

# Information Literacy, Information Communication Technologies (ITCs), and the Nongovernmental Organization (NGO)/Nonprofit World: A Practitioner's Perspective

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*"Information is the lifeblood of nonprofit work."*<sup>1</sup>

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## **Abstract**

Around the world, civil society's agents for social change--nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and nonprofits--are wrestling with the challenges of integrating information and communication technologies (ICTs) within their organizational infrastructures and service delivery systems. The economic and social gains from globalization have not been equitably distributed, in effect, negatively impacting the sustainability and capacity building efforts of most NGOs/nonprofits in many countries today (Sen, 2001).

In addition, the struggles of NGOs and nonprofits providing services to poor people in developing nations are even more acute given the complex issues involving trust, access and infrastructure--as well as the political, social, economic, and cultural ramifications, including that of literacy. The systemic and cultural impact of illiteracy within the service delivery areas of many NGOs and nonprofits intensify an already critical situation, the Digital Divide. The World Education Forum has estimated that 880 million adults worldwide are illiterate.<sup>2</sup>

There are many kinds of literacy: basic, computer, cultural, social, political, economic and so on. *All* of these literacies fall under the umbrella of information literacy (See Figure 1).

### **Figure 1: Information Literacy Defined**

"to be information literate, a person must be able to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information....Ultimately, information literate people are those who have learned how to learn. They know how to learn because they know how information is organized, how to find information, and how to use information in such a way that others can learn from them."<sup>1</sup>

--Presidential Committee's Final Report on Information literacy American Library Association, 1989

<sup>1</sup> Blau, A. 2001. *More Than Bit Players: How Information Technology Will Change the Ways Nonprofits and Foundations Work and Thrive in the Information Age*. New York, Surdna Foundation, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> World Education Forum, [http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/ed\\_for\\_all/framework.shtml](http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/ed_for_all/framework.shtml)

Excluding libraries, educational systems and/or information science organizations, most NGOs/nonprofits are unfamiliar with the concept and practices of information literacy. As a result, with limited staff and funding resources/options, NGOs and nonprofits are finding the strain of managing day-to-day operations increasingly overwhelming. Trying to keep pace with ICT developments, its requisite training demands, while concurrently managing daily operations is becoming an even more daunting task for the NGOs/nonprofit community at large. Whereas English is the official language of international business activity, information literacy must become the official worldwide language of the ICT universe and for those who interact within it.

This paper will explore the issue of *information literacy* as a key economic imperative and possibly the first step necessary in the effective and comprehensive deployment of appropriate ICT strategies within the NGO/nonprofit world.

## 1. OVERVIEW

In civil society today, the term non-governmental organization (NGO) is often used interchangeably with that of nonprofit organization. However, there is a distinction between these two organizational entities. The primary mission of NGOs is advocacy whereas nonprofits are more diversified in their scope of services. Both span the spectrum of service organizations, in size and in mission, representing such organizations as chambers of commerce, legal assistance, environmental protection, education, and human rights. The independent sector in the U.S. comprises 1.2 million nonprofit organizations. The international NGO community has increased from approximately 400 organizations a century ago, to over 25, 000 organizations worldwide (Paul, 2000).

In a recent U.S. study, 51% of nonprofit organizations surveyed believe that their daily operations have changed significantly with the introduction of ICTs (Princeton Survey, 2001). This has presented them with significant management challenges often competing with service delivery priorities. One can surmise that the same management issues exist for the international NGO community as well, particularly within those that engage in economic development activities.<sup>3</sup> These institutions play a significant role in the lives of the poor and as such, have accepted responsibility for improving their well-being. The 2002 World Development Report, in describing the role of institutions in the lives of poor people in developing nations, concluded that weak, complex, and inefficient institutions hurt poor people and hinder development and that effective institutions use available technology, collaborate, and facilitate the open flow of information.

Most NGOs try to adhere to sound institutional practices. However, without a comprehensive information literacy needs assessment, these organizations will continue to unintentionally undermine not only their ability to realize the full potential of their human and social capital, but also the efficacy of their services and programs. The ICTs juggernaut will continue to destabilize the administrative structures of the NGO community, disrupting the delicate balance between effective service delivery and modernization.

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<sup>3</sup> World Bank, Voices of the Poor <http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/voices/index.htm>

Currently, very little research is available on the relationship between information literacy and its impact on the NGO/nonprofit world.

