

Pan Asia Networking programme

The Pan Asia Networking (PAN) programme initiative of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) has been working on Information and Communication Technologies for Development (ICT4D) issues since 1994. PAN is the Asia component of the ICT4D@IDRC Programme Area, which focuses primarily on issues relating to connectivity and the information economy in Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean. Since its inception, PAN has supported Asian institutions to adopt ICTs as a means of addressing development problems.

As part of the prospectus five year strategic planning process, PAN organised a two-day partners consultation meeting, entitled PAN Prospectus Consultation, or 'PAN PC'. The meeting aimed to gather feedback on PAN's current focus areas, as well as on key emerging issues that can be considered for inclusion in the future programming of PAN. The consultation was designed as an interactive forum for about 30 Asian researchers, practitioners and policy makers to exchange ideas and experiences. It served as a learning experience that could help stimulate fresh thinking among PAN stakeholders from different regions of Asia.

The first day of the 'PAN PC' included presentations from PAN staff and evaluators of PAN's programming, who highlighted the programme initiative's key achievements (including the digital inclusion of marginalised communities; developing and testing development applications in telemedicine, distance education, commerce and agriculture; networking digital pioneers and developing appropriate ICT policies) and challenges (ensuring research outcomes are relevant to the poor, the need to build capacity, and the multitude of players in ICT4D field). IDRC's Director of ICT4D, Richard Fuchs, and PAN's Team Leader, Laurent Elder, then touched on key points and issues to help formulate thinking about PAN's future programming.

The second day of the meeting was more focussed on gathering detailed feedback from the participants. Key research issues were identified and prioritised within the three broad areas: ICT policy research; research on appropriate ICT technologies; and research on the social and economic effect of ICTs.

More specifically, some of the key ideas that surfaced from each of the three different areas are:

Policies

- Research on policies to support localisation efforts
- Better understanding of key ICT4D concepts and mapping ICT4D initiatives



Credit: IDRC

- Research for more effective e-Government
- Research on how best to achieve universal access issues
- Research on Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) in Digital Asia

Technologies

- Building awareness and capacities, through training and education
- Research and development on localisation
- Research on the appropriateness and applications of Open Source and Open Spectrum
- Research and development on end-user application for development

Effects

- Research on social inclusion and vulnerable groups
- Research on communication processes and content related issues
- Building research capacity and developing appropriate research methodologies to better understand the effects of ICTs on communities
- Community popularisation and use of new last-inch ICT tools

The exercise of seeking ideas and advice for the next prospectus does not end with PAN. The team will also engage with other programmes working in ICT4D as well as other stakeholders in the development field.

PAN PC preceded by PAN localisation workshop

The PAN PC dovetailed a highly successful training meeting of the PAN Localisation network (PANL10N), 'From Localisation to Language Processing', in Siem Reap. This second Asian Regional Training on Local Language Computing focused on tackling the more advanced technical challenges they are facing in the development of local language applications in Asian languages. ■

For more information visit www.idrc.ca/panasia