is problematic in most contexts, it may have a place in situations where the legal environment of a Northern partner provides for better access to tools and knowledge related to surveillance. Even in this case, however, there is the need to find more equitable ground in the framing of the research and observation objectives.

***Sustainability – of people not money***

Like many of the other strategic technology applications described in this report, online research and observation projects require money to sustain themselves. In fact, tech heavy and long term projects such as distributed data gathering can be quite costly. However, it is often human and intellectual resources that create the biggest sustainability problem for online research initiatives. In the context of informal networks, there is a need to keep people engaged in collective intelligence gathering and information sharing. As Internet users, we are fickle, dropping out and sometimes back in to such networks on a whim. In this context, sustaining interest and participation is a challenge.

More formal research projects like OLISTICA often face a challenge finding research participants in the first place. It is assumed that people will participate sheerly out of goodwill. This is unlikely in a world where potential participants in an online research project are under constant bombardment with requests for their online attention. While money can be the solution to this problem in some cases – with participants being paid small research honoraria for their involvement – there needs to be a stronger motivation. This motivation may be found in the ability to more significantly shape the questions being asked to suit ones own research needs. In the end, this kind of collaborative research may already contain some of the raw material necessary to fuel itself.

## 7. Emergence

We often hear talk of 'emergent' technologies – things that are on the horizon. In a way, this concept is of little value in our discussion of the appropriating and strategic use of networked technologies by civil society. This is because when we speak of appropriation we are talking about process more than outcome. With technologies shifting and being shaped, everything is emergent in some sense of the word. For the sake of completeness, however, it is worthwhile to take a brief look at our radar to identify new ideas, approaches and technologies that have not yet been adopted within civil society in any significant way. The following is a list of things that we should keep an eye on:

- **Mobile and Place Based Technologies** – Mobile phones and place based technologies offer great potential for civil society, especially in the area of mobilization. Despite this, few civil society organizations have taken full strategic value of these technologies. As most mobile phone and SMS systems work only at a national or regional level, this is particularly true of organizations working and organizing at the transnational level. As a result, examples that do exist tend to be local and national in nature. The site [textuality.org](http://textuality.org) lists a number of examples with headlines like: 'Swiss students coordinate anti war rally by SMS' and 'SMS messages urge consumers to boycott US products'.<sup>16</sup> Yet even these examples do little to show the potential of these technologies to quickly organize mobile, fluid constituencies into flash mobs and smart mobs. However, it is likely that that strategic, place based use of mobile phone will be adopted by civil society organizations in the coming years.
- **Social Software** – Throughout this paper, we have emphasized the importance of social relationships over technology. While definitions vary, it is these relationships which are the focus of the emerging social software movement. On the SocialText web site, Adina Levin defines social software as: “Tools that depend more on social convention than on software features to facilitate interaction and collaboration” (Levin, 2003). Taking a slightly different angle, Clay Shirky writes: “Social software, software that supports group communications, includes everything from the simple CC: line in email to vast 3D game worlds like EverQuest, and it can be as undirected as a chat room, or as task-oriented as a wiki (a collaborative workspace)” (Shirky, 2003) Finally, a report from the Sarai / Waag Exchange says of social software: “Whatever it actually is it's important” (Hegener, 2003). This last quote speaks to the position that civil society is now – there is growing consensus that ideas such as social software must be taken into consideration, yet we are struggling to figure out what kind of consideration is required.
- **Peer-to-Peer (P2P):** The term ‘peer-to-peer’ refers to applications that do not rely on a centralized server but rather draw on the power of many end user computers. Napster, Gnutella and other software used to swap music files us P2P, with everyone on the network essentially having access to each other’s hard drive. In theory, P2P has significant potential for civil society. At one level, P2P can work as an alternative to corporate infrastructure, connecting civil society users directly to each other. P2P can also be used as a shared infrastructure for computationally intensive – and expensive – tasks. Most promising of all, P2P offers the potential for ‘collaborative filtering’ – ranking the importance and value of information based on the comments and actions of trusted peers. Despite all of this potential, P2P has yet to find its feet within civil society. There are no real examples of major activist or NGO projects that have been built on P2P technology. So, it remains to be seen whether this promise can translate into reality. Protest in Australia over the refugee claimants that got imprisoned.
- **Rich Site Summary (RSS):** Many people believe that RSS feeds and other forms of content syndication have the potential to again turn online civil society publishing on its head, both by connecting NGO sites to each other and by giving readers more control over the information they receive. “A ‘feed’ in RSS parlance is an XML-formatted description of a Web page, stored separately on a Web server” (Angel, 2003). Most often, these feeds come from news sites or from personal blogs. RSS is already used in the geek world as a way to share content between sites. For example, open

source haven Slashdot allows users to add headlines from sites like Indymedia, Kuro5hin and the Electronic Freedom Foundation not a personalized version of their front page. Sites like NPOBlogs.org have started to collect civil society RSS feeds, pointing to the potential for new kinds of collaborative publishing. A number of NGO coalitions in Eastern Europe and Canada are also experimenting with more advanced forms of syndication using APC's ActionApps software, an open source publishing package designed for civil society use. These projects are sharing not only headlines between sites but also the full text of articles, event listings and other material. Individual users are starting to access RSS feeds directly using 'aggregation software'. Direct, personal access to RSS feeds is seen by some as a way around the spam problem faced by e-newsletters and e-mail calls to action. RSS is in a format that is not human readable.

- **Blogs:** Weblogs – more commonly called blogs – started out as personal diaries where people would talk about everything from interesting sites they had visited that day to the banal minutiae of their lives. At a function level, a blog is a single column web page where the newest 'story' appears at the top and older stories are stacked below. Blogs tend to come in two forms – collective (written by a group) and personal (written by an individual). Strangely, the collective blog format typified by sites like Slashdot and MetaFilter has had little take up within civil society. However, the popularity of personal blogs has led many civil society organizations – and even politicians – to set up their own blogs. Creating blogs for both its ESSO campaign and its presence at the 2003 Cancun WTO meetings, Greenpeace has turned to this medium a way to provide informal and irreverent coverage of its actions (Greenpeace). For example, the final posting on the Cancun blog started out saying: "Nature documentaries mark end of conference. The meeting has failed to reach an agreement, and that's a good thing. The talks are over, and the televisions inside the convention centre that showed the open proceedings all week are now running nature documentaries on flamingos" (Greenpeace). Greenpeace web master Eric Squire (2003) sees this kind of informal coverage as a good way to overcome the barriers between activists and certain publics: "I think blogs are a useful tool for us in certain situations because it presents our message in a non-threatening, accessible way. When we chain ourselves to tanks bound for Iraq or chase whaling ships, we can be perceived by some as eco-crankers. When we can get the activists involved to tell their stories in their own voices directly to a web audience, we foster much more understanding."
- **Desktop Video and Video Streaming** – Ever since seeing the first grainy C-U-See-Me clips over a modem in the mid-1990s, many in civil society have been exuberant about the potential of online video. "Finally, our own television stations" went the refrain. Yet, for the last eight years, online activist video has pattered along as at best a marginal activity. With digital video production equipment dropping in price and increased access to broadband in many Northern countries, this has started to change in some parts of the world. Sites like Guerrilla News Network (GNN) that provide an alternative to the mainstream news have started to provide exactly the kind of alternative TV channel that many have been imagining. However, viewership is still small – 10,000 'hits' a day for GNN (Gill, 2003) – which indicates that activist video online has not yet reached the 'tipping point'.

Of course, this list is only a tiny part of the 'emergent' picture, and there are overlaps between what is highlighted here and what is described above. There is a need for a much more complete and ongoing set of 'radars' that watch where tools and ideas like these are going. More importantly, there is a need to make civil society organizations aware of new tools so that they may experiment with them in the context of their own strategic and political goals.

## 8. Conclusions

*The world at large is exactly what is at stake. Geographical borders seem to be of no importance whatsoever to the new media - they simply haven't been invited to the global ICT party.*

*Sarai Report to The Waag*

Civil society is clearly moving beyond borders. And, in this, networked technologies are deeply implicated. The borders that have been crossed include those between organizations, issues and cultures. Even the borders of civil society itself are in question, assuming that they ever existed in the first place. And, of course, geographical borders have been crossed, with data, ideas and emotions flowing fluidly through cyberspace.