This paper addresses the relationship between information literacy and ICTs and its impact on the NGO/nonprofit world. This discussion will serve as a foundation for proposing a comprehensive strategy for creating an information literacy agenda--one suitable for addressing the ICT needs of diverse NGO/nonprofit organizations and one that will support self-sufficiency initiatives throughout the developing world. This paper is organized in five sections:

- Background on Information Literacy.
- The Digital Divide and its impact on the NGO/nonprofit world--U.S. and International Perspectives.
- ICT Economic Realities in the developing world.
- Challenges faced by human services organizations in the NGO/nonprofit world.
- A NGO/nonprofit information literacy strategic planning process.

### **1.1. Background**

Information literacy, rooted in the academic disciplines of library and information science, is an intellectual phenomenon not very well known outside its own discipline or the field of education. The leading advocates for information literacy in the U.S. are The National Forum on Information Literacy, the U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, and the American Library Association.

Simply put, information literacy is a synthesis of *all* literacies. Information is the genesis of knowledge creation. In other words, "knowledge is information put to work. It is the marriage of theory and practice. It is the integration of ideas and experience. Knowledge is what enables people to make judgments, create new products, interpret events, design new services, and solve problems" (Jackman, 1999). In today's dynamically changing information society, cognition, computing, telecommunications, information resources and information seeking skills (otherwise known as The P.I.K. Approach™) constitute the elements fundamental to the creation of an information literacy environment and strategic planning process. (Jackman & Jones, 2001)

First coined in 1974, information literacy, a set of critical workplace and educational skills, reflects the learning challenges inherent in a digital world economy, which is dependent on a highly skilled workforce. Effective participation in an ICT environment demands an on-going reexamination of workplace training and retraining needs. For better or for worse, ICTs have permanently changed not only how information is disseminated and distributed, but also how knowledge is created within the workplace as well as on the farm. Information literacy practice has the capability of providing individuals, organizations, schools, businesses, governments and communities with the flexible intellectual framework needed to mediate successfully the information input/output produced by today's diverse ICT universe.

NGOs/nonprofit organizations, many of which are dedicated, in principle, to the eradication of illiteracy, must embrace this latest dimension of ICT development in order to reverse the continued international growth of the Digital Divide. The bricks and mortar required to bridge the Digital Divide is information literacy. The real challenge to bridging the Digital Divide is

reducing illiteracy rates worldwide. Illiteracy is not a phenomenon exclusive to developing nations alone. Twenty-one million Americans, representing approximately 9 percent of the total U.S. population, cannot read. Illiteracy costs U.S. companies and organizations \$225 billion a year in lost productivity.<sup>4</sup>

Presently, information literacy is not a common practice within the NGO/nonprofit community and as a result, may be inadvertently contributing to the widening gap between the Digital Divide's *information haves* and the *information have-nots*. Most of the U.S. and international focus on the Digital Divide has been on the lack of ICT development, infrastructure, and access. The potential for using ICTs in the developing world for educational purposes, however, has tremendous promise as evidenced by a myriad of UNDP and World Bank sponsored programs.<sup>5</sup> Yet, illiteracy remains their chief adversary and continues to impede the sustainability and replicability efforts needed for the systemic integration of ICTs. Information literacy provides a unique teaching and learning template to engage the issue of illiteracy both on the technological as well as educational front.

Alan Greenspan (2000) Chairman of the U.S. Federal Reserve Board, and a major supporter of globalization believes that our evolving information society demands the acquisition of an expanded set of conceptual skills that will equip individuals not only with “*technical know how, but also with the ability to create, analyze, and transform information...*”

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are revolutionizing the world of education and, as such, NGOs and nonprofits are currently in pivotal positions to engineer empowerment through the dissemination of information literacy principles and practices throughout community networks within developing nations.

## **2. THE DIGITAL DIVIDE—U.S. AND INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES**

*“The Digital Divide is the civil rights issue of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (Carvin, 2001)*

### **2.1. U.S. Perspective**

Lloyd Morrisett, former president of the Markle Foundation, coined the term “Digital Divide” in a 1995 foundation report that addressed the growing concern of the *information haves* and *information have-nots* and the role of technology in society. The rapid deployment of ICTs without appropriate acculturation for users to comprehend their complexities has contributed enormously to the ever-widening chasm of the Digital Divide.

A number of U.S. reports--most notably, the annual National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) reports on the Digital Divide--describe the social, educational, economic inequities experienced by Americans in their use and integration of ICTs

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<sup>4</sup> The National Jewish Coalition for Literacy. <http://www.njcl.net/NCJLStats.html>

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) <http://sdnhq.undp.org/it4dev/stories/stories.html>; World Links <http://www.worldbank.org/worldlinks/english/>

within American society.<sup>6</sup> Each report details incremental improvements in America's adjustment to the rapidly changing information and communication technologies environment; however, certain ethnic groups, the poor, and individuals with disabilities still experience challenges in accessing ICT opportunities. Interestingly, the latest NTIA (Feb. 2002) report, *A Nation Online: How Americans are Expanding Their Use of the Internet* strongly suggests that the challenges of access and affordability described in previous NTIA reports are no longer issues of critical concern nationally. As a matter of fact, more than 54% of American households are using the Internet and 66% of the American population uses computers. This may presage the death knell of the Digital Divide in the U.S.. Or does it?

