Evaluation of
Global Information Society Watch
2007-2010

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Background

APC has been playing a leading role in civil society-led global ICT policy advocacy since the inception of the United Nations World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) in February 2001. Since the conclusion of the WSIS process in December 2005 APC has been active in follow-up global forums as well as in various related regional processes in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

In 2007 APC joined forces first with ITeM (the Third World Institute) and Hivos, a Dutch non-governmental organisation, to produce the first Global Information Society Watch (GISWatch) annual report. The partners recognised that there was a need for a structured, action-oriented monitoring mechanism from a civil society perspective to help ensure that the WSIS stakeholders meet their commitments at the global, regional, and national levels. This vision resulted in the overarching aim of GISW:

> *To become the premier information platform for civil society perspectives on the state of the Information Society on global, regional and national levels, as well as a vehicle for improvement of an Information Society that deepens democracy and social justice.*

More specifically, the aims were:

- to produce an annual publication focussing on a critical thematic issue, which is seen as a legitimate report from civil society practitioners, and not just a reflection by experts;

- to build the ability of civil society practitioners to review current national ICT policy objectives, review national technology and infrastructure choices and how they intersect with broader national development objectives.

- to strengthen civil society practitioners capacity to recognise "windows of opportunity" for policy advocacy in their national contexts

- to encourage critical dialogue;

- to empower and motivate national civil society organisations and their constituencies, and

- to inform decision makers and the media.

GISW endeavours to achieve these aims through:

- annual publication of GISWatch – both in print and online;

- encouraging civil society organisations to contribute national reports, and support them through providing networking platforms and capacity building in research and writing, policy analysis, and advocacy; and

- providing support to national contributors in effective communication and dissemination of GISW content at national and regional levels.

GISW has focussed on the following thematic issue areas to date: Participation (2007); Access to infrastructure (2008); Access to online information and knowledge (2009); Environmental Sustainability and ICTs (2010); and Advancing human rights and democracy – freedom of expression and association online (2011). This report reflects the findings of an evaluation of GISW activities over the period 2007 to 2010.

This independent evaluation of GISW was commissioned by APC. The aims of the evaluation were to:

- understand, by reflecting on the collective experience of primary and secondary stakeholders/target groups, what have been the strengths, weaknesses, challenges and opportunities experienced/presented through/by participation in GISW.

- assess what change/impact participation in GISW has made at the individual or organisational level (specifically in relation to the GISW network members)

- assess what change/impact GISW has made (i.e. in what ways, or to what extent has GISW achieved its overall and specific aims)

- enable learning that can be channelled to addressing problems and making GISW more effective in achieving its overall and specific aims

The report is structured into five sections. The section that follows describes the methodology. The next section describes the feedback from the various stakeholder groups obtained through the primary research done for this evaluation. The findings are organised according to the different instruments as these give the views of the various stakeholder groups. The section that follows discusses findings from the primary research, drawing also on the documentary review. The final section provides a few suggestions on the way forward.

Methodology

The methods used for the evaluation included desk-based reading, surveys and (mostly on-line) interviews.

Documentation included reports from monitoring and evaluation and assessment exercises done to date, GISWatch proposals and reports to donors, selected chapters of the four GISWatch annual publications produced in the evaluation period, indicator collations relating to dissemination, and summary financial/budget information. The set of proposals was not fully complete as a few of the 2007 documents could not be located. This is probably at least partly the result of how GISWatch responsibilities have shifted among APC staff members over the years. The chapters of the four GISWatch annual publications were selected partly on the basis of those suggested by APC members or mentioned by other respondents, and partly on the basis of the interests of the evaluator.

Interviews and questionnaires were for the most part conducted electronically. APC staff assisted in identifying target groups and individuals, as well as in sending them the evaluation instruments. The groups for whom interviews and questionnaires were used were as follows:

- Hivos and other donors: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), Hivos (as both GISWatch "inner partner" and donor), Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) and Bread For All: Open-ended interview schedule for self-completion.

- APC staff: Seven current and one past staff member who played leading roles in APC were identified, and sent an open-ended interview schedule for completion. For the purposes of the evaluation, Alan Finlay was classified as an APC staff member although he is, in strict terms, contracted as GISWatch editor. One of the identified people was on leave and not available. However, another not initially identified was asked to – and did – complete the interview schedule.

- Workshop participants: Sixteen participants in workshops organised under the auspices of GISWatch, or to which GISWatch participants were invited because of their GISWatch participation, were sent an open-ended questionnaire to complete.

- GISWatch contributors: Eight country and four thematic contributors were identified and sent an open-ended questionnaire to complete. Selection of the country contributors included five who had responded to an early (2010) on-line evaluation with open-ended responses that seemed especially interesting as well as four others, identified by APC, who had not responded to the 2010 questionnaire. In addition, all GISWatch contributors received an email inviting them to send in a short "most significant change" (MSC) story on changes they had seen occur as a result of participation in GISWatch.

- "Outsiders": A short open-ended schedule of questions was sent to ten people in the information society arena who had not been directly involved in GISWatch but were likely to have read or seen all GISWatch annual reports. Some of these were people with whom APC had had previous contact, while others were identified on the internet as people who had quoted or referred to GISWatch in some way.

All instruments except the donor questionnaire and the instrument relating to the most significant change story promised confidentiality, in that responses would be read only by the evaluator. The evaluator's email address was provided for submission. Many respondents chose to send their submissions to the APC staff member who had sent it to them, and these submissions were passed on to the evaluator without being read.

The timing of the evaluation was unfortunate as it took place in July and August, when some of the hoped-for respondents were on leave. As will be seen below, the response rate was poor across all instruments except the staff survey, despite follow-up reminders to all groups except the "outsiders". APC helped in a range of ways with facilitating the evaluation process. Karen Banks deserves special thanks in this respect.

Feedback from primary and secondary stakeholders

As noted above, this section is presented instrument by instrument. The order moves outwards. It starts with APC staff, as they will have the most in-depth knowledge of the project and their responses thus provide the background against which the other responses can be understood. Donors are presented next. The response of "inner partner" Hivos is included in this section as they served a dual role as both inner partner and donor. The responses to the various instruments

used for the broader set of partners, including APC member organisations, are then discussed. The first sub-section in this category discusses responses from contributors to the GISWatch publications. The discussion in this sub-section also draws on a previous on-line survey of contributors which had a much better response rate of 40, compared to the three who responded to the evaluation questionnaire. This is followed by discussion of the MSC stories contributed. Finally, the responses from the two "outsiders" who responded are presented.

The staff survey

All except one of the current staff members who played key roles in GISWatch responded to the questionnaire, as did one previous staff member.

One of the first questions asked about the positions held by the person over the years of the GISWatch project, as well as whether and how they had been involved in each of the areas of work identified in the projects proposals. These questions were included to help give an understanding of the experiences on which the other responses to the questionnaire might be based. The responses on areas in which staff members felt that they had been engaged could also perhaps be taken as a crude indication of the extent to which APC as an organisation was involved in the various aspects of GISWatch. All eight people said that they were involved in some way in production of the annual report, and six said that they were involved in each of capacity building and dissemination and outreach. Four were involved in Latin America analysis, while three said that they were involved in Latin America analysis and partnership building and support and two were involved in Africa analysis. The apparent imbalance between Latin America and Africa, despite the fact that Africa was the earlier more explicit focus of GISWatch, could be explained by staff changes and an extra response being offered from the Latin American staff.

One staff member noted that the list of areas provided did not include an item for conceptualisation. This is an important omission for an initiative that was from the beginning trying to do something different. While the question was not asked, the responses on other questions suggest that at least half of the staff members did play a role in conceptualisation either in the birth of the project or its development over time.

Achievements

Staff members were asked what they regarded as the biggest or best achievements of GISWatch.

Several named annual production of the publication over a number of years as a noteworthy achievement. Some elaborated on how the annual production had stimulated reflection, analysis and debate around key issues related to an inclusive information society. It had, in particular, created the space for a civil society perspective on issues. Feedback had indicated that GISW was "really doing something unique and filling a gap" in this respect. One or two noted that APC's key role in production of the annual reports had helped to establish its credibility and reputation.

Several responses focused on the way in which GISW had strengthened partnerships and increased both research and advocacy capacities. Having a single (but broad) focus each year had also provided issues around which networking could happen. The fact that the number of writer

participants increased over time despite the limited financial incentive offered served as proof of the value that others attached to the network and initiative.

At least two of the staff members highlighted the fact – although in response to other questions – that GISWatch was an APC-wide project. Several other responses implied this less explicitly. This observation is important. The project has allowed APC to document learning, analysis and advocacy of its own as well as of members, other organisations and consultants working in this area. The fact that APC is a network has allowed it to achieve better dissemination than a similar project housed elsewhere, for example in a research funding agency.

Disappointments

Staff members were asked about their biggest disappointments and/or regrets about GISWatch.

The most common response by far was the failure to build a strong (policy advocacy) network out of the initiative. Some explained this failure by the fact that production of the reports monopolised activities (but none questioned the importance of the reports). One elaborated that the "vision was for GISW to be a global network of activists working together to monitor actions (of governments and the private sector in particular), influence policy and bring about social change." However, while the initiative had "touched the edges of all of these areas" they had not "as yet seen the impact of a fully resourced, animated initiative." In line with the last point, several staff members referred to inadequacy of funding – and how this constrained what could be done – as one of their disappointments. Two staff members noted that the web-space had not achieved what was hoped for in terms of fostering participation and collaboration. It had remained "unidirectional" with only a few people posting content, and without the multiple languages hoped for.

At a personal level, one person was sad that they were now less involved than before because of their changed role within the organisation, while another referred to disappointment that Latin Americans were not yet authoring thematic chapters – a statement that was incorrect as several other thematic papers had been authored by Latin American writers.

Challenges

Staff members were then asked what they saw as the main challenges faced by the project. The answers here were more varied than in respect of disappointments, and ranged from the more practical through organisational to the more strategic.