Electronic networks have become the platform on which much of civil society operates. As such, organizations and activists must increasingly come to terms with the networked realm in which they now live. This is not about rushing out to buy a modem or get e-mail training, although many still need these things. It is, as we have said many times above, about gaining the skills and perspective to be able to appropriate these technologies – to use them strategically and politically.

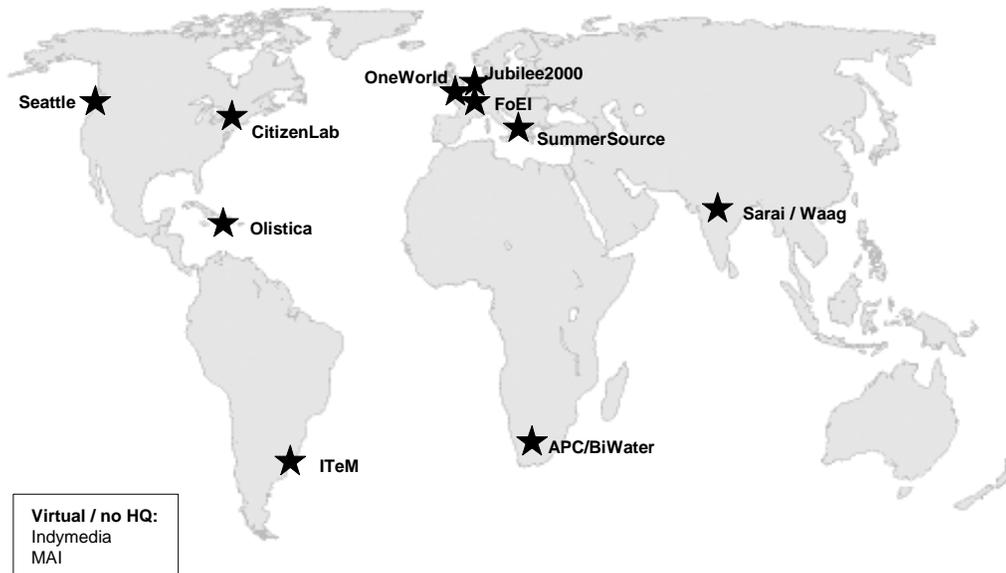
Both the anecdotal tales from practitioners and the small bits of research that we have tell us that civil society has a long way to go in this regard. Yet, at the same time, the case studies and other examples in this report show that there is a rich world of strategic practice surrounding us. There are examples of campaigns that have succeeded, organizations that have transformed and collectivities that have organically emerged as powerful new voices for peace and justice. In these examples, we begin to see a glimpse of what civil society can do when it molds technology to its own image.

However, these examples also show us that it is not just a matter of waking up one day and deciding to use network technologies strategically. The process of appropriation is both challenging and ongoing. Looking across our case material, we have identified five major challenges – equity, impact, trust, sustainability and enclosure. These are the challenges that lay beyond access and adoption. Examining these challenges and seeing how others have dealt with them can provide at least part of the map we need to find our way forward.

### **Equity (north + south)**

The biggest challenge to the strategic use of network technologies by civil society remains one of equity. This concern for equity is not about entitlement or tit for tat. Rather, it is the core condition for the kind of collaboration that holds out so much hope – the sense of being on level political and cultural ground with our collaborators. It is this visceral feeling of equalness that is required if we are to build the kind of powerful collectivities that are being imagined.

As discussed briefly in the early sections of the report, global money and power flows – and often by extension the attitude with which we approach transnational partnerships – leave Northern organizations in a dominant position. If one looks at the maps that the LSE's Global Civil Society project has created to show the headquarters of major transnational networks and the flow of money within the civil society sector, this situation becomes immediately clear (Glasius, 2002). In looking for purely 'transnational' examples, we have in many ways mirrored this situation. The following map shows the 'headquarters' of the organizations profiled in the case study sections of this report:



Certainly, all of the organizations and projects on this map have transnational reach that includes participation by organizations in both the North and South. In fact, the map very quickly loses its depth, ignoring the fact that OneWorld has centres in many parts of the world and the more equal nature of the Delhi / Amsterdam connection between Sarai and the Waag. However, the picture still tells us something – transnational online networks within civil society remain far from ‘equal’ in terms of North / South power flows. It may have been possible to find more Southern-based examples for this report, but it would not have changed the fact that what happens online reflects the broader balance of power and resources within civil society.

As many of the cases above illustrate, this issue emerges clearly, explicitly and regularly within online networks. OneWorld, Jubilee 2000 and even the protest movements against corporate-led globalization have all faced questions about whether their online work excludes Southern participants and others with limited access to the technology. More important, questions are raised about the power dynamics that exist online even when all stakeholders do have access. How is it possible for a global discussion to emerge on a mailing list where loud North Americans are dominating the conversation? This is a simple yet common question, and it is rarely dealt with well.

The question remains then: how do we deal with these questions? It is possible that some clues lie with in the chaotic realm of Indymedia, with its structurelessness and quest for global consensus. On our map, IndyMedia rests on no continent, as it truly seems to be ‘headless’. In this, we see an honest attempt to find equal footing amongst diverse global players. Also, there may be some answers in the approach and attitude of the Sarai / Waag Exchange. Speaking of the Exchange, Ravi Sundaram states: “The old aid model is nation to nation, For instance: Holland help India. Now it is possible for Waag Society and Sarai to collaborate at an equal level. We both learn through the collaboration: we work together, set up events together. We spoke very little about the aid implications, the formal aspect. We never talked about it at that level. The most important thing about the Exchange is that, for the first time, it is possible to speak at an equal footing” (Hegener, 2003). The only thing that is truly clear is that while the questions are pressing, there are no firm or obvious answers. With major gaps in both our research and our practice, this is an area that needs our honest, creative and ongoing attention.

## **Impact (politics)**

As we have shown in this report, we can point to examples of organizations and activists who are using networked technologies strategically. We know that they have taken hold of these technologies with clear intent and vision, molding them to their own purposes. Yet, what we know very little about is what this means in the world. What is the political, cultural, social impact of this work?

Certainly, we can say that the global mediascape has changed. An important focus of democratic communications work from the last half of the 20th century – MacBride and NWICO, community radio and television, independent cinema – has been about gaining access to media distribution channels. With the Internet, we now have them. Indymedia, OneWorld, Guerrilla News Network and dozens of other sites around the globe serve as examples of alternative media outlets that we could barely have imagined 20 years ago. Activists and grassroots journalists are producing the news, and it is getting out there. Furthermore, civil society organizations themselves are able to produce and distribute their own media, providing an opportunity to frame the story and provide a direct alternative to CNN and others in the corporate mainstream media.

We can also say with fair confidence that these new technologies have proven their ability to mobilize people and to weave disparate organizations together in collective action. Seattle and its many offspring show that technologies as simple as mailing list can bring people out by the tens of thousands. This of course does not mean that the on the ground, barefoot organizing is no longer needed, but rather that there is a place for this barefoot organizer online. It also means that those who once organized alone can now – even without knowing sometimes – organize together.

Yet the question remains: does all of this activist media and large scale protest really matter? Is it possible that we are not shifting the broader media and political landscape, but rather just creating a spectacle to entertain ourselves? “What if information merely circles around in its own parallel world? What’s to be done if the street demonstration becomes part of the Spectacle?” (Lovink and Schneider, 2003). Of course, spectacle is not always a bad thing. It may be that the primary purpose of civil society online media is to compellingly reinforce and strengthen out movements, giving a sense of belonging and home.

Similar questions may be asked of online campaigning. Are we changing the minds of politicians and bureaucrats when we get hundreds of thousands of people to sign on to online petitions or send e-postcards? Certainly not, at least not directly. Yet these tactics make it possible to build networks and relationships that can lead to bigger things. Certainly, the cases of Jubilee 2000 and even the MAI show that large, net-enabled campaigns can lead to positive political outcomes. And, further, they have the potential to create ripples that show up later. While the connection is not direct, it is likely that four years of online and on-the-ground resistance against corporate-led globalization led into what Maude Barlow called ‘Seattle without tear gas’ – the failure of the WTO talks in Cancun in September 2003.