This latest governmental perspective is being challenged by several civil rights organizations in hopes of restoring proposed cuts of two government sponsored ICT programs, Technology Opportunities Program and the Community Technology Center initiative, both of which have been beneficial in providing nonprofits with access to ICT opportunities for the poor and low-income communities in the U.S. Other recent ICT reports such as:

- Bridging the Organizational Divide: Toward a Comprehensive Approach to the Digital Divide (Kirschenbaum & Kunamneni, 2001);
- Wired, Willing And Ready: Nonprofit Human Service Organizations' Adoption of Information Technology (Princeton Survey, 2001);
- More Than Bit Players: How Information Technology Will Change the Ways Nonprofits and Foundations Work and Thrive in the Information Age (Blau, 2001);

substantiate the concerns articulated by former NTIA reports regarding accessibility, affordability, utility, and the training required for the use of ICTs in the delivery of services to needy populations and communities in the U.S. Introducing ICTs into the American NGO/nonprofit community, without the inclusion of proper training and retraining strategies for personnel and community participants, defeats the goal of economic self-sufficiency for *all* of its citizens.

Although segments of the U.S. have been the prime beneficiaries of the positive effects from globalization, its myopic perspective on the importance of developing an information literate society remains a formidable barrier for many as evidenced by the following statistics:

- 12.3% of U.S. population is African American; 17% of African Americans have bachelor's degrees.
- 6.6% of Americans with an elementary education use the Internet.
- 77.7% of U.S. households (under 80,000,000 households) with \$75,000 incomes or higher have Internet access.
- 40 million Americans still read at the 5<sup>th</sup> grade level or below.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> U.S. National Telecommunication and Information Administration Reports, <http://www.ntia.doc.gov/reportsarchives.html>:

- 2002 A Nation Online: How Americans Are Expanding Their Use Of The Net
- 2000 Falling through the Net: Toward Digital Inclusion
- 1999 Falling through the Net: Defining the Digital Divide
- 1998 Falling through the Net II: New Data On The Digital Divide
- 1995 Falling through the Net: A Survey Of The Have Nots In Urban And Rural America

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/edu-attn.html>

Several states and educational accrediting organizations (Colorado, Washington, and the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools) are, in fact, pioneering information literacy efforts.

However, the above data clearly suggests that there may be an ICT "underclass" lurking in American society and it may be larger than originally estimated. More importantly, the genesis of this underclass could probably be linked to the lack of integrating information literacy skills within our national educational and job training infrastructures – an issue fundamental to the utilization of information and communication technologies within the American classroom and in the workplace.

## **2.2. International Perspective**

On the international scene, the inequities in ICT development and deployment have been clearly documented. A 1999 UNDP report shows that the industrial countries of the world, comprising 15% of the world's population, accounted for 88% of all Internet users, whereas South Asia with 20% of the world's population has less than 1% of Internet users.<sup>8</sup>

More recent reports support the same trend. *The Use of Information and Communication Technologies by Non-governmental Organizations in Southeast Europe* (OneWorld, 2001) study uses a pyramid analogy to describe the status of NGO use and ICT access in Southeast Europe. At the bottom of the pyramid is the majority of NGOs with little experience and/or no access to ICT opportunities. Those in the middle have minimum access and experience. At the top are those with substantial access/experience who are incapable of communicating with peers in the middle and/or at the bottom of the pyramid for a host of infrastructure and personnel challenges. The annual A.T. Kearney/Foreign Policy Magazine Globalization Index (2002) calculated that by the end of January 2001:

- 35% of the U.S. population and
- 41% of the Canadian population were online;
- the U.S. maintains some 77,000 of the world's 118,000 secure servers (e-commerce activities) and
- the U.S. houses the vast majority of the Internet content in addition to
- dominating 95% of the world bandwidth.

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) estimates that 95.6% of the world's Internet hosts in 2000 were located in member countries, the majority of which reside in the Northern Hemisphere. They have calculated that by the end of 2001 OECD countries will have more than 100 Internet hosts for every 1000 inhabitants while the rest of the world may have only 1 for every 1000 (Global Policy Forum, 2001).

In addition, major international NGOs have also conducted studies on the societal challenges being produced by the