At the practical level, several people referred to lack of financial resources, which was also linked to lack of other resources, including human resources. Even more practically, two or three people referred to the challenge of producing the book and meeting all the associated deadlines. One raised a practical question with strategic consequences, namely the extent to which the publication was in hard or soft copy. On the latter point, in the response to another question one of the staff members expressed the feeling that an online-only publication "would spell the beginning of the end of what GISWatch has become. I think the power of print is rewarding for the authors." Another suggested that plans to use the services of a commercial publisher would allow GISWatch itself to focus on (its specialist strength of) on-line communication.

At the organisational level, within APC there was the question of rotation of roles – further confirmation of the fact that this was an APC-wide activity. On the one hand, the ongoing rotation

of roles meant that a wider group of people were involved in GISWatch, and the project could also draw on specific skills and knowledge each year as both topics and positions within the organisation changed. On the other hand, this rotation meant that some aspects were stronger in some years than others. Beyond APC, the change of topic was also seen to create both opportunities and challenges. On the plus side, staff members had noted that changes of topic exposed partners to new ideas. On the down side, it meant that the publication sometimes drew on people with limited knowledge in some of the countries. One person said that there had been "insinuations" that the resultant weak chapters had resulted in some outsiders taking the publication less seriously.

At an even broader, and perhaps more strategic, level, several staff members spoke about challenges in relation to establishing something beyond a loose network, and establishing an ethos where authors did not work on the reports "as if they were commissioned pieces, detached from their work and priorities". There were concerns as to how a greater sense of ownership could be encouraged, for example through establishing more participatory ways of identifying and defining the issues to be covered each year.

Two staff members provided their perceptions of how the project worked year by year. These are useful in giving a sense of how APC and its partners applied lessons learnt over the years, as well as in providing background to understand other comments on the various years.

In 2007, there were the teething problems associated with a new project, including working out the roles of the three partners, as well as how to manage participation – and delivery – of the contributing authors. Having ITeM as one of the partners in this first year was not explicitly mentioned as a plus in the staff questionnaires, but it was clear from other communication that GISWatch drew heavily on the ITeM experience of producing Social Watch. In respect of managing contributing authors, it was noted that problems of late or non-delivery had diminished over the years. Further, over the life of the project there have been very few contributions rejected on the basis of poor quality.

In 2008, Hivos' joining the project as a full and "equal" partner rather than primarily as a donor was a gain, and provided an expanded network from which GISWatch could source country partners and authors. The Hivos-commissioned strategy report, written by Alan Finlay, also proved useful in taking the initiative forward. ITeM was no longer a partner, but Pablo Accuosto – the most involved ITeM staff member – continued to work on the project on an outsourced basis (and in 2010 as a staff member), thus lessening the impact of ITeM's withdrawal. With limited finances, the focus in 2008 was on production of the report. Partnership building and support and capacity building were limited to aspects associated with production of the report.

In 2009, GISWatch for the first time received financial support explicitly for capacity building. This was used to support participation of African and Latin American participants in three workshops. The Latin America workshop was held in 2010 and in the case of Africa the workshops were not GISWatch-specific. Instead, given the limited resources available for capacity building, the strategy agreed upon was to invite Africa authors to CICEWA advocacy capacity building workshops and build GISWatch into the agenda. (The full name of the CICEWA project is Communication for influence: Linking advocacy, dissemination and research by building ICTD networks in Central, East and West Africa). Some country partners in Africa were supported to

attend global Inter Governance Forum meetings. Those who attended could participate in GISW launch events.

In the lead-up to 2010, there were intensive discussions around how best to use limited financial resources. While there were some ideas for relatively "drastic" changes, the steering committee felt that these could not be effected in the middle of a funding cycle. A member survey was done which, among others, was intended to guide future planning. There was, however, a decision to pay more attention in 2010 to monitoring and support of country-level advocacy related to GISWatch. (The evaluation did not reveal much evidence of this.)

The inner partnership

Staff members were asked how the partnership/s between APC, ITeM and Hivos had worked. The responses to this were sparse, in part reflecting the fact that some staff members did not feel that they knew enough to comment.

Only one staff member openly acknowledged that APC had been in the "driving seat", but this seemed fairly obvious from other inputs obtained during the evaluation. There was broad agreement on the important contributions of the other two partners. ITeM's contribution lay, among others, in its experience of coordinating the multi-country Social Watch publication. It was also said to have given potential access to new partners in the Middle East, and to partners with "progressive" political positions. Hivos's contribution lay, among others, in their opening doors to a range of new partners (particularly in Central Asia and the Middle East at the country level, as well as thematic authors), as well as in their funding contribution. On the negative side, while for APC GISWatch was clearly an organisational initiative, in the case of the other partners it was one or two individuals who participated. These individuals were said to have done their best in the circumstances. However, there were changes over time in the relationship as the individuals and/or their position changed.

In the case of ITeM, the challenges went deeper, as it seems that APC and ITeM had somewhat different conceptions of and visions for GISWatch – and perhaps more generally. Some of these differences are documented by Finlay in GISW: A way forward, produced for GISWatch in late 2007. In contrast, the relationship with Hivos was seen as complementary, and as being based on mutual respect. ITeM withdrew from the project after 2007 as part of a general cutting back on the organisation's activities and a move away from a focus on ICTs.

Comparing the years

Staff members were asked which of the four years 2007 to 2010 they rated as most successful and which was least successful. One person gave only minimal responses offering as reason that they had not read enough from the various reports to feel confident about answering.

One of those who responded more fully said that they did not think there had been a "less successful" edition to date. While some reports had received more attention than others, this was not due to "intrinsic" aspects of the report, but instead to the contexts in which the reports were disseminated. Further, the fact that the report was in English could influence its reception. Another noted that the rating depended on the criteria used, and would differ if the criterion was content or

policy advocacy (where 2008 might have rated highest), overall impact (2008) or network building and addressing an emerging issue (2010). The responses are reported below by year of report because, firstly, some people did not give a definite rating and, secondly, discussion by year better highlights the factors considered by staff members in offering responses, thus addressing the point above about rating depending on criteria. It must be remembered when reading these comments and those on chapters below that these are the assessments of "insiders" with a solid understanding of the information society and related issues.

On the 2007 edition, which focused on participation, several people commented that this served to launch the project. This characteristic had contributed a special quality to the launch and had also allowed the initiative to reach diverse stakeholders for the first time. The novelty of the project in itself made it noteworthy, but it also meant that the report could not draw on a team of experienced country authors. This, in turn, might have led to tighter editorial control and less "dynamic" contributions. Nevertheless, at least one person commented on the overall high quality, and the "excellence" of the thematic reports and structure. Further, having repeat authors is not an unmixed blessing. One staff person commented that some repeat authors "appear to have started to take the process for granted, and often deliver second-rate work." Finally, and importantly, the 2007 topic was seen as central to APC's policy advocacy work.

The 2008 edition focused on access to infrastructure. The topic was seen as fitting in well with APC's regional and global policy advocacy work, and was well covered in the media in different countries. This, in turn, opened up opportunities for APC's members in several countries. However, this edition accounted for the lowest number of downloads – perhaps because those most interested were less likely to have the infrastructure for downloading. However, another reason could be weaker networking by GISWatch during and after production of the report than in other years. One staff member felt that the thematic reports in this edition were weaker than in others. Another felt that the topic – and as a result many of the chapters – was less "adventurous" than for other editions.

The 2009 focus was on access to knowledge. Overall, this edition had the most people saying it was probably the best. The edition was rated high on account of its coherence and "soundness", in particular of the introductory chapters. The fact that GISWatch could draw on authors and material from the International Development Research Centre's African Access to Knowledge project could have contributed to the coherence. The fact that the publication appeared at a time when the global debate on internet governance was "at a high point" could also have contributed to the success of this edition. Another positive aspect was the introduction of a mapping section. However, one staff member felt that the content was not clearly linked to the advocacy work of APC and its network. The fact that it was a new area of work for many partners presented challenges at the content level, but also provided an opportunity to commission "very interesting" thematic chapters and so perhaps provided opportunities for new learning by APC and its partners.

The 2010 edition on environment was again a new area for many people, including many authors. One staff member suggested that this presented an opportunity at a time when the project was attempting to reanimate the network and create an agenda for future action. However, it resulted in more uneven quality of the content. It was also more difficult to get reviews. Nevertheless, at

least one of the APC staff said that this was their favourite edition both because of the topic and because it raised new – and sometimes uncomfortable – ideas and perspectives.

Rating chapters

Staff members were asked which chapters they rated highest and which they found disappointing, and were asked to give reasons for their ratings. They were also asked which chapters they had found personally useful.

Some staff members commented on their relative rating of different types of chapters. Overall, it seems that staff members tended to rate the thematic chapters as most useful to them personally. The institutional reviews were also among the chapters found to be most useful. The institutional review of 2008, in particular, was identified as having introduced the main international actors for non-experts in a way that avoided over-simplification.

Country reports were generally acknowledged to be uneven in quality. There were suggestions that some of the weaknesses had resulted from requiring authors to follow a general template. While this allowed for some comparison, it made it difficult to write "memorable" chapters. There was also a feeling that GISWatch had perhaps been too "lenient" with authors. However, this leniency was understandable given the aim of strengthening partnerships and the network, and in acknowledgement of the fact that authors were often attempting to deal with topics that were new to them. One staff member reported that quality problems arose when reports were developed by organisations which did not have research and report-writing among their main activities. Another staff member noted that the need to ensure better quality if GISWatch was to maintain its good reputation was yet another reason why GISWatch needed to find better ways of providing capacity building not only in respect of advocacy, but also in the production of the report.

One staff member named the regional overviews in the 2008 and 2009 editions as among the most useful chapters. Overall, however, regional reports came in for the most criticism. One person described them as primarily reference documents, which as a result were not "riveting". Further, while ideally the regional chapters should link to the country chapters, the current production timeline did not allow for this. Even if the timeline allowed this doing the chapters in stages would add to the complication of communication and management. The problems associated with regional reports have been discussed within GISWatch and in 2011 there will not be regional chapters. Further, country chapters will attempt to tell a "story" rather than follow a pre-determined template.