All of this, however, remains wild speculation. We don’t really understand the political and cultural impacts of civil society experiments with networked technologies. This partly because the network has become so intertwined with the rest of our worlds that it is hard to know what is cause and what is effect. But it is also because we have had little time to reflect, as the dearth of literature on uses of networked technologies by civil society organizations certainly demonstrates. Certainly, there are many donor-supported evaluations and project reports floating out there. Yet even when these are prepared honestly, they hardly provide what we need. What is needed is a bigger picture that comes from sincere reflection beyond the level of projects and grants to look at what it is we are trying to do and whether we are doing it. This can come through very diverse channels – dialogue between practitioners, user testing of online projects, storytelling about the work we do. The method is not the issue, but rather that the reflection happens and that it feeds back quickly into future work. Civic cyberspace has great potential as an action research laboratory, a potential we have barely begun to tap.

### **Trust (collaboration)**

So much of what we have achieved – and hope to achieve – with networked technologies is tied into our ability to collaborate. Certainly, we have already seen both the potential and the power of virtual collectivity. Collaborative publishing projects like OneWorld show that organizations can create media together that they could never have produced apart. Groups like Friends of the Earth and countless others have seen their ability to work transnationally improve dramatically, despite the fact that online collaboration brings its own troubles. And, in the example of the Sarai / Waag Exchange, we see that collaboration can produce a tangible sense of mutual knowing.

While the evidence is harder to gather, we might also say that those civil society organizations that have succeeded with online collaboration have done so in a manner that is more impressive – or at least dramatically different – than their counterparts in other sectors. Much has been made of the collaborative potential of the Internet for business and government, yet the examples where such collaboration truly works are few and far between. In contrast, civil society can point to examples like Indymedia where a huge global collaborative ‘organization’ has emerged from the ether in only a few years. Even projects like OLISTICA that have had limited success in other regards demonstrated the will collaborate that exists amongst many civil society organizations.

However, the will to collaborate – something that seems to be driven by the significant social and network capital available within civil society – is not the same thing as the ability to collaborate. Anecdotally, effective online collaboration skills are not as widespread within civil society as we would like them to be. Certainly, most who want to collaborate know how to use e-mail and the web. But the skills that are most needed are actually social – the ability to listen well, to communicate simply and without anger, to facilitate and draw out the voices of those who feel timid. These skills are not easy to develop, even amongst those who need to use them everyday. As a case in point, it was only after many years of working completely online that the staff of the APC learned to work as effectively in their virtual office as they would face to face. And, even for such skilled practitioners, there remain challenges related to isolation, time lag and the limited ‘bandwidth’ of text communication.<sup>17</sup>

If we are to tap the potential for online collaboration as we say we want to, we must encourage the development of these skills broadly across civil society. Many have paid lip service to doing this, yet few have actually taken the time and resources required to truly invest in this area. However, it is essential that – alongside the preservation of trust and social capital – civil society organizations immerse themselves in the experiences and challenges needed to make online collaboration a part of who they are.

### **Sustainability (money)**

When it comes to the connection between money and networked technologies, we have been sold a load of goods. In many ways, we must take responsibility for selling these goods to ourselves. The attraction to information technology in general seems to be tightly intertwined with the ideas of efficiency and cost savings, almost to the point where the connection is a cultural given. Certainly, there is some truth in it all. Managing the accounts of an organization using accounting software is cheaper than maintaining a report ledger, at least if one is paying a skilled accountant to do this work. And, certainly, it is cheaper to create a web site that is read by 100,000 people than it is to print 100,000 copies of a news report.

Yet, in focusing on efficiency and cost savings, we are missing the point on a number of levels. The more important difference between old and new media is, well, difference. One can do different things with information once it is on a web site or in an accounting software package. One can search, manipulate, reframe, recycle. At the level of money, we seem to miss the fact that the biggest and most important costs are not the costs that are eliminated by technology. For example, it is content, editorial and marketing that represent the biggest expenses in media, not the distribution. Yet we tend to get excited about dramatic

drops in the production line items of our budget, often underestimating how much money we will need overall as a result.

So, with new media as with old, sustainability is a significant challenge. Looking at our cases, it is clear that the different qualities of networked technologies bring different options for sustainability. OneWorld has developed a partner program that essentially turns the site into a 'content coop', with partners throwing into a pot to ensure that there is a high profile web site in place to promote their issues and ideas. ITeM is experimenting with syndication and content feeding, a business that at one time only the largest commercial media outlets and research houses could participate in. Others have experimented with reader donations, socially conscious advertising, the sale of technical services, technical resource sharing and other techniques aimed at bringing in new forms of revenue or lowering costs. The difficulty is that all of these models are still in their early days, and they are not widespread. No one has yet figured out a reliable and dramatically successful new model for sustaining online technology and media projects.

In the mean time, the old techniques of donor dependency and extreme volunteerism are used to keep most projects alive. In some regards, there is nothing wrong with this. We have known for a very long time that socially relevant media and communications projects require outside support to provide. The problem is that donors have both moved to more project based funding and put pressure on grantees to find new, independent revenue models. Finding these new revenue models may be possible, at least in part. But at present little effort is going into researching such models or sharing results from the creative experiments that are taking place. Without such knowledge and reflection, there is now choice but to just fall back into old patterns.

#### **Enclosure (1.0 vs 2.0)**

A paranoiac hype is emerging in corporate boardrooms and government hallways – a fear that the Internet is becoming a rough neighborhood to be avoided. A recent article of *eWeek* opened: "The public streets and highways of the Internet have become like neighborhoods where it is no longer safe to venture. Hackers, scammers, virus builders and other Web predators are looming in the shadows" (Tinnirello, 2003). For some, it seems, the Internet is becoming the enemy. From this fear has emerged hopefully fleeting discussion of turning corporate and academic networks into gated communities, disconnected from the rest of the Internet (Garfinkel 2003)

At the same, time cable providers and telcos in the North are taking steps that threaten to change both the content that is carried and the very nature of the Internet pipe that customers receive. The specifics of these threats range from commercial deals where one content provider is given priority over another to changes in the network architecture that limit the many-to-many nature of the net. As Lawrence Lessig said in an interview with Howard Rheingold: "The innovation commons is being corrupted by changes that being made at the architecture level. These changes are accomplished by allowing future versions of Internet software protocols to abandon the end-to-end principle, enabling network owners to decide which applications are permitted to run over the network and which applications won't. Coaxial cable owners that offer high speed Internet access already prevent their users from running servers or hosting web pages and are preventing content that competes with the cable owner's own content from running on their parts of the Internet" (Rheingold, 2002).

This potential enclosure of the Internet is what Graham Meikle calls 'Internet Version 2.0' -- a version of the Internet "...where we get to watch TV and type at the same time. It is the Net as closed system rather than open system"(Meikle, 2002) This vision is in conflict with the Internet that many in civil society have embraced, which Meikle terms 'Internet Version 1.0'. "Version 1.0 is the Internet as open system ... it connects to those early claims that the Net would bring about huge changes in political life and social action" (Meikle, 2003).

Without Internet Version 1.0, our hopes for the strategic use of the Internet by civil society are surely scuppered. The question is, how big and broad is this threat? Certainly, the points that Lessig raises are legitimate and the threats are real. However, these are threats that we have been concerned with since the earliest days of the web when global media companies were gushing about convergence and the 'information superhighway' (Surman, 1994). In the intervening 10 years, Internet 1.0 has not only survived but also become deeply ingrained in the cultures of business, government and civil society. Furthermore, the gated vision of the Internet is being contested at the very top of the corporate technology food chain, with Microsoft and Amazon fighting it out with the cable companies (Manjoo, 2003). While tides can change, there is at least some small solace for now that the corporate giants who have the most influence over the broad direction of these technologies have an interest in keeping Internet 1.0 alive.

For civil society, the much more serious and immediate threats of Internet enclosure are those described by Sean O'Siochru (2003) in his companion to this report – *Global Governance of Information and Communications Technologies*. These threats include regressive intellectual property regimes, online surveillance and other issues that should – but are not – being addressed within Internet governance forums like WSIS. How serious are these threats? It is hard to know. They are certainly serious enough to warrant our attention and action. Yet they are also distant enough that they cannot be a sole focus, but rather must be thought of alongside more tangible, day-to-day issues of appropriation and strategic use.

### **A movement afoot?**

Intuitively and collectively, we already know these things. We know that we have yet to master collaboration or fully understand the political impacts that will flow from our work. We know that we still need to find a way to build networks that are sustainable and that put all participants on even footing. And, certainly we know that there are threats to the fluid and open version of the Internet that we currently enjoy.

In our knowledge of these things – however intangible and unfocused – there is a feeling that a movement is emerging. This is a movement of what might be called 'social tech' organizations and activists. On most days, the diversity of these groups makes it hard to see them as a movement. Groups like eRiders and many at the Summer Source camp focus primarily on infrastructure and skills development issues. Networks like CRIS and the various civil society coalitions that have been critical of the WSIS process work on issues related to Internet rights and the threat of enclosure. ICT4D volunteering programs like GeekCorps and the various NetCorps are committed to providing skilled techies for projects in the South. Long-standing, more formal organizations like APC and OneWorld focus on building the ability of organizations to use technology strategically. Yet amidst this diversity is a common belief that the ways that civil society uses and appropriates networked technologies are important. And, there is a shared idea that we will have missed a major opportunity if we do not actively engage in these issues and support the strategic use of these technologies. It is to this that these organizations and activists have committed themselves.

Within this nascent movement there is also a diversity of roles and players. Certainly, there are the formal organizations – Kibassa, TacticalTech, BytesForAll, Sarai, APC and its members. These organizations range dramatically in size and scope, with some being composed of only a few people working at a local level. However, even the largest of these organizations is quite small, with APC having only about 30 members, all of which are themselves small. Where these organizations have grown large, they tend to do so through networking and partnerships and not as traditional, staff intensive NGOs. In addition to these identifiable organizations, there is a huge cadre of individuals working and volunteering within NGOs and activist groups who are promoting and enabling the strategic use of technologies. The best example of this is the techies who are a part of the Indymedia movement, working side by side with activist journalists and campaigners to make the network function. However, people like this exist not only in exemplary networks like Indymedia but also within civil society organizations of all shapes and sizes. More often

than not, they are struggling to find purpose – sharing the political passions of their colleagues but bringing a different and often misunderstood set of skills to the table.

Given both the pervasiveness of network technologies and the huge challenges that we face, there is certainly a compelling case for a movement like this, if a case is indeed what is needed. The combination of technical skills and political commitment that these organizations and individuals bring provide the necessary raw material to amp up the process of appropriation and strategic use. They have the expertise in key areas like collaboration and the social dynamics of networks. And, best of all, they often bring a creativity and inventiveness that is sorely missing in many corners of civil society.

The difficulty is that, for all of this potential, connections between more traditional civil society organizations and these ‘social techs’ have often been a difficult to make. One reason for this is the diversity – or even divergence – of those who might be considered a part of this movement. Like Naomi Klein’s (2000) hub and spoke vision of the movement against corporate-led globalization, social tech organizations and individuals are like a set of multi-coloured spokes. Looked at from the outside, they can seem like a confused and disconnected mess. Seen as a part of a larger wheel, the meaning and purpose of this work comes into focus. Similarly, in a world where civil society organizations must navigate a terrain of issues that includes everything from the environment to gender to corporate domination, dealing with another issue – especially a cross cutting issue like technology – seems like a stretch. Amidst everything else, most civil society organizations simply don’t see technology as a compelling issue.

There is also the question of the ‘cultural divide’ between civil society organizations and people working with technology. Different languages are spoken and, in some cases, different politics are promoted. The case of the Summer Source camp in Croatia illustrates how difficult it can be to bridge this divide, even amongst those who are reasonably savvy about technology and committed to the idea that networked technologies can benefit civil society. As noted above, this problem extends well beyond Summer Source. In fact, it is probably one of the bigger issues that stand in the way of large scale interaction between social tech organizations and broader civil society.

Of course, these organizations are confronted by the chicken and egg problem that runs throughout this entire report – is this a problem of understanding or a problem of communication? On the one hand, a large number of organizations say ‘we’re done’ once they get e-mail and a web site in place. They don’t necessarily see the need to go further. On the other, most social tech advocates seem to have a hard time communicating why and how organizations should move beyond this basic stage of adoption. They struggle to find compelling stories that illustrate how strategic online campaigns, collaboration, and projects can work.

Deeper digging, thought and experimentation is needed to understand how the potential of this social tech movement can be more fully tapped. This is not a matter of trying to formally organize or corral the groups and individuals doing this work. Such efforts are not only sure to fail but also could stifle the creativity that is already there. More likely, attempts to improve networking and social capital amongst these groups – and with key civil society sectors – are what is needed. While Summer Source did not magically bridge the techie / NGO culture gap, it is an example of exactly the kind of thing that is needed to build bridges in the long term. Building on this initial foundation, Tactical Tech and its partners plan to do similar workshops in the future. Sometimes quietly, others are also holding similar events – not just about open source but about technology and non-profit in general – in different corners of the globe.

There is also a need for platforms and resources that support NGOs and social techies in the hands on work of appropriation and experimentation with strategic us. The currently circulating proposal for a Social SourceForge – an organization or network that facilitates the development of open source solutions for civil society – is an interesting concept in this regard (Peizer, 2003). Whether the proposed model is perfect or not, the idea of an ongoing initiative specifically aimed at civil society technology appropriation is a brilliant one. Of course, any such initiative would need to operate as an open collaborative network

with a culture that welcomes both NGOs and developers. It would be the creation of such a culture, as well as developing a business model to support this sort of work, that would be the biggest trick.

Finally, there is a need for thinking and documentation that demonstrates what can be done with the strategic use of networked technologies within civil society. Building on the work of others, we have tried to start this process here with our case studies. Yet we have barely broken the surface of all that there is to be said. There is still a need for more refined 'storytelling frameworks' that at once encourage practitioners to tell their tales and provide useful inputs for big picture research into what is working and what is not. There is also a need to collect these stories at the local and national level. In these stories we hope to find what you don't often find in grant reports, program evaluations or short conference reports – a honest sharing of information not only about what worked and what was easy but also about what broke and what was hard. The sharing of this kind of information amongst both NGOs and social techies is essential, both to provide models of strategic use that can be duplicated and evolved and to more broadly excite civil society leaders about the potential and possibilities that these technologies hold.

### **A way forward? (aka recommendations)**

The stakes are high with networked technologies. The ability of civil society organizations to control their own communications, and even their relationships and networks, is intimately intertwined with the question of appropriating these tools. Yet, despite these high stakes, there is no single issue or proposal at hand presently that can be thrown down on the table to gather attention or galvanize support. Similarly, encouraging the more strategic use of technology within civil society is not something that can be simply addressed with a few tweaks to government policy or investments by donors. This, in fact, is the whole fallacy of WSIS, the Dot Force and their brethren. We are not talking here about a rigid system that can be herded and bossed around by bureaucrats. The realm of networked technologies is much more like a living ecosystem, where the actions of all those who participate – especially those with money – slowly ripple out and impact the rest of the inhabitants and their environment.

And so, the recommendations of this report are not some big policy idea, but rather to encourage the diverse and quietly radical actions necessary to nurture the ecosystem that is civic cyberspace. Certainly, some of these actions do relate to the policy arena – especially where there are questions of privacy and enclosure. But more are related to the 'on the ground' practice and research necessary for transnational civil society organizations to take more control of the means by which they communicate and interrelate. Building on the conclusions outlined above, specific recommendations include:

- **Build the social tech movement:** There is a need to further build and support the 'social tech' movement that is emerging, both creating better connections within this movement and, more importantly integrating more holistically with other spheres within civil society. One way to do this is through more events based on the principles demonstrated at SummerSource, where civil society organizations and techies have a chance to work together in person. These events could be piggy backed on top of non-technology civil society events and get together. Building on such events would not only make it possible to tap into existing groups of people but would also ensure that discussion of technology happens within the context of the day to day challenges and political issues dealt with by civil society organizations. At the same time, efforts should be made to create more cohesive platforms for collaboration on the development and appropriation of networked technologies within civil society. There are a number of proposals for this kind of thing, including SocialSource Forge and APC's Learning and Practitioners Network. Finally, there is a need for more research and documentation about the practices and potential of social tech groups. Very little work has been done here and, as a result, it is difficult for most in civil society to understand what is happening in this arena, where we are headed and why it matters.
- **Focus on goals not gizmos:** As a step towards appropriation, civil society organizations should put a concerted focus on strategic technology planning. The important point here not the technology, but

rather the strategy. Too many attempts at non-profit technology planning end up as a list of hardware and software. Or, they produce 'neat' technology projects that are not driven by the political or social goals of the organization that produced them. Real and useful technology planning starts with the question 'what are we trying to do in the world?' From there, it is a process of mapping mission and goals on to clear, practical and flexible ideas about how networked technologies can (or maybe can't) play a role. This kind of mapping and planning is an essential (and ongoing) first step towards strategic use and appropriation.