A few staff members commented that the chapters they found most useful were those that related most directly to their work. This is a pleasing finding, as GISWatch is intended as a spur to action rather than simply a publication. The 2010 publication was seen as especially useful because it reflected a new programmatic area of work. Perhaps reflecting this, Paul Mobbs' introduction to the 2010 introduction got the highest number of "votes" as one of the best or most useful chapters. Mobbs was praised for his knowledge of the topic, his courageous activist stance, and his ability to express his knowledge and perspective in a clear way. The introductions to the 2008 and 2009 editions were also rated "best" by one or more the staff members.

Amy Mahan's "Indicators for Advocacy" in the 2007 edition was the next most often "best" rated after Mobbs. This chapter, too, was said to be provocative, well written and based on

comprehensive knowledge. One person said that it was the only writing on indicators that they had enjoyed reading to date. Another noted that it gave clear and practical guidelines for an area in which APC had been struggling.

For the other chapters that were individually named, the most common reason was that it covered a new topic or gave a new perspective. In some cases chapters were also praised for the clear writing.

Few staff members named particular chapters as disappointing. Among those that were named were "Mapping democracy" in 2009 (which was rated "best" by some others), "Building advocacy networks" in 2010, and the indicators report in 2010. In some cases the disappointment resulted from expectations not being met, and in others from weak writing style.

Country experiences

Staff members were asked which countries had been most effective in using the GISWatch process. Most felt unable to answer this question conclusively. Those that did generally emphasised that they were relying on hearsay.

Romania (StrawberryNet) and Pakistan were named most often, which makes it unsurprising that Romania was one of the few countries from which there was a response to the contributor questionnaire. Other countries that were named as having been effective were Argentina (two mentions), Chile (two mentions), Bosnia-Herzegovina, Costa Rica, Colombia, Croatia, Ethiopia, India, Mexico, Nigeria, Peru, Philippines and Switzerland. The fact that as many countries as this were named, despite staff members' hesitation, is pleasing as it suggests that country-based activity beyond writing the chapter is not uncommon.

In giving possible reasons for these countries' effectiveness, staff members said that these were countries in which the issues – and advocacy – were part of the organisations' agenda – GISWatch was thus "an extension of what they do" rather than an "add-on". As a result, organisations in these countries used the research and the report through translations (including of reports from other countries), outreach, local launches, and the like. Responses that spoke about organisations having interest in the issues covered explained why countries in some years were more effective than others. Nevertheless, it seemed that those who contributed regularly were also more likely to use their engagement effectively. The reason offered for the large number of Latin American countries named was that organisations had worked collaboratively as a regional network on the research and advocacy agenda. One of the staff members who named more countries than others noted that all those named were APC members except Ethiopia. In the case of Ethiopia, APC had been working with the organisation through the Catalysing Access to ICTS in Africa (CATIA) initiative since 2004.

Indicators

Staff members were asked what GISWatch had achieved in respect of its objective of establishing ICT indicators.

Several staff members said that this objective had been de-prioritised, or even dropped. One explained that it had been dropped because another International Telecommunication Union (ITU)-led indicator initiative, the Partnership for Measuring Information Society, was doing this work.

APC is not a member of this other initiative. Another contributory reason could be that ITeM had committed to working on indicators and, as noted above, they withdrew from the partnership after 2007.

Despite the relatively downbeat answers to this question, staff members felt that GISWatch had made a contribution in chapters that highlighted the complexity of the issue of indicators and provided a critique and guidelines. At least two felt that GISWatch had over the years contributed to an understanding of what indicators could mean in respect of different issues. Several said that GISWatch had never aimed to develop indicators. Some felt that quantitative indicators were too narrow and that if GISWatch were to be involved, it would be in trying to develop qualitative impact indicators. One felt that the mapping initiatives were one way in this was being done within GISWatch. Overall, though, there seemed to be an acknowledgement that it would be over-ambitious to expect GISWatch to play a lead role in developing indicators.

Scoring areas of activity

These open-ended questions were followed by a semi-quantitative exercise in which staff members were asked to rate GISWatch's performance in respect of each of the key areas of activity identified in the GISWatch proposals. They were asked to give scores between 1 (very poor) and 5 (excellent). The table below provides both the average (mean) scores and the number of people providing a rating on each area of activity.

Table 1.   Staff scoring of GISWatch's performance on key areas of activity

	Average	N
Analysis of policy and implementation contexts in Africa	3.8	5
Analysis of policy and implementation contexts in Latin America	3.9	7
Capacity building of country partners and contributors	3.0	8
Partnership building and support for country partners	2.9	7
Production of the annual GISWatch report	4.4	8
Dissemination and outreach	3.1	8
Building advocacy networks	2.6	7

Scores ranged from 2 (of which there were 6) to 5 (of which there were 5), with no 1's. Overall, production of the annual report was clearly the highest scorer, at 4.4, while building advocacy networks (2.6), followed by partnership building (2,9), score lowest. Only five of the eight staff felt able to score Africa analysis.

- *Analysis of policy and policy implementation contexts in Africa (3.8)*

While one person gave as their reason for a high score the "good quality" of the reports, several others commented on the varying – sometimes poor – quality of the reports from Africa. There was a concern, in particular, with the country reports rather than the regional reports. It was said to be especially difficult to get strong reports from francophone Africa. This could be related to the fact that CATIA did not focus on francophone Africa to the same extent as Anglophone, both because of language difficulties and because of the relative weakness of organisations and networks in francophone Africa.

- *Analysis of policy and policy implementation contexts in Latin America (3.9)*

While the average score for this area is similar to that for Africa, the comments were more upbeat with some staff explicitly noting that the quality of Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) reports tended to be better than for Africa. In particular, the Latin American reports were said to have a stronger regional perspective, which could have been linked to greater interaction between authors from this region, stronger support from regional staff and greater engagement in advocacy. However, one staff member again (somewhat incorrectly) bemoaned the paucity of LAC authors contributing to thematic chapters. Another noted that quality varied over the years, with 2009 "somewhat fragmented", perhaps due to the subject matter.

- *Capacity building of country partners and contributors (3.0)*

This was one of the lower-scoring elements. Overall, the feeling seemed to be that where there were capacity building opportunities – exemplified by the workshops, and the LAC GISWatch-specific workshop in particular – this went well. However, there were not sufficient such opportunities. Two staff members observed that capacity was built through the process of writing reports, especially when these introduced authors to new topics.

- *Partnership building and support for country partners (2.9)*

Partnership building and support also scored relatively low – although the average was more than half of the top score of 5. One staff member noted that while GISW was a "great vehicle" for partnership building, there had not been the necessary staff capacity to take advantage of this. However, others noted that the number of country partners increased each year and new thematic authors were brought on board. One staff member felt that partnership building was one of the main positive outcomes of the project.

- *Production of the annual GISWatch report (4.4)*

This item received only 4's and 5's in the scoring. Staff members commented on the "smooth"-ness and efficiency of the process including all stages from editing through proofing to printing and publication, the fact that deadlines were met, and the professionalism of the publication. This had been achieved despite resource constraints. One noted that the interior design had drawn on the model of Social Watch and that the cover illustrations created a distinctive "look". Another noted that the small font was the only weakness in respect of production – something that was inherited from Social Watch. (In fact, GISWatch uses a font size slightly larger than that used for Social Watch!) One staff member commented in particularly about the "great job" done by Alan Finlay as editor.

- *Dissemination and outreach (3.1)*

There were concerns about lack of a clear dissemination and outreach strategy, as well as lack of solid information on who was using GISW and how. Nevertheless, staff members felt that GISWatch was reaching strategic audiences through events and media as well as dissemination in other ways, such as through partners. The extent of library holdings (see below) also suggested good dissemination among academics. The re-design of the web-site was noted as one of the extra efforts that had been taken to improve dissemination and outreach from 2010 onwards.

- *Building advocacy networks (2.6)*

This was the lowest-scoring element. Some staff members felt that production of the annual report had taken precedence over this element. However, this did not effectively create a network beyond the contributing authors. One noted that while some of the reports could be seen to be advocacy-oriented, it was not clear that they had often been used in this way. Interestingly, none of the responses referred to the capacity building workshops in answering this question although advocacy was covered in all three workshops that GISWatch country authors attended. Overall, this was seen as an area needing more attention.

Donor responses

Interview schedules were sent to four donor organisations. Responses were received from three of the organisations – Sida, Hivos and Swiss Development Corporation (SDC) – with two responses from Sida given changeover of staff. The lack of response from the fourth donor – Bread For All – can be partly explained by the fact that the requests were sent out in the middle of the European summer break. The SDC response was provided by a former staff member because he was considered to be the person with the best knowledge of the period being recovered. Only one of the respondents had a history going back to 2007, and even she had not been involved in the early stages of conceptualising the project.

When asked how they saw the overall aim of GISWatch, donor responses were as follows:

- To publish and distribute information;

- To build networking and advocacy among civil society organisations who work for a just and inclusive information society with the objective of contributing to inclusive ICT policies at national level and strengthened accountability by governments;.

- To create and facilitate a unique space – on- and off-line – for monitoring implementation of commitments made by governments towards the creation of an inclusive information society;

- To act as an impartial watchdog to assess progress (and lack thereof) on goals and commitments agreed at WSIS 1+2 and hold leaders (and institutions) accountable through its "no-nonsense reporting";

- To serve as an advocacy tool for mainstreaming ICTs into development practice; and

- To serve as an impartial instrument to guide policy makers on priorities through its critical multi-stakeholder approach.

These responses between them probably cover all the key objectives of GISWatch. The responses are also more or less in line with each other, although there could be some tension between the emphasis on civil society advocacy on the one hand, and multi-stakeholder impartiality on the other.

Two people responded to the question about changes seen over time in GISWatch. One observed that the "static report" had developed into a "more dynamic community of practice regarding WSIS" through the efforts to involve people throughout the process, including after production of the report. The second observed, somewhat similarly, that there was a growing community of contributors and "watchers", but also commented on the improvements in terms of stronger and

more diverse themes, better structure of content and organisation, and improved quality of thematic and country reports.

When asked how GISWatch fitted in with their own organisation's aims, objectives and other activities, three of the responses could be summed up by the laconic but pleasing "good" offered by one of the four respondents. One of the Sida representatives highlighted the match with Sida's emphasis on increased participation and power of civil society in national and global processes that affect their lives, and their related emphasis on access to ICT, freedom of expression, democracy and good governance, and human rights. Hivos similarly noted a fit with their focus on freedom of expression within their Expression and Engagement programme. The SDC response was less positive, noting that institutional changes at SDC meant that ICT4D and WSIS currently "fall between the cracks". The SDC person stressed that this was not through any fault of GISWatch as SDC had been very satisfied with what GISWatch had done.

When asked about GISWatch's greatest achievements, donors highlighted:

- The relevance and ability to shift focus with each edition so as to cover multiple aspects'

- The trustworthiness, concise, focused and unique nature of the publication, and the fact that "hard core" specialists worldwide knew about the publication and contributed to it;

- The fact that the initiative provided a "credible and concentrated" civil society voice to the "state-dominated" UN discussions, thus contributing to a multi-stakeholder approach;

- The role the initiative played of impartial watchdog of WSIS achievements and gaps.

Disappointments and regrets related to lack of interests and funding from other donors, including private sector donors, limited visibility in the WSIS process, and limited take-up by the non-ICT mainstream development community.

Sida representatives felt less able than the others to identify challenges, but suggested that financial sustainability might – as common with many other initiatives – be a problem. SDC referred to the challenge of keeping the initiative in line with SDC's institutional objectives, as well as the difficulty in determining a thematic focus each year given the many different themes covered by WSIS. The former SDC staff member said that these challenges had been addressed through a flexible logframe that left leeway for the GISWatch team at APC to make the decisions. Hivos, as more of an insider, named challenges as including the debate around whether to disseminate on- or off-line, and how to create broader awareness and establish the name of the publication so that its added value was recognised and it was more widely used – and attracted more funding.

When asked how their organisation had used or benefited from GISWatch "outputs" such as the publication and events, one organisation responded only that they had participated in launch events and obtained access to "critical" information and analysis. Others spoke about their organisations – including regional offices – learning and increasing their awareness of the importance of WSIS and ICT4D. Hivos said that some country reports were translated into Russian. SDC said that GISWatch had contributed to Switzerland's prioritisation of support for civil society during the WSIS process and to promotion of a multi-stakeholder approach.

Donors were asked whether other organisations that they supported had used or benefited from the GISWatch "outputs". To some extent their responses to the previous question had already answered this question. Answers to this question included both access of other organisations to useful information which was "very appreciated" at ICT/democracy related events, and participation by organisations as authors. One felt that the capacity building that happened through this process was more important than the product. This aspect was again stressed later in the same person's response, with the donor advising that GISWatch should try to convince other donors of the importance of the process.

Donors, like APC staff members, were asked to rate each of the seven areas of activity highlighted in the proposal on a scale from 1 (very poor) to 5 (excellent). The table below records the average scores.

Table 2.   Donor rating of areas of activity

Analysis of policy and policy implementation contexts in Africa	4.3
Analysis of policy and policy implementation contexts in Latin America	4.3
Capacity building of country partners and contributors	4.0
Partnership building and support for country partners	4.0
Production of the annual GISWatch report	4.3
Dissemination and outreach	4.0
Building advocacy networks	3.7

Three of the four donors scored the areas of activity. However, only two gave reasons for their scoring, and not for every area of activity. Across the three who scored, production of the annual report and analysis of policy and implementation in the two regions scored highest, at 4.3, while building advocacy networks scored lowest, at 3.7. While the pattern is similar to that for staff ratings, the overall level of the donor scores are higher than the staff scores. Across the three scorers and seven areas of activity there was no score lower than 3, and there were only four 3's.

The ratings in respect of analysis of policy and policy implementation contexts in Africa and Latin America were justified on the basis of GISWatch being unique in producing such analysis, and also – in the case of Africa – for the strong analysis. Production of the report was also rated highly because of "excellent content, analysis and presentation".

On capacity building there were doubts as to the extent the "conversation" among actors continued after GISWatch had been written. There was also a feeling that capacity building could be done in a more organised and structured way. Somewhat similarly, on partnership building and support and building of advocacy networks there was concern as to whether there was a clear vision of how this could be done in a sustained way.

Perceptions of performance on dissemination and outreach were more optimistic, with the feeling that a good job was being done, with solid plans for further improvement. There was, however, a concern about the extent to which GISWatch was reaching the non-ICT4D "mainstream development practice" community.

The Hivos interview schedule included some additional questions in recognition of their role as both partner and donor. The response to these extra questions indicated that the collaboration

between partners worked well, efficiently and with clear communication. When the collaboration was three-way, having three partners sometimes slowed down the process, but the detailed communication necessary for such collaboration was provided and products were delivered on time. The collaboration benefited from the combined knowledge and networks of the three partners and she felt that there was trust between them.

Playing the dual role of both donor and partner had given Hivos good insight into the programme, and made them feel more involved and "attached". Hivos had dealt with the challenge of combining the roles of professional monitor and implementer by splitting the roles between staff members.

Responses to contributor questionnaire

As noted above, this section discusses both the responses to the contributor questionnaire for this evaluation and responses to an on-line contributor survey conducted during 2010. The latter discussion does not cover all responses as there is a full separate report. Instead it draws out findings that supplement what was found in the evaluation.

Evaluation questionnaire

Only three of the 12 contributors approached responded – one thematic, and two country authors. The low response rate could be partly the result of the fact that this was the second request for survey responses in a relatively short time period. All three respondents were from Europe. The thematic author had contributed twice, while the country authors had each contributed to four editions of GISWatch.

The answers to the question as to how they saw the overall aim of GISWatch were fairly distinct. The thematic author saw the initiative as providing a world-wide overview of the status of the information society, with a different theme explored in more depth each year. One of the country authors, in contrast, saw the aim of the initiative as establishment of an advocacy research network with regional and global connections through "a mutual process of learning, empowering and positioning." The other country author saw the initiative as the "missing link" towards a multi-stakeholder approach to ICT policy evaluation globally in that it strengthened and promoted a civil society perspective. This was necessary as "governments and telecommunication companies have an overwhelming share from the big cake of internet regulation. If one compares these responses with the overall aims of GISWatch, the responses of the country authors reflect the more "strategic" goals of the initiative.

When asked whether the aim was achieved, the thematic author answered that it was, as GISWatch constituted the only platform where a global view could be found. However, he speculated that there might be room for further outreach. The country author who saw the aim as establishment of an advocacy research network felt the collaborators were "just at the beginning" and that, in order to build an interactive and "response-oriented" network, human resources needed to be devoted to ensure continuous communication within the network. Research alone did not build a feeling of belonging.

The other country author responded that the evaluation should provide an evidence-based answer to the question. She noted that CSOs' lobbying power seemed stronger in countries such as

Colombia, Uruguay, Brazil and Spain, but did not know to what extent GISW had contributed to the strength. At a global level, GISW's power came from the broad coverage and it could therefore be seen as a credible source of information for policy debates, and could also be used to educate target audiences of government officials, CSOs, activists, and researchers. On the research side, she felt that GISWatch had a role to play in promoting inclusive research agendas that included community-based and action research. She herself has promoted GISWatch at international, national and local scientific forums and conferences.

When asked what they had learned through writing the chapter, the thematic author explained his aim in writing it rather than what he had learned. He also did not answer the subsequent questions on difficulties and challenges encountered.

The first country researcher had gained experience in doing case study research, and had learnt both about the situation in her country and various actors. She reported that the main challenges were workload given that this work was done in addition to other daily work, and the absence of a real interactive relationship while doing the research other than the call for proposals, reminders about due dates, and "corrections". She felt that direct and personal informal communications through "chat" would help authors feel connected. In terms of content, she said the main challenge was connecting with other countries in the region. This was hampered by different languages and lack of resources for translation.

To overcome the challenge of work overload, she had to rely on her own project management skills in the absence of interactive communication and encouragement. On the regional level, the organisation had established contacts with individuals and organisations but not achieved anything "strategic".

The other country author felt that she had learned "a lot" through writing the chapters. When she started, ICT policy issues were completely new for her, but by 2010 she was able to deliver a comprehensive speech on these issues "at any time of the day and the night". She had learned from colleagues in Philippines Forum (she was not from Philippines) and gathered information at FOSS conferences.

She said that finding reliable ICT-related information was difficult in the first two years, but she had identified good information sources in the academic and CSO communities with which she was connected. Networking was thus the main way in which she had overcome challenges, and various events and partnerships had also provided the opportunity to collaborate on activities and campaigns.

Sources of support included the authors' own organisations, a university, and APC (with Alan named individually). One of the country authors said that a team within the organisation worked on the report.

When asked what would have made their task as chapter writer easier, the first country author again pointed to the need for more informal communication so as to feel part of a team. She also highlighted the need for more resources for "localisation" of the research, delegation of interviews to people in other towns, and attractive materials for use when approaching others to involve them in local advocacy that has global links. The second country author also raised the need for financial

support from APC for dissemination, alongside greater interaction with other report writers, and greater availability of ICT policy-related information on government web-sites.

Both country authors reported use of the chapter since it was written or published. In both cases, the report was published on the organisation's website, and disseminated in other ways, including through conference presentations and meetings. In addition, one of the researchers reported translations and publication of other chapters, both thematic and country-based in an electronic journal, and included an impressive list of the various ways in which the report had been disseminated at conferences, meetings and through publications. Countries chosen for translation were those most relevant for the country because of similar situations or because they served as role models that were often cited in the media.

The authors reported some contact with other GISWatch chapter writers while writing or after publication. Much of the contact seemed to relate to country authors whose reports were to be translated. One of the authors said there was other "ad hoc" contact after reading chapters to exchange views. The other said that while an email list existed, more topic-related interaction would have been useful. She said that this had been discussed at a workshop in the Philippines.

In terms of other "spin-offs" from being involved in GISWatch, the first country author said that GISWatch provided a good reference for potential donors, partners and alliances with other international actors active in the region and Europe more broadly. The other said that involvement had been useful for her academic research.