- **Experiment with more equitable network models:** While online networks have changed the dynamics of collaboration within global civil society, they most often continue to reflect uneven and inequitable power flows. There is a need for more experiments like Sarai / Waag Exchange profiled in this report. Such experiments provide an opportunity to try out new approaches and to address problems organically as they emerge. Hopefully, the end result is a model, or at least inspiration, that can be drawn on by others. Also, there is a need for more software development initiatives that consider questions of equitable communications flow in the systems they are designing. The Friends of the Earth intranet project provides a model here, with a redesign of the software taking place in response to feedback about exclusion and other difficulties created in the first version of the software.
- **Collaborate with both thought and passion:** Simply put, we do not take collaboration seriously enough. We have put a great deal of hope in the idea of online collaboration, yet we have invested very little in it. At an organizational and coalition level, there is a need to think through and plan online collaborative initiatives just as well or better than other projects. This means having clear answers to questions like: 'what are we trying to achieve together?' and 'what's in it for us?'. In this, it is essential to keep in mind that successful collaboration is based on the principle that there are both collective benefits and benefits for individual participants. Goals and clarity of purpose are key. There is also a need to consider issues of effective collaboration at the personal level, building better skills in working with the limited emotional bandwidth of text and e-mail. Few of us have the essential skills here – listening, avoiding assumptions, sharing, suppressing our egos. We need these skills for online collaboration to work.
- **Embrace open source culture:** There has been much talk about using open source software within civil society. Certainly, there are benefits that open source software can provide to civil society organizations. However, there is a bigger opportunity available to civil society – the ability to embrace open source culture and values. As Geert Lovink writes: “We have entered a crucial period, with free software and open source on the brink of leaving behind the 'geek culture' of IT and spreading in a multitude of directions, both as software and as a set of attractive, 'infectious' ideas and concepts” (Lovink, 2003). Both the SummerSource and Sarai / Waag cases show this change in process, with attempts to apply open source ideology in spheres that are more social than software. As the values of open source begin to be imagined and implemented beyond software, there is a great opportunity for those within civil society to explore new models of collaboration, resource sharing and political actions. This opportunity should be embraced.
- **Experiment and stretch:** Civil society organizations need to be willing to experiment a little and stretch themselves in figuring out how to best use technology to support their political and social goals. In doing this, they can tap into practical strategic technology use such as the ones profiled in this report. It is also important to note that many of the most impressive examples of technology appropriation happen outside the formal world of NGOs, in unions and the like, emerging from the hands of youth and social movements who use these technologies playfully and in an ongoing mode of experimentation. The problem, of course, with looking to these practical and informal examples is that they are both poorly documented and constantly shifting. One solution to this is the development of a larger body of case material on the use of networked technologies by civil society organizations. Hopefully, this report will provide both encouragement and a loose framework for such efforts. However, there is also a need to look constantly beyond civil society, watching both the technology

press and the streets. For this, there is a need for better open source intelligence mechanisms. Here there are lessons in the work of researchers doing distributed Internet-supported observation; how can this work be better bridged with alternative publishers like OneWorld, or even Eldis? And, we would encourage the 'ICT and Civil Society' research network being created by the Social Sciences Research Council to facilitate advances on this front.

- **Push the sustainability envelope:** In civil society, we seem to have a hard time thinking deeply and honestly about sustainability. Maybe this is because we think that money is evil. Or difficult. Or both. Whatever the case, our efforts to build new platforms for collaboration, media and knowledge take resources. We can rely on old sources for some of these resources, but most likely not for all. There is a pressing need for both experimentation and research into new sustainability models that will support civil society communications and technology initiatives. Where will these models come from? From the world of open source, where small amounts of money mix with volunteer efforts to create flexible software tools? From the world of social enterprise, where people are trying to find the right balance between mission and money? From the realm of informal economies, where innovation and practicality are a constant requirement? The answer is probably all of these places, and others. The point, however, is that both organizations and donors must create the space for new ideas. They must be willing to try them out in small ways, and to consider failure as learning. At the same time, effort must be put into researching and examining what has worked in other contexts in order to come up with proposals for new approaches to sustainability that can be used in the context of civil society media and communications projects.
- **Fight to keep networks open:** Amidst all of these efforts to promote the strategic use of networked technologies, there is the constant threat of 'enclosure' on the Internet. New technologies, network designs and legal frameworks are emerging that threaten the open '1.0' version of the Internet that provides the flexibility necessary for the effective appropriation of these technologies by civil society organizations. It is in this realm of 'Internet rights' that policy work is most important. There is a need to advocate for open frameworks and technologies at forums like WSIS, within the context of international trade agreements and at the national level. There is also a need to lobby against corporations who are implementing technologies and network infrastructure that limit the openness of the Internet. More detailed recommendations in this area are presented by Sean O'Siochru (2003) in his companion to this report – *Global Governance of Information and Communications Technologies*.
- **Create better maps:** Finally, it is important that we create better 'maps' of civic cyberspace – frameworks for analysis, case studies that illustrate models that work and data that paints a picture of the overall landscape. If this report demonstrates anything, it is that we know very little about the broad question of 'how transnational civil society organizations are using networked technologies.' There are bits and pieces of case material. There are frameworks to be borrowed and bent from elsewhere. There is weak data from a handful of countries. In order to advance the cause of the strategic use of networked technologies within civil society, we need a better picture of what is going on. At a basic level, this includes data about access to and use of these technologies by organizations in all parts of the globe (especially those not typically represented in international CSO networks). This information could be gathered at minimal cost by encouraging groups like the London School of Economics and Civicus to add a small number of Internet-related indicators to their longitudinal studies of civil society demographics. However, there is also a need for more in depth and ongoing exploration in the form of case studies documenting what groups (both wired, and not) are actually doing on the ground. Also, it would be valuable to have detailed comparisons of the workings of regional networks. With solid frameworks in place, creating such case material need not be an expensive undertaking but could take the form of 'storytelling' and self documentation by organizations who are doing good work. And by supporting the advance of observational methodologies such as the ones discussed in this paper, groups should be able to use the Internet to make use of data, and observe each others network strategies. Cases like this can also be used for multiple purposes, forming the basis of self reflexive grant reports

and promotional materials while at the same time contributing to the overall picture of what is happening with civil society online.

How will we know if we are succeeding at all of this? Partly through better knowledge and awareness. Ongoing experimentation and research should lead to the broader strategic use of networked technologies within civil society. The research component of this work both serves to inform action and to let us know the impact of this action. We will also know we are succeeding if the technologies we are speaking of begin to disappear into the background, being replaced by discussions of the actual political and social work that is happening on these collaborative technology platforms. The drive behind the appropriation of these tools is not 'technology for its own sake', but rather to enable civil society organizations to collaborate better, communicate more effectively and to have more social impact.

In all of this, we should also remember that we will never 'arrive' in the land of strategic technology nirvana. The appropriation of technology is a process and not an outcome. Becoming skilled at this process is the point, with our skills giving us the ability to mold the technologies as issues and political strategies for change. As noted in one of the Sarai / Waag documents: "the techno-civic maze always remains under construction" (Central Committee, 2000). The way forward requires us to learn how to build, create and work together in this ever changing maze.

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Appendix 1: INGO, ODA and Connectivity Figures

Country Groupings <sup>1</sup>	Population in millions 2002 <sup>2</sup>	Internet Users (% of pop)	Cell Phone Users (% of pop)	Digital Cell Nets 2002 <sup>3</sup>	INGOs 2001 <sup>4</sup>	INGOs / million 2001	ODA millions of US\$ 2001 <sup>5</sup>	ODA per person US\$
Afghanistan	27.800						402	\$14.46
Angola	10.600	0.57%	1.23%		2.12	0.20	268	\$25.28
Azerbaijan	7.800	0.32%	10.71%		0.78	0.10	226	\$28.97
Bangladesh	133.300	0.11%	0.81%		13.33	0.10	1024	\$7.68
Benin	6.700	0.37%	1.87%	100	22.11	3.30	273	\$40.75
Bhutan	2.100	0.12%			0.00	0.00		
Burkina Faso	2.600	0.96%	2.31%	100	4.42	1.70	389	\$149.62
Burundi	6.400	0.09%	0.81%		0.00	0.00	131	\$20.47
Cambodia	12.800	0.08%	2.97%	99.2	5.12	0.40	409	\$31.95
Cameroon	16.100	0.28%	3.50%	100	19.32	1.20	398	\$24.72
CAR	3.600	0.06%	0.31%		0.00	0.00	76	\$21.11
Chad	9.000	0.04%	0.38%		0.00	0.00	179	\$19.89
Comoros	0.614	0.41%			0.00	0.00		
Congo	3.000	0.02%	7.39%		1.80	0.60	75	\$25.00
Cote d'Ivoire	16.800	0.42%	6.11%	100	33.60	2.00	187	\$11.13
DR Congo	55.200	0.01%	0.27%		5.52	0.10	251	\$4.55
Eq. Guinea	0.498	0.18%	5.42%		0.00	0.00		
Eritrea	4.460	0.22%			0.00	0.00	280	\$62.78
Ethiopia	67.670	0.03%	0.07%	100	20.30	0.30	1080	\$15.96
Gambia	1.400	0.36%	7.14%		3.08	2.20	51	\$36.43
Georgia	4.960	0.50%	10.15%	97.4	1.98	0.40	290	\$58.47

<sup>1</sup> Countries are divided into low, lower middle, upper middle and upper income groupings according to the standard developed by the World Bank Group's World Development Indicators.

<sup>2</sup> Population in millions, 2003. Data from the CIA World Fact Book online addition at <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>. According to the Fact Book notes, "This entry gives an estimate from the US Bureau of the Census based on statistics from population censuses, vital statistics registration systems, or sample surveys pertaining to the recent past and on assumptions about future trends."

<sup>3</sup> Number of countries in the region that have digital cell phone networks out of the number of countries considered in that region, 2002. Data from the International Telecommunications Union website at <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/>. Note that ITU data was incomplete many cases. The fact that a cell phone network is 100% digital should not be confused with full coverage in that country.

<sup>4</sup> Number of INGO's, 2001. Data from the Union of International Authorities as presented in the Global Civil Society Year Book, 2002. According to the Year Book, this data reflects, "the total number of international organization secretariats (headquarters) of international non-government organizations (INGOs) and internationally-oriented NGOs in a given country."

<sup>5</sup> Net Official Development Assistance or Official Aid, 2001. Data from the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD as presented in the World Bank World Development Indicators, 2003. According to the report, "Net official development assistance consists of disbursements of loans made on concessional terms (net of repayments of principal) and grants by official agencies of the members of DAC, by multilateral institutions, and by non-DAC countries to promote economic development and welfare in countries and territories in part I of the DAC list and aid recipients. Net official aid flows (net of repayments) from official donors to countries and territories in part II of the DAC list of aid recipients." Also, the figures "do not reflect aid given by recipient countries to other developing countries. As a result, some countries that are net donors (such as Saudi Arabia) are shown in the table as aid recipients."

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Country Groupings <sup>1</sup>	Population in millions 2002 <sup>2</sup>	Internet Users (% of pop)	Cell Phone Users (% of pop)	Digital Cell Nets 2002 <sup>3</sup>	INGOs 2001 <sup>4</sup>	INGOs / million 2001	ODA millions of US\$ 2001 <sup>5</sup>	ODA per person US\$
Ghana	20.200	0.99%	2.22%	95.8	38.38	1.90	652	\$32.28
Guinea	7.770	0.19%	1.17%		1.55	0.20	272	\$35.01
Guinea-Bissau	1.345	0.30%			0.00	0.00	59	\$43.87
Haiti	7.000	0.43%	2.00%		18.59	6.50	166	\$23.71
India	1000.000	0.70%	1.27%	100	200.00	0.20	1705	\$1.71
Indonesia	231.000	1.90%	5.06%		46.20	0.20	1501	\$6.50
Kenya	31.100	1.61%	4.26%		105.74	3.40	453	\$14.57
Kyrgyzstan	4.800	1.08%	1.11%		1.92	0.40	188	\$39.17
Lao	5.770	0.17%	0.96%	100	1.15	0.20	243	\$42.11
Lesotho	2.200	0.23%	4.18%	100	2.20	1.00	54	\$24.55
Liberia	3.200	0.02%	2.84%		9.28	2.90	37	\$11.56
Madagascar	16.470	0.21%	0.99%		3.29	0.20	354	\$21.49
Malawi	10.700	0.33%	0.80%	100	3.21	0.30	402	\$37.57
Mali	11.340	0.26%	0.46%		4.54	0.40	350	\$30.86
Mauritania	2.800	0.27%	8.83%		3.08	1.10	262	\$93.57
Moldova	4.430	0.34%	5.08%		2.22	0.50	119	\$26.86
Mongolia	2.700	1.48%	8.00%	100	5.40	2.00	212	\$78.52
Mozambique	19.600	0.11%	1.30%		0.00	0.00	935	\$47.70
Nepal	25.870	0.23%	0.08%	100	15.52	0.60	388	\$15.00
Nicaragua	5.000	0.40%	4.80%		12.50	2.50	928	\$185.60
Niger	10.600	0.11%	0.02%		3.18	0.30	249	\$23.49
Nigeria	129.900	0.08%	1.26%		51.96	0.40	185	\$1.42
North Korea	22.200				0.00	0.00	-111	-\$5.00
Pakistan	147.600	0.81%	0.84%	55.8	29.52	0.20	1938	\$13.13
Papua New G	5.170	2.61%	0.21%		6.20	1.20	203	\$39.26
Rwanda	7.398	0.27%	1.22%	100	0.00	0.00	291	\$39.33
Senegal	10.580	0.95%	5.23%	100	68.77	6.50	419	\$39.60
Sierra Leone	5.600	0.36%	1.18%		5.04	0.90	334	\$59.64
Solomon Islds	0.495	1.70%	0.20%		0.00	0.00		
Somalia	7.700	0.00%			0.00	0.00	149	\$19.35
Sudan	37.000	0.15%	0.52%	100	7.40	0.20	172	\$4.65
Tajikistan	6.700	0.07%	0.20%		0.00	0.00	159	\$23.73
Tanzania	37.180	0.81%	1.80%	100	18.59	0.50	1233	\$33.16
Timor-Leste	0.953					--		
Togo	5.285	0.95%	3.22%	100	20.61	3.90	47	\$8.89
Uganda	24.700	0.24%	1.59%	100	12.35	0.50	783	\$31.70
Uzbekistan	25.563	0.39%	0.73%		5.11	0.20	153	\$5.99
Vietnam	81.098	0.49%	2.02%		8.11	0.10	1435	\$17.69
Yemen	18.701	0.53%	2.20%	94	0.00	0.00	426	\$22.78
Zambia	9.959	0.25%	1.40%		7.97	0.80	374	\$37.55