When asked how much of each GISW publication they had read, one of the authors marked "some" for the three most recent years, another marked "most" for 2007 to 2009 and "some" for 2010, and the third progressed through "some" in 2007, to "most" in 2008 and 2009, to "all" in 2010. She explained the fact that she read "all" of 2010 by her interest in the particular theme (environment).

Two authors found the regional and thematic overviews most useful and interesting, but one also read country chapters if travelling for work in the country concerned, while the other read country chapters because of interest in particular countries. The third author said thematic reports were most useful as they helped frame her own work, but that she often read all reports.

One of the contributors offered three practical suggestions when asked if there was anything she would like to add. The three suggestions were to register an ISSN number for GISWatch, which would facilitate dissemination on DVD and promotion within the academic world; to create a hub of resources for ICT-related data and reports, so as to encourage uniformity across reports in the data used and strengthen the quality of the arguments; and to provide financial support for GISW dissemination at international workshops and conferences.

One contributor commented simply that completing the questionnaire provided the opportunity for a useful reflection on their participation in the GISWatch process.

2010 on-line survey

On 16 June 2010, APC requested all who had been contributing authors to the GISWatch initiative to participate in an on-line survey of their experience. By the closing date of 24 June 2010, 40 of 60 country authors had completed the survey and 8 of the 56 authors of other types of reports. A

further two respondents did not indicate their role, and also gave sparse responses to other questions.

Overall, two-thirds of respondents were male. All the Asia Pacific, Middle East and North American respondents were male. While the two-thirds is disappointing from a gender perspective, it is not appallingly low. Unfortunately, it was APC's gender lead staff member who was not available to participate in this evaluation and her views on how GISWatch had addressed gender issues both in terms of participation and content were not available. Of the chapters read for this report, the Mahan report on indicators was diligent in raising gender issues.

Europe had the largest number of respondents, but was closely followed by Africa, Asia Pacific and Latin America. The good showing of Africa and Latin America is pleasing as these were the two regions on which GISWatch focused. However, the fact that Europe was ranked first – and that Europe also featured strongly in responses to the evaluation instruments – suggests the need for ongoing vigilance about getting a good balance between developing and developed countries.

Of the 43 respondents for whom information was available, 17 were from APC member organisations and a further 13 were from other NGOs. As with other questions, it could be that there was a bias among those who responded towards more "positive" answers. What the 17 and 13 do suggest is that GISWatch has extended APC's civil society reach beyond its members. Disappointingly, of the eight respondents who wrote thematic papers, none were from APC member organisations.

Almost all (96%) of respondents said that they were interested in contributing to GISWatch in the future. This suggests strongly that the experience of participation was positive. Over three-quarters had used the publication/s for awareness-raising, and close on two-thirds for local or national advocacy. However, several noted that they had not, as yet, used the material. Translation was a hindering factor for some of those who did not. More generally, translation arose repeatedly as a challenge and source of concern. This is especially noteworthy as the fact that contributors must submit chapters in English would mean that most contributors would themselves be relatively comfortable in English. Seventeen respondents said that translation of the full report was very important, and a further 22 that it was important. Six said it was not particularly important. Of the latter six, three were from Europe and one each from Middle East, Africa and Asia Pacific. Three were from NGOs. One was an APC staff member.

Twenty-seven of the respondents had reproduced the national chapter that they had contributed in another format, or used it for a specific purpose. This suggests that GISWatch does not "stop" with publication of the report. In terms of dissemination, 22 said that there was a link to GISWatch from their organisational website. Overall, the online version was rated more highly than the printed version. However, there might again be a bias here in that those who respond to an online questionnaire might also be those who are more likely to appreciate an online version.

Of the 46 people who answered the question about support received while writing and doing the research, 26 said the support was very useful while 19 said it was useful. Only one, an independent (not organisationally-linked) country author from Latin America, said it was not particularly useful.

Of the 44 people who responded to the question about their capacity and budget to organise a launch, only 3 said that they had the capacity and budget to organise such a launch while 18 said that they did not have the capacity and/or budget. This response gives a sense of the size of resources that might be needed if GISWatch wanted to offer support to partners in the form of assistance with in-country activities.

Of the 44 people who answered the relevant question, 31 said that administration and coordination were very good, while the remaining 13 said it was good. Three commented specifically on the editor's patience, diligence and "kind" approach. Three others gave thanks more broadly to the APC team and the editor and administrative staff. One of these commented on the team's ability to make suggestions yet be respectful of country contexts.

Most significant change stories

The invitation to submit a "most significant change" story was sent to all GISW authors. The invitation explained that the motivation was to hear stories about successes to which authors' participation in GISWatch had contributed. The invitation specified that the "changes" described could be at the personal, organisational, country or broader level, and that what was important was that the changes were important to the author and made them feel glad about having participated in GISWatch. The length of the story was specified as one page maximum, although one of the contributions exceeded this.

Four responses were received – two from the Middle East, one from Latin America, and one from South Asia. There was no overlap between those who contributed stories and the four contributors who responded to the survey.

One of the Middle East contributors, Leila Hassanin from Arabdev, said that while she would have liked to contribute a story, having written country reports in all four years, she was wary of talking about change. She felt that the publications had provided perspectives that were previously lacking from a wide range of countries on different themes. However, the chapters and publications as a whole had not been cited as much as in-depth studies. She questioned whether the "change" question was appropriate for GISWatch given that it was about highlighting new themes and spreading information and knowledge. She ended: "To go from that to 'change' is a big step and would need more work and resources."

The second Middle East story came from Sam Bahour in Palestine. It described how GISWatch had led to a relationship being established with an Israeli partner. This relationship was initiated when the Israeli introduced the report to Sam. The establishment of this relationship was in itself seen as a "win", with one of the side-benefits being that the Israeli learnt how the pace of Palestinian ICT development was negatively affected by the Israeli occupation. The following year the Israeli "partner" again forwarded the call for proposals and Sam then worked with a Palestinian research partner to produce the "first-ever" report on ICTs and environmental sustainability in Palestine. The report sparked interest on the issue of ICT waste, on which there had previously been minimal, if any, interest. Sam participated again in 2011, with the topic of human rights (and social resistance) seeming especially appropriate for Palestine.

At a personal level, Sam felt that GISWatch had disciplined him to look deep into the sector while at the same time taking a step back to analyse where Palestine stands in relation to the various topics. For him, a strong message that has come out of his experience in the initiative, which he wishes to continue, is: "We are all in this together."

The Asian story, entitled "From Socio-Cultural to Internet Enabled!", came from Syed Kazi, of the Digital Empowerment Foundation in India. It focused on achievements of and changes within the Foundation. The Foundation's involvement in GISWatch started in 2008 and Syed feels that their involvement has helped them extend their perspective on ICT and expand the organisation's objective and mission in respect of environment and climate change, on the one hand, and internet rights and human rights on the other. This happened firstly through collaboration with APC on a five-country comparative study for the 2010 report, which resulted in a subsequent report 'Mapping Policy Advocacy on ICTs, Environmental Sustainability & Climate Change in India' which will be launched during the Manthan Award in December 2011, at the ICT Environment special consultative session. In undertaking the study, the Foundation made contact with key policy makers, and laid the basis for collaborative work with government. The study also led to the creation of a new project within the organisation, entitled Green Prakriya, which aims to create a knowledge eco-web platform for ongoing learning, sharing and collaboration amongst all stake holders.

The Foundation's GISWatch chapter of 2011 was entitled 'The Internet, Human Rights and Social Resistance'. Again, the process of producing this chapter led to modification of the objectives of the organisation to incorporate advocacy around Internet as a basic human right. The Foundation had published articles in the local media and also planned to organise a workshop on Right to Information, Internet Access and Inclusive Development at the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) meeting in Kenya in September 2011.

The final story came from Nodo Tau in Argentina, which has been part of the GISWatch initiative from the time of the London workshop in 2006 at which the project was presented and discussed. This meeting, in itself, was seen as very enriching. Since that time, Nodo Tau has produced chapters for GISWatch on an annual basis. The story of change focuses on what this has meant for Nodo Tau.

Firstly, ongoing involvement has allowed the organisation to experiment with different ways of writing the chapter, and also to involve different colleagues in the tasks. This in itself has stimulated discussion and debate within the organisation. In writing the reports, the organisation has had to learn how to write in a way that appeals to different stakeholders, and to identify the particular contribution that they can make. When the publication arrives, they can feel part of a diverse cross-country group that shares political intentions.

The story highlights the organisation's experience in 2007, when APC supported them in organising a public panel oriented to disseminate the report and the issues its addresses. This experience allowed them to strengthen their contacts and increase the visibility of the organisation.

While the number of stories submitted was few, between them they include personal, organisational and networking changes as well as a political angle that goes beyond ICT in the Palestine case.

Outsider responses

Short interview schedules were sent to ten external people. As noted above, some of these were people with whom APC had had previous contact, while others were identified on the internet as having quoted or referred to GISWatch in some way. Unfortunately, only two responded – one from an international NGO and the other based at a university. The response of the latter revealed that the person had also contributed as an author to one of the very recent GISWatch publications and had only become aware of the initiative at this point. The other person had been aware of GISWatch since the first publication – although she could not remember how she first became aware – and had read some of each of the four publications – the first three on-line, and the fourth both on-line and in hard copy.

Comparing the four publications, she said that she found the 2010 edition the most interesting and useful. The fact that she had a hard copy could have contributed to this, but it also was a new area for her and the country and regional reports were thus particularly interesting. Generally, she felt that institutional analysis and regional reports were most useful for new issues, with country reports serving as case studies. Comparing the benefits of on-line and hard copy, she liked the searchability of on-line versions, but also liked scanning and "flipping through" a hard copy. Overall, she felt that having a hard copy encouraged her to read more. She had definitely learnt about both content and different positions through GISWatch, and found the reports were credible despite the danger of first-person reports introducing subjectivity. She had recommended GISWatch to others.

Suggestions for future themes were an update of internet-related human rights, linguistic patterns, and opportunities for on-line participation for inclusion. The latter was explained to include remote but active participation in global meetings through interactive platforms.

The university-based respondent was less interested in the institutional analysis than in the thematic chapters and regional and country reports. He had found the chapters he read "quite insightful and well-researched" and felt the information and analysis were very reliable. He had recommended GISWatch to others.