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Zimbabwe	11.376	0.88%	3.10%	100	34.13	3.00	159	\$ 13.98
<b>Low Income</b>	<b>2412.455</b>	<b>0.65%</b>	<b>1.71%</b>		<b>887.19</b>	<b>0.37</b>	<b>23867</b>	<b>\$9.89</b>
Albania	3.540	0.34%	24.04%	94			269	\$75.99
Algeria	32.200	0.56%	1.24%	100	9.66	0.30	182	\$5.65
Armenia	3.300	0.91%	2.18%	100	0.99	0.30	212	\$64.24
Belarus	10.330	4.09%	4.50%	96.3	4.13	0.40	39	\$3.78
Bolivia	8.400	0.93%	10.39%	100	13.44	1.60	729	\$86.79
Bosnia & H	4.000	1.13%	18.72%		0.80	0.20	639	\$159.75
Brazil	176.000	7.90%	19.82%		107.40	0.60	349	\$1.98
Bulgaria	7.700	7.60%	20.13%		28.49	3.70	346	\$44.94
Burma	42.200	0.02%	0.02%			--		
Cape Verde	0.409	2.93%	10.49%	100	0.00	0.00		
China	1300.000	3.52%	15.89%	17	0.00	0.00	1460	\$1.12
Colombia	41.000	2.80%	11.21%	100	45.10	1.10	380	\$9.27
Cuba	11.200	1.07%	0.16%		29.12	2.60	51	\$4.55
Djibouti	0.473	0.70%	3.17%	100	0.00	0.00		
DR	8.700	2.14%	19.55%	82	5.22	0.60	105	\$12.07
Ecuador	13.400	2.45%	11.65%	19	30.82	2.30	171	\$12.76
Egypt	70.700	0.85%	6.36%	100	77.77	1.10	1255	\$17.75
El Salvador	6.300	0.63%	14.11%		10.08	1.60	234	\$37.14
Fiji	0.856	1.75%	10.50%	100	31.25	36.50		
Gaza	1.275	4.71%						
Guatemala	13.300	1.50%	11.86%		19.95	1.50	225	\$16.92
Guyana	0.698	13.61%	12.51%		0.00	0.00		
Honduras	6.500	0.62%	5.02%		13.65	2.10	678	\$104.31
Iran	66.600	0.63%	3.28%	100	6.66	0.10	115	\$1.73
Iraq	24.000	0.05%			12.00	0.50	122	\$5.08
Jamaica	2.860	3.50%	48.95%				54	\$18.88
Jordan	5.300	4.00%	23.01%	100	28.09	5.30	432	\$81.51
Kazakhstan	16.700	0.60%	4.96%		1.67	0.10	148	\$8.86
Macedonia	2.050	4.88%	10.89%	100	1.03	0.50	248	\$120.98
Maldives	0.320	1.87%	13.09%	100	0.00	0.00		
Micronesia	0.136	1.47%	1.33%		1.00	7.40		
Morocco	31.100	1.29%	19.93%	100	18.66	0.60	517	\$16.62
Namibia	1.800	2.50%	8.33%	100	1.98	1.10	109	\$60.56
Paraguay	5.800	0.34%	28.74%	100	6.38	1.10	61	\$10.52
Peru	27.950	10.73%	8.25%		50.31	1.80	451	\$16.14
Philippines	84.500	5.33%	17.99%	97.4	118.30	1.40	577	\$6.83
Romania	22.300	4.48%	17.24%	43.4	15.61	0.70	648	\$29.06
Russia	145.000	12.41%	12.18%		72.50	0.50	1110	\$7.66
Samoa	0.179	1.68%	1.51%		2.25	12.60		
Serbia	10.656	3.75%	25.81%					

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South Africa	43.600	7.04%	31.68%	100	143.88	3.30	428	\$9.82
Sri Lanka	19.570	0.62%	4.76%		19.57	1.00	330	\$16.86
St. Vincent &G	0.116	3.01%	8.59%		30.44	26.20		
Suriname	0.436	3.32%	19.93%	100	0.00	0.00		
Swaziland	1.100	1.27%	5.73%	100	2.31	2.10	29	\$26.36
Syria	17.150	0.35%	2.33%	100	12.00	0.70	153	\$8.92
Thailand	62.300	1.93%	25.87%	89.8	93.45	1.50	281	\$4.51
Tunisia	9.810	4.08%	5.14%		30.41	3.10	378	\$38.53
Turkey	67.308	3.71%	34.73%	100	47.12	0.70	167	\$2.48
Turkmenistan	4.600	0.04%	0.18%		0.00	0.00	72	\$15.65
Ukraine	48.390	1.55%	4.60%	100	14.52	0.30	519	\$10.73
Vanuatu	0.196	1.53%	2.50%		0.98	5.00		
<b>Low Middle</b>	<b>2484.309</b>	<b>4.04%</b>	<b>15.10%</b>		<b>1158.99</b>	<b>0.47</b>	<b>14273</b>	<b>\$5.75</b>
Anguilla	0.012	7.41%	13.14%					
Argentina	37.800	10.26%	17.20%		128.52	3.40	151	\$3.99
Belize	0.263	6.84%	19.96%	19.7	2.29	8.70		
Botswana	1.500	2.20%	27.67%	100	10.65	7.10	29	\$19.33
Chile	15.500	20.00%	41.59%		54.25	3.50	58	\$3.74
Costa Rica	3.800	10.11%	12.10%	100.0	67.64	17.80	2	\$0.53
Croatia	4.400	10.91%	51.77%		13.20	3.00	113	\$25.68
Czech Rpblic	10.250	26.34%	84.00%	99.5	45.10	4.40	314	\$30.63
Dominica	0.070	2.85%	13.41%					
Estonia	1.400	30.69%	62.93%	100	7.14	5.10	69	\$49.29
French Guiana	0.182	1.10%						
Gabon	1.200	1.50%	23.39%		2.88	2.40	9	\$7.50
Grenada	0.089	5.83%	8.52%					
Guadeloupe	0.436	0.92%	74.25%		7.33	10.50		
Hungary	10.100	11.88%	64.97%		59.59	5.90	418	\$41.39
Latvia	2.360	13.22%	38.86%		10.86	4.60	106	\$44.92
Lebanon	3.600	8.33%	21.53%	108	26.28	7.30	241	\$66.94
Libya	5.300	0.38%	1.32%	100	2.12	0.40	10	\$1.89
Lithuania	3.500	9.74%	46.62%		8.40	2.40	130	\$37.14
Malaysia	22.600	25.22%	40.89%	98	67.80	3.00	27	\$1.19
Mauritius	1.200	13.17%	29.17%	99.7	14.40	12.00	22	\$18.33
Mexico	103.400	3.38%	25.08%		124.08	1.20	75	\$0.73
Oman	2.700	4.44%	17.22%	100	2.16	0.80	2	\$0.74
Panama	2.800	1.61%	20.34%		17.36	6.20	28	\$10.00
Poland	39.000	16.41%	35.90%		54.60	1.40	966	\$24.77
Saudi Arabia	23.500	2.43%	21.31%	100	32.90	1.40	27	\$1.15
Seychelles	0.080	11.24%	55.06%	100				

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Slovakia	5.400	12.96%	54.14%		10.26	1.90	164	\$30.37
St Kitts & Nevis	0.039	5.17%	12.92%		3.22	20.10		
St Lucia	0.160	1.87%	1.00%		3.01	25.90		
Trinidad & T	1.162	10.33%	31.14%				-2	-\$1.72
Uruguay	3.386	11.81%	19.26%		46.39	13.70	15	\$4.43
Venezuela	24.287	5.35%	26.61%		65.57	2.70	45	\$1.85
<b>Upper Middle</b>	<b>331.477</b>	<b>9.73%</b>	<b>30.84%</b>		<b>888.00</b>	<b>2.68</b>	<b>3019</b>	<b>\$9.11</b>
Andorra	0.068	35.82%	34.36%	100			<i>na</i>	<i>na</i>
Antigua & B	0.067	7.42%	37.09%					
Aruba	0.070	34.09%	75.28%					
Australia	19.500	54.51%	64.51%	100	360.75	18.50	<i>na</i>	<i>na</i>
Austria	8.200	45.12%	80.49%	100	263.22	32.10	<i>na</i>	<i>na</i>
Bahamas	0.301	5.62%	40.53%		4.87	16.20		
Bahrain	0.656	21.37%	59.30%	100	5.05	7.70		
Barbados	0.277	2.17%	19.20%		23.73	85.80		
Belgium	10.300	36.50%	78.99%		1879.75	182.50	<i>na</i>	<i>na</i>
Bermuda	0.064	38.77%	46.52%					
Brunei	0.351	9.97%	39.03%	100	3.16	9.00		
Canada	31.900	52.79%	37.15%	75.5	484.88	15.20	<i>na</i>	<i>na</i>
Cyprus	0.767	19.56%	54.49%	100	15.57	20.30		
Denmark	5.400	62.41%	82.93%	100	238.14	44.10	<i>na</i>	<i>na</i>
Finland	5.200	51.73%	84.62%		144.56	27.80	<i>na</i>	<i>na</i>
France	59.760	28.40%	64.57%	100	1470.10	24.60	<i>na</i>	<i>na</i>
Germany	83.200	38.58%	72.17%	100	948.48	11.40	<i>na</i>	<i>na</i>
Greece	10.600	13.21%	87.16%	101	95.40	9.00	<i>na</i>	<i>na</i>
Greenland	0.056	35.46%	35.28%				<i>na</i>	<i>na</i>
Hong Kong	7.300	59.59%	87.61%	95			4	\$0.55
Iceland	0.279	78.85%	91.76%		10.90	39.10	<i>na</i>	<i>na</i>
Ireland	3.880	33.76%	76.52%	100	68.68	17.70	<i>na</i>	<i>na</i>
Israel	6.000	31.67%	105.57%	100	92.40	15.40	172	\$28.67
Italy	57.700	17.76%	90.67%		600.08	10.40	<i>na</i>	<i>na</i>
Japan	127.000	44.09%	63.87%	100	279.40	2.20		
Kuwait	2.100	9.52%	58.43%	100	7.56	3.60	4	\$1.90
Luxembourg	0.449	22.29%	105.45%	96	46.70	104.10	<i>na</i>	<i>na</i>
Macao	0.462	21.87%	59.77%	100				
Malta	0.399	14.81%	69.49%	100	25.42	63.80	<i>na</i>	<i>na</i>
Martinique	0.422	1.18%	75.77%	100				
N. Antilles	0.214	0.93%	6.53%					
Netherlands	16.000	60.81%	75.63%	100	816.00	51.00	<i>na</i>	<i>na</i>
New Zealand	3.900	52.82%	62.46%		54.21	13.90	<i>na</i>	<i>na</i>
Norway	4.500	59.56%	85.38%	100	172.35	38.30	<i>na</i>	<i>na</i>

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Portugal	10.080	43.65%	84.61%	100	62.50	6.20	<i>na</i>	<i>na</i>
Puerto Rico	3.957	15.16%	30.61%					
Qatar	0.793	9.46%	33.63%		4.12	5.20		
S. Korea	48.300	53.00%	66.96%	100	53.13	1.10	119	\$2.46
Singapore	4.452	51.89%	74.41%	100	86.81	19.50	1	\$0.22
Slovenia	1.900	31.58%	87.74%		19.19	10.10	126	\$66.32
Spain	40.077	19.69%	83.53%		300.58	7.50	<i>na</i>	<i>na</i>
Sweden	8.900	67.64%	89.31%		322.18	36.20	<i>na</i>	<i>na</i>
Switzerland	7.300	52.74%	78.55%	100	701.53	96.10	<i>na</i>	<i>na</i>
Taiwan	22.500	51.56%	106.25%					
UAE	2.445	36.81%	99.31%	100	8.31	3.40	3	\$1.23
United States	280.500	59.07%	50.18%	89	3394.05	12.10	<i>na</i>	<i>na</i>
Utd Kingdom	59.800	57.36%	83.48%	100	1889.68	31.60	<i>na</i>	<i>na</i>
Virgin Islands	0.123	9.72%	33.20%					
<b>Upper Income</b>	<b>935.548</b>	<b>46.30%</b>	<b>65.72%</b>		<b>14953.44</b>	<b>15.98</b>	<i>na</i>	<i>na</i>



Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Many of these issues are covered in detail in Sean O'Siochru's *Global Governance of Information and Communications Technologies* in which he looks at issues related to the physical technology, content and control over policy and decision-making.
- <sup>2</sup> Countries are divided into low, lower middle, upper middle and upper income groupings according to the standard developed by the World Bank Group's World Development Indicators.
- <sup>3</sup> Population in millions, 2003. Data from the CIA World Fact Book online addition at <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>. According to the Fact Book notes, "This entry gives an estimate from the US Bureau of the Census based on statistics from population censuses, vital statistics registration systems, or sample surveys pertaining to the recent past and on assumptions about future trends."
- <sup>4</sup> Number of INGO's, 2001. Data from the Union of International Authorities as presented in the Global Civil Society Year Book, 2002. According to the Year Book, this data reflects, "the total number of international organization secretariats (headquarters) of international non-government organizations (INGOs) and internationally-oriented NGOs in a given country."
- <sup>5</sup> Net Official Development Assistance or Official Aid, 2001. Data from the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD as presented in the World Bank World Development Indicators, 2003. According to the report, "Net official development assistance consists of disbursements of loans made on concessional terms (net of repayments of principal) and grants by official agencies of the members of DAC, by multilateral institutions, and by non-DAC countries to promote economic development and welfare in countries and territories in part I of the DAC list and aid recipients. Net official aid flows (net of repayments) from official donors to countries and territories in part II of the DAC list of aid recipients." Also, the figures "do not reflect aid given by recipient countries to other developing countries. As a result, some countries that are net donors (such as Saudi Arabia) are shown in the table as aid recipients."
- <sup>6</sup> Countries are divided into low, lower middle, upper middle and upper income groupings according to the standard developed by the World Bank Group's World Development Indicators.
- <sup>7</sup> Population in millions, 2003. Data from the CIA World Fact Book online addition at <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>. According to the Fact Book notes, "This entry gives an estimate from the US Bureau of the Census based on statistics from population censuses, vital statistics registration systems, or sample surveys pertaining to the recent past and on assumptions about future trends."
- <sup>8</sup> Internet users in millions, 2003. Data from the CIA World Fact Book online addition at <http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/>. According to the Fact Book "This entry gives the number of users within a country that access the Internet. Statistics vary from country to country and may include users who access the Internet at least several times a week to those who access it only once within a period of several months."
- <sup>9</sup> Cell phone users in millions, 2002. Data from the International Telecommunications Union website at <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/>. According to the ITU, "Telecommunication data are supplied by annual questionnaire sent to telecommunication authorities and operating companies. These data are supplemented by annual reports and statistical yearbooks of telecommunication ministries, regulators, operators and industry associations. In some cases, estimates are derived from ITU background documents or other references ..."
- <sup>10</sup> Number of countries in the region that have digital cell phone networks out of the number of countries considered in that region, 2002. Data from the International Telecommunications Union website at <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ict/statistics/>. Note that ITU data was incomplete many cases. The fact that a cell phone network is 100% digital should not be confused with full coverage in that country.
- <sup>11</sup> This quote and others in this section were drawn from the raw data of practitioner interviews conducted by APC (2002) as a part of its Learners and Practitioners Network research project (unpublished). APC generously shared this research with us to aid in the development of this paper.
- <sup>12</sup> From Niels Peen's bio on the SummerSource site (2003): "We run a global VPN called Greenlink-3 which provides connectivity and services to Greenpeace offices, ships and mobile users around the world. Currently over 60 locations are connected and we expect to pass the 100 somewhere in the next two years. On this network we provide services like email, news, discussion lists, file transfer, typical web-based applications, world-wide dial-in and more using primarily Open Source software." See <http://www.tacticaltech.org/summersource/>
- <sup>13</sup> From an archive of the Jubilee2000 site –December 02 2000 - <http://web.archive.org/web/20001202234300/www.jubilee2000uk.org/main.html>
- <sup>14</sup> This according to the Jubilee 2000 site at: <http://www.jubilee2000uk.org/jmi/main.htm>
- <sup>15</sup> Material in this section has been drawn from a personal interview with ITeM Director Roberto Bissio (2003) and from various web sites run by ITeM.

<sup>16</sup>See: [http://www.textually.org/textually/archives/cat\\_sms\\_and\\_politics.htm](http://www.textually.org/textually/archives/cat_sms_and_politics.htm) for more examples.

<sup>17</sup>Informal discussions with APC staff.