Key findings

For the most part, this section is organised according to the areas of action described in the GISWatch proposals and donor reports. There are, however, a few additional sub-sections. The section starts with a discussion of finances given the centrality of this resource and the fact that reports repeatedly reveal that the plans could not be fully implemented due to limitations of funding. After discussion of the key areas of action, there is also a discussion of indicators as this topic emerged repeatedly in the documents as a planned area of activity.

Finances

Funding has been an ongoing concern for GISWatch. As discussed in more detail below, there is an ongoing pattern of activities having to be postponed or dropped because of available funding not being sufficient to cover all plans.

Funding has also been complicated by the fact that there have been multiple sources of funds. While this reduces the risk of reliance on a single donor, it also complicates the fundraising and reporting. Fortunately, APC has a lot of experience in dealing with such complications and is expert at preparing reports that can, for the most part, be used across donors with limited tailoring. It seems that donors have also shown understanding in this respect.

Table 3 summarises the sources of funding received for GISWatch over the four years. It indicates the years in which funds were received from each of the sources, as well as the percentage contributed by each over the four years. In the first year, a large part of the funding came from APC's core funds from Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and project funding the Ford Foundation. These two sources, and the Hivos funds, allowed APC to allocate the funds for any item that was short-funded, in contrast to the SDC and Sida funding which was restricted to specified areas.

Overall, Hivos and Sida have been the largest funders over the four years, each contributing over a third of the funds. The SDC contribution is much smaller, at 9%, but was all concentrated in 2010. SDC had, however, contributed funds for some of APC's other WSIS-related activities in previous years. Hivos' significant contribution is noteworthy as earlier documentation suggested that while Hivos would be a partner, it would not contribute funds. Instead, it would contribute "as an advocacy organisation on an equal footing with APC and ITeM" (Finlay, 2007) but facilitate relationships with other donors. The table reveals Hivos as a major donor.

Table 3.   Distribution of total funding (US$ 541,574) across sources

Hivos (2008/2009/2010)	37%
Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (2008/2009/2010)	37%
CIPP core funding – Ford and Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2007)	9%
Swiss Agency for Development & Cooperation (2010)	9%
Bread for All (2008)	5%
ITeM (2008) (contribution to Pablo Accuosto's salary)	2%

Table 4 gives the broad distribution by category of expenditure over the four years. Payments to authors and the editors account for over half of the expenses, with the next biggest expenditure being production and distribution of the report. The dominance of payments to authors and editors reflects the large number of authors rather than generous size of payments. In fact, the amount provided to individual authors has, if anything, decreased over the years. In 2007 thematic authors were paid US$ 1,200 while country authors received US$ 700. Subsequently the amount was standardised at US$1,000 irrespective of the nature of the chapter. The fact that the number of contributors has grown over the years despite constant or decreased payments is an indicator of the importance that is attached to being part of the initiative.

Table 4.   Distribution of total expenditure across activities

Content (payments to authors and editor)	53%
Production and distribution	20%
Website and launch	13%
Coordination (editor)	14%

Networking advocacy and capacity building (includes APC staff time)	16%

Table 5 disaggregates expenditure by year. It confirms that funding for capacity building was only obtained in 2009, and funding for redevelopment of the website only in 2010 (from Hivos). It is not clear why the amount for editing fluctuates as much as it does. Some of the other fluctuations could be due to changes in how particular items were classified over the years. The very small amounts allocated for coordination and editing in 2007 are misleading, as they do not include all the time spent by APC staff on this task. Instead, they include the cost of people brought in specifically for editing plus a token amount for coordination.

Table 5.   GISWatch expenditure by year and category

	2010		2009		2008		2007	
	US$	%	US$	%	US$	%	US$	%
	226,533	100	201,596	**100**	**142,778**	100	**49,172**	100
Coordination/networking and advocacy	34,790	15	36,240	18	31,395	22	4,469	9
Editing	37,680	17	28,000	14	38,500	27	3,880	8
Book - content	66,163	29	66,058	33	41,023	29	17,240	35
Book - production and distribution	19,315	9	26,103	13	10,512	7	22,810	46
Book - website and launch	5,199	2	1,632	1	8,107	6	774	2
Website redevelopment special grant	20,000	9						
Capacity building	15,740	7	8,872	4				
Communications	2,000	1	8,180	4	800	1		
Translation	17,313	8	16,342	8				
APC Admin	8,333	4	10,170	5	12,441	9		

The total expenditure per year (shown in bold in the table) can be compared with the US$250,000 quoted in Finlay's 2007 report as Hivos' estimate of the annual amount that would be required. At the time, ITeM felt that the project would need a secretariat which would require a larger amount than this. Yet even by 2010, and despite inflation, total expenditure is less than Hivos' estimate.

As noted above, limited funds delayed or prevented certain activities being undertaken. For example, the fact that the contract with SDC was signed late in 2009 prevented the organisation of capacity building workshops before 2010. Further, it was agreed that only certain chapters would be translated into Spanish, namely the introduction, the thematic papers, the LAC regional overview, the institutional overview, the indicators chapter and the Spain and Latin America national reports. Other examples of the impact of funding constraints are the delay in developing and implementing a research communications strategy and in developing an on-line learning platform for the GISWatch community. (The research communication strategy took an important step forward when in late 2009 Hivos provided funds for the development of an interactive Web

2.0-enabled website, although this has not yet been utilised as much as it could be.) The final example here is that reports to donors repeatedly note that the building of advocacy networks area of activity was not pursued due to limitations of funding. Several of the documents make a similar point in respect of development of indicators.

Analysis of policy and policy implementation contexts

In the documents analysis of policy and policy implementation contexts is framed in terms of Africa and Latin America. GISWatch has gone beyond these two regions. For the 2010 report, 27 of the 53 country reports – i.e. more or less half – are from outside the two specially targeted regions. Further, more responses to the instruments for this evaluation came from outside the two targeted regions despite special efforts made to include them in requests for responses.

The Africa and Latin America areas of activity were scored relatively highly in the evaluation. As noted above, several people suggested that the quality of the African reports was overall weaker than that of the Latin American ones. This is disappointing given that Africa was the initial target, but it is a common finding across projects of this kind. It is perhaps even less surprising in this area given that Latin America as a whole probably has longer and more widespread experience of ICT than Africa. Latin America has also benefited from having dedicated staff working on ICT policy coordination, more coordinated follow-up to the WSIS process with the formulation of eLAC, the plan of action for the development of the information society in LAC, more active engagement by government and more inclusion of civil society in the processes as a result, among others, of earlier advocacy.

Overall, country reports were generally seen to be weaker than the thematic or regional reports. This again could have been expected as many of the country authors are not primarily writers. Further, for many authors some of the themes were new. GISWatch would thus have stimulated analysis where it would otherwise not have been undertaken, but one cannot expect sophisticated analysis to develop through a single initiative. While all had praise for the support of Alan Finlay as the editor, the limited other capacity building and networking activity could also have contributed to weaknesses in the chapters. The fact that Alan played the editorial role for all the chapters must also have limited the extent to which he could engage with each author.

One should not overplay the weaknesses of the chapters. The on-line survey revealed that a large number of people had used their chapters in other ways, which would presumably not have been possible if the quality was very weak. The fact that authors continue to want to be part of GISWatch year after year also suggests that authors feel that they gain from the process. It would be surprising if part of this gain was not greater confidence in their policy analytical abilities.

Capacity building of country partners and contributors

Capacity building emerged as a relatively low-scoring area of activity. The proposals envisaged capacity building in four areas: policy analysis; research and writing; information dissemination; and policy advocacy. There is also reference to capacity building on information design, including targeting of audiences and use of graphics. The SDC proposal for 2009-10 stated that GISWatch would aim to organise three training workshops each year in different regions, where possible combined with other activities. An Africa-targeted proposal envisaged this happening in that region

through an annual workshop, through author and researcher mentoring, through facilitated discussion in online spaces, and by inclusion of GISWatch partners in other APC capacity building events and processes. However, several of the donor reports, in listing the areas of activity, omit capacity building on the basis that funding for this was not available. Partial funding was eventually made available for African and LAC capacity building activities in 2009 and 2010, with more funding in 2010 than 2009. However, the resources made available were not sufficient to convene dedicated face-to-face learning events and APC therefore combined the GISW capacity building with events being supported by other projects.

The Latin American funding was used for a GISWatch-specific capacity building workshop held in Quito in August 2010, on the occasion of the LAC Internet Governance Forum. In her introduction to the workshop, Valeria Betancourt of APC highlighted that while capacity building had been envisaged as an intrinsic part of GISWatch from the start, the demands related to production of the book had resulted in "dilution" of the capacity building objectives. The workshop was an attempt to redress this imbalance.

There were no GISWatch-specific workshops in Africa. Instead, GISWatch country authors were invited to CICEWA workshops, with those from Anglophone countries invited to the Kenya workshop of May 2009 and Francophone country participants invited to a workshop in Cameroon in September 2009. Neither of these workshops had GISWatch firmly built into the objectives. Both included objectives of building research and/or advocacy capacity of participants of the CICEWA initiative. The latter focused, in particular, on questions of access, and thus had some overlaps with GISWatch but was by no means the same. The Kenya workshop included an opportunity for the GISWatch participants to report on what they were doing.

The evaluation report from the Kenya workshop provides evidence that the GISWatch participants felt that they had gained, particularly in terms of guidelines for advocacy. One said that they had also already started discussing regional issues with someone they met from another country. However, one of the GISWatch participants felt that the GISWatch involvement "seemed an afterthought" and felt that it would have been useful to include a session devoted to GISWatch.

GISWatch's decision to use the CICEWA workshops was a wise one given the funding limitations. However, it seems that the opportunity could have been more tailored. It is also clear that the capacity building as a whole fell far short of plans. In the absence of activities such as workshops, the main task of capacity building fell to the editor. He did his job well by all accounts, but there are limitations to what can be done through this single avenue.

Partnership building and support for partners

Partnership building and support also emerges as one of the lower-scoring areas of activity.

In terms of partnership building, GISWatch has involved an increasing number of partners over the period. The number of Latin American country reports increased from six in 2007, to 11 in 2008, 10 in 2009 (when Ecuador pulled out at the last minute), and 12 in 2010. Numbers for Africa increased more from seven in 2007, to 13 in 2008 and 17 in 2009, but then dropped to 14 in 2010. Overall, the number of countries covered increased from 22 in 2007 to 53 in 2010. These figures in themselves show signs of partnership building in the sense of bringing in new partners as well as collaboration with existing partners. The drawing in of new authors each year for the

thematic, institutional and regional chapters also extends partnerships, although these might not last much beyond the year in which the report is produced. The stronger partnership established with the country authors seems appropriate given that the initiative is intended to strengthen the civil society voice and some of the other authors do not come from civil society organisations.

In terms of support for partners, this has primarily taken the form of support for the chapter authors. Further, this support has for the most part been one-on-one, provided by the editor. This is openly acknowledged as being less than envisaged in the initial plans for GISWatch. But there is also acknowledgement that providing more than this would be costly, whether it took the form of bringing partners together to meet face-to-face, or providing other forms of support – for example for launches – on a country-by-country basis.

The report of the LAC workshop suggests that there might be some sense of a regional partnership in that region. As the SDC proposal for 2009-10 suggested, this reflects "the unique spirit that fuels the advocacy context in the region."

This evaluation prompted the setting up of a new mail list that includes all contributors from 2007 onwards. Previously there have been lists for current year's authors that include previous year's authors. This is the first list that includes thematic authors. It remains to be seen whether this list serves as a further form of partnership building. The introductory message promised that the list would be "low volume". It remains to be seen whether and how this e-list might contribute to partnership building and support. The thematic orientation introduced in 2010 and referred to above is also seen as a form of partnership building.

The inner partnership

The above paragraphs describe the broader partnerships. There is also the inner partnership, which initially existed between APC and ITeM, was expanded to include Hivos in late 2007, and from 2008 onwards encompassed APC and Hivos. Finlay's 2007 report, produced shortly after publication of the first edition, notes that initially there were tensions in the partnership around several issues (in particular, participation, editorial issues, and finances), and details the differences and similarities in stances of the three partners in respect of a range of topics.

This evaluation revealed very few complaints about the partnership, although there was some unhappiness on APC's part about Hivos not having played the expected role in helping to raise funds. It was evident that APC was very much the lead partner, but this did not seem to cause much tension on either side.

The 2007 Finlay report states that communication between the (inner) partners needed strengthening. He proposed that there be a face-to-face meeting at least annually, with partners undertaking to be "responsive" to online communication in between meetings. There has since been one face-to-face meeting, held in London.

The Finlay report also suggested that an editorial terms of reference be developed to guide editorial decision-making and to be used if disputes arose. When I checked whether two of the items suggested for such terms of reference had been included, namely commissioning a second contribution alongside the first where an alternative perspective was felt to be necessary, and having a gender policy, it seemed that a loose approach was being used, with issues addressed as

they arose rather than through firm policies. On the issue of a second contribution to provide an alternative perspective, it seemed that the question had not yet arisen.

The consensual and trusting approach used by the two partners seems to have worked well to date. It seems that ITeM's departure from the partnership may have removed some of the areas of potential disagreement. The consensual and trusting approach is perhaps appropriate for an initiative that seeks to grow and adapt to changing circumstances as they arise. However, the partners need to acknowledge the risks that the approach carries if disputes do arise. Further, as acknowledged in the evaluation, the success of this type of approach is dependent on having sufficient continuity in the key people involved in the initiative so that they can draw on experience.

Production of the annual GISWatch report

This was the area of activity that was scored highest, with comments that were overwhelmingly positive. This evaluation will not repeat all the positive comments. Instead this sub-section will focus on the challenges related to the report that emerged in the course of the evaluation.

Framing the issue and the publication

The theme of the GISWatch publication changes from year to year. This requires annual decisions as to what the theme should be, and also has implications on choice of authors for the country, regional and thematic reports.

The theme gets decided by the coordination committee. There is probably no other practical place for the final decision as to the theme to be made. There are, however, possibilities for eliciting suggestions on themes, and the GISWatch team has no doubt used some of these.

Overall, it seems that the thematic approach has ensured that there is sustained interest in the project because each year there is something new. However, participants in the LAC workshop expressed some unhappiness with the particular themes chosen. In particular, they felt that the environmental sustainability issue was less relevant than others for the region. The fact that some themes will be more relevant to some regions than others is probably inevitable. However, GISWatch could perhaps continue exploring ways of choosing themes that are more inclusive. This was done to some extent through the 2010 on-line survey, in which several participants raised questions about the human rights theme that had been chosen for 2011. One hopes that their questions helped to refine the theme (but 2011 is beyond the scope of this evaluation). The newly created general e-list may be a further avenue for discussions about future themes and how these would suit particular regional and country contexts.

There was a suggestion in the Quito workshop that it would be helpful if the thematic chapters could be written before the country chapters, so that country authors could use them as background. This approach would require a longer time-line for production of the annual report and is probably not feasible. However, GISWatch might want to explore some phasing of the reports, or ways in which the thematic chapter authors could share what they plan to write at an early stage with the country authors.

In terms of country authors, GISWatch has generally drawn on the member or partner organisations of the "inner" partners (namely, APC, ITeM (in the first year) and Hivos). This creates a potential tension if there is more than one partner organisation in a particular country. However, it seems that this problem has, to date, only arisen in one or two instances. For the most part, the same organisation (and often same author) produces the country reports each year, with new organisations and authors joining each year. This approach means that GISWatch cannot expect the authors to be experts in the chosen theme each year. On the plus side, it provides the opportunity for increasing partners' understanding of a range of ICT-related issues. This, in itself, constitutes a form of capacity building. Further, since the 2010 edition, GISWatch has used an e-list to orientate those who have agreed to contribute chapters to the new theme at the same time as clarifying the terms of reference. In 2010, of the 55 chapter authors, at least a dozen introduced themselves to the list, but only two or three participated actively in the discussion. Authors were, however, encouraged to direct further queries directly to Alan Finlay, the editor and e-list manager.

For thematic and regional reports, GISWatch does not stick to the same authors year on year. When asked how the authors were chosen, APC staff members emphasised that there was not a single "blueprint" for the publication for thematic reports, institutional reviews, or even the regional and country reports. Instead – and this is seen as a strength – the coordination committee discusses the appropriate theme and approach each year. The coordination committee then suggests people who might be approached for thematic chapters.

The regional reports have been the most difficult in terms of defining what they are meant to do and finding the appropriate people. The task is made more difficult by the fact that these reports have the same timeline as the country reports, thus precluding their being written as summaries or introductions to the country reports. Instead, regional authors are not presented with a framework for their reports (as the country authors are), but instead asked, as experts, to write on the topic for the year. In at least some cases the regional reports bear little direct relationship to the country reports, but instead describe interesting research that the particular authors have been doing in the region. Given the challenges, for 2011 there will not be regional reports.

One of the APC interviewees said that the lack of direct connection between the regional and country reports had not been a major concern because the publication was intended to present material from which the reader would draw links that were meaningful for them. I think this might be expecting too much from readers, especially where the issues are new for them or where – like me – they are not part of the "network". The link-drawing can only be done effectively either by reading the full publication (which few people do) or having some chapters that guide the reader as to what is in the publication. This question for me goes beyond the regional chapters; it extends to the need for an introductory chapter that tells the reader what the different thematic chapters cover (and, if this is true, how they together tell a story).

Practicalities

The design and approach to the publication drew heavily on the experience of Social Watch. This "heritage" included the small font size and the absence of authors in the index. Personally, I was struck when first seeing the publications by the small font. GISWatch increased the font size by one point after receiving complaints about the 2007 edition. However, the font remains very small

and is likely to discourage readers. The advantage of the small font size is that it reduces the overall size of the publication and thus the printing and distribution costs. This is an important consideration given that printing and distribution account for close on a tenth of expenditure. However, saving on this item is counter-productive if it results in a reduction in readership.

Authors' names were omitted in the Social Watch table of contents because many of the contributions had multiple authors, including authors that spanned different organisations that were part of national coalitions. The situation is different with GISWatch, where chapters are generally produced by one or more authors from within a single organisation. Including the names of authors in the terms of reference would be an acknowledgement of the work the authors have done. It would also assist readers and those wanting to refer others to particular chapters of the publication. It should not entail more than a minor change (if any) to the size of the publication.

In terms of design, the 2009-10 proposal to SDC, in describing the characteristics GISWatch would like to be known for, states that it should be "a real must-have because of the generous use of pictures, cartoons and graphs". In reality, the GISWatch publication makes little use of graphics beyond the mapping section introduced in 2009. Hivos has been keen that graphics should be used so as to give the publication a "lighter" feel. However, writers are explicitly asked to avoid graphs, tables and picture because of the extra time and effort involved, often with limited gain for the content of the chapter. Graphics would also tend to increase the size of the publication, and the associated printing and distribution costs. The mapping chapters have, however, included some graphic features. For me, the decision not to have graphics makes the need for a larger and more reader-friendly font-size even more pressing.

Dissemination and outreach

GISWatch's Information Dissemination Report for 2008-2010 provides a range of detailed statistics that document the extent to which the hard copies and electronic versions of the publications have been accessed. The report notes the limitation of such statistics, but provides as full a picture as seems possible. For example, it notes that simply counting the number of pages accessed does not give full information. Instead, one needs to know the number of visits and average pages per visit. (I wondered whether it was also possible to do a distribution of pages per visit i.e. how many visits were only one page, how many two pages, and so on.) The report suggests, convincingly, that a smaller number of visitors each visiting more pages is preferable to more visitors with fewer pages each as the goal is not to have a site that attracts many visitors "who leave immediately".

The paragraphs below highlight some of the many statistics contained in the report.

Firstly, in terms of hard copies, 2,000 English copies of the book were printed each year from the start. In 2008, an additional several hundred copies in French were also printed and bound in South Africa and shipped to key ICT policy meetings in French-speaking Africa.

Beyond the hard copies, the content has been disseminated electronically. The full text of the publications is available on the GISWatch website. Since its launch in April 2007, the website has been visited by an average of 60,000 visitors per year and a total of about 180,000 pages have been visited. The number of pages visited rose from 170,650 in 2007 to nearly double at 313,404 in 2008, but then dropped back to 155,998 in 2009 and an even lower 82,314 in 2010. There has also been a trend of fewer visitors looking at more pages each.

The fact that the book is downloadable and can be disseminated and made accessible on other websites without breaking licencing conditions makes it more difficult than usual to estimate the true extent to which the publication or parts of it have been accessed electronically. APC's analysis of Google-alerts found that GISWatch 2008 was covered in ten media sources and official websites other than the GISW partners in late 2008 and early 2009. The 2009 GISWatch was covered in fourteen different media sources and official websites in 2009.

On the more academic side, APC's search of WorldCat using the phrase "Global Information Society Watch" produced 16 results marked "[Citation]". About half of the citations came from APC member organisations. While the fact that these member organisations cite the publication is reassuring as evidence of their interest, it is also pleasing that it is not only the "insiders" who are citing GISWatch.

Not mentioned in the dissemination report is that GISWatch is frequently quoted in the United Nations Secretary General's reports, including reports that go to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations, and to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development's commission for science and technology. This provides evidence of GISWatch's reach beyond WSIS-related bodies.

The need for translations comes up repeatedly. The full book was translated into French in 2008 and 2009 in a Sida-supported effort to increase participation from within francophone Africa. The French versions were not produced in hard copy. Relevant sections of GISWatch 2009 were also translated into Spanish, and made available electronically. Several of the country partners have also translated parts of the publication – typically the country chapter, but sometimes also other chapters – into local languages. (Examples can be found on the GISWatch website.)

Nevertheless, translation remains a challenge and hampers the building of a wider partnership and advocacy network. Further – and perhaps inevitably – some complaints emerged about the Spanish translation at the GISWatch workshop held in 2010. Participants felt that the translation and editing process had to some extent diluted the "political" meaning of the original chapters.

The dissemination report notes that the Spanish and French translations of the 2009 book were delayed because APC wanted to use its best translators. In future APC therefore plans to use more translators to speed up the process. While this might seem to risk eliciting more complaints about problems with translation, in reality translations almost always elicit complaints, especially if those commenting have strong views. As long as the translations are overseen by someone who understands the "politics" of the situation, multiple translators and quicker work is almost certainly a wise decision.

In terms of outreach, the book was launched at the Internet Governance Forum in three of the four years. This seems an excellent occasion to catch the attention of most of the key roleplayers, although the dissemination report notes that it results in APC's own focus (or that of the communications team) being divided between the launch and the Forum event itself. APC issues press announcements in English, French and Spanish which are sent out to APC and Hivos networks. APC's communications team also does some media liaison in English, but also in French and Spanish.

Building an advocacy network

This area was one of the lower scorers. For an outsider, it seems to be the area in which least was achieved. The GISWatch reports acknowledge the limited activity undertaken in this area. For example, the workplan and activities table for 2009 in one of the donor reports notes that this area of activity "is not being implemented" due to budget constraints. Instead, African participants would be invited to attend CICEWA workshops.

This is also the area in which it is most difficult to envisage what would have been possible without substantial human and financial resources. Even with such resources, it is difficult to see – given that each edition of GISWatch raises so many different issues that would be of varying importance to different countries, regions and actors – how GISWatch would determine what the advocacy should focus on beyond broad messages.

The Quito workshop highlighted the need to find a balance between working on a general theme and working on a theme or issues that are relevant in a particular country. Unless this balance is found, it is difficult for country-based organisations to find the necessary "hooks" for advocacy and elicit interest in other actors.

Given all these challenges, the GISWatch partners might want to consider the extent to which an advocacy element is feasible for the project. This is not to argue that the need for research to have a policy purpose should be lost, but rather to argue that the large number of participants in GISWatch as well as the diverse issues raised each year and the different circumstances across countries might render concerted advocacy unfeasible.

If advocacy is to continue as a key objective and area of activity, the partners need to think more about how this might happen. Successful advocacy will also require more attention to building strong networks.

In raising these questions, it is interesting to return to Finlay's 2007 report. The first thing to note is that advocacy was not among the top scorers when Finlay's informants were asked to name the aims of GISWatch. Instead, the top scorers were (a) national awareness-raising, monitoring and support; (b) civil society perspective on the information society; (c) a global review/monitoring tool; and (d) encourage government to meet international commitments. Further, Finlay found that while network building was seen by ITeM as the core objective of GISWatch, Hivos felt that it should be not a key objective. Instead, the key objective should be the production of an influential report. Similarly, civil society understood civil society in an inclusive way that Finlay likens to a multi-stakeholder approach, while concentrated advocacy might require a narrower approach that was clear about the differing interests of different stakeholders.

Finlay's 2007 report suggests further that if GISWatch is to be "an empowering process that increases civil society's impact in policy processes", there is need to build in more collaboration both within countries and across countries. GISWatch does not seem to be doing that at present. The question is whether it is something that GISWatch would like to and be able to do.

Indicators

As noted above, indicators is not listed among the key areas of activity of GISWatch. It nevertheless is mentioned in many of the documents. It is also included, in the following words, among the nine targets which GISWatch formulated for the 48 months from 2009 to 2012:

- To assess and possibly develop a set of comparable (in time and space) key indicators for a information society development and b) the annual GISWatch theme.

The possibility of developing indicators from a civil society perspective is also named by Finlay as one of the attributes giving GISWatch a "niche" position. Finlay notes that such indicators would respond to a need expressed by country authors as well as, informally, by global policy advocacy actors. The 2008 proposal to Sida notes that the use of ICT indicators is among the aspects of policy analysis that "will get priority", and will include work towards creating GISWatch indicators "that can be used by civil society in 'bottom-up' monitoring of implementation." However, the proposal notes clearly that this activity is "not currently funded".

The interviews suggested lack of clarity even among APC staff as to whether development of indicators was still in GISWatch's plans. Some said clearly that it was not. Others were less clear, and instead identified it as an area in which there had been limited achievement.

As noted above, Amy Mahan's chapter in the 2009 edition was one of those named most often as being especially informative. The chapter highlights that there is a wide range of existing indicators and indicator initiatives. The staff interviews revealed that there is a currently ongoing initiative, in which APC is not involved, to develop new indicators. However, this process is led by the ITU and thus presumably does not match the original GISWatch idea of indicators from a clear civil society perspective.

As with advocacy, indicators seems to be an area in which GISWatch needs discussion as to what is both desirable and possible.

Issues for consideration

GISWatch's self-identified targets are set for 2012. It is thus not possible in an assessment of the period 2007 to 2010 to measure achievements against targets. Instead, the evaluation is based on a reading of the largely qualitative information gathered.

The evaluation elicited a high degree of consensus on the areas in which GISWatch had been strong and where it had achieved less. There was overwhelming consensus that the production of a solid report each year, with an upward trend in the number of contributors, was a remarkable achievement in itself. There also seemed to be agreement that the publication was unique and thus filled a "niche". There could be some indication of tailing off in the number of contributors. This need not be a concern unless tailing off continues. There is, after all, a finite number of countries that can be involved in such an initiative. Further, the publication is also very "full" – and comes across as even denser given the small font size.

GISWatch also seems to have done well on dissemination given the resource constraints, although the trend in the page downloads needs to be watched. There will always be further avenues that could be pursued in this respect. However, they are likely to have diminishing marginal returns.

Nevertheless, one important issue for consideration is the issue of translation. The publication would not be easy for readers with limited English. Indeed, many of the chapters are not easy even for someone comfortable in English but less comfortable with all the technical terms and technical issues. Lack of translation will limit reach to those who are interested in these issues but do not have good language skills.

The previous paragraph leads into the issue of the extent to which GISWatch has reached the "mainstream" development world. This was not directly canvassed in the evaluation. My suspicion is that the reach in this respect at present would be very limited. This assessment is based, in part, on the difficulty for someone who is not an insider of following all the technical issues. The mainstream development world was not one of the key target audiences for GISWatch, but is mentioned in some of the documents. If GISWatch thinks this audience is important, it might need to think of specially designed products or other means of making the most relevant messages clear and understandable.

GISWatch itself acknowledges that it has done less well in the areas of capacity building, partnership building and advocacy. This is not to say that nothing has been achieved. There have been achievements, especially in respect of the first two, but these have occurred primarily through the one-on-one engagement with country authors. The achievements through this route should not be discounted. It is clear that both capacity and awareness of new issues has been built. The ongoing participation by many of the country authors attests to the importance of what people feel they get out of participation. While acknowledging all this, it is likely that more could be done without incurring enormous additional expenses. On advocacy, in contrast, I suggest above that the answer to the question as to what is feasible within a project like GISWatch is less clear.

As with other initiatives in which APC has engaged, the vision for GISWatch was ambitious. In this particular case, there was the added challenge of the project being implemented in a period of even greater than normal funding constraints internationally. For the most part, the aspects in which GISWatch has fallen short are clearly stated to be the result of resource constraints. This claim seems true if one compares the expenditure over the years with Finlay's modest estimate in 2007 of the amount needed to implement the project.

There was no evidence from this evaluation that GISWatch had had a direct impact on policy, or on implementation of government WSIS commitments. There was, however, evidence of impact on individuals and on organisations within the GISWatch network.

Finally, we return to the aims of GISWatch listed at the beginning of this report and provide a short, sharp (and crude) answer as to whether each has been achieved:

- to produce an annual publication focussing on a critical thematic issue, which is seen as a legitimate report from civil society practitioners, and not just a reflection by experts: YES

- to build the ability of civil society practitioners to review current national ICT policy objectives, review national technology and infrastructure choices and how they intersect with broader national development objectives: YES

- to strengthen civil society practitioners capacity to recognise "windows of opportunity" for policy advocacy in their national contexts: PARTIALLY

- to encourage critical dialogue: YES, WITHIN SPECIFIC CIRCLES

- to empower and motivate national civil society organisations and their constituencies: PARTIALLY

- to inform decision makers and the media: YES for decision makers and on-line media; PARTIALLY for mainstream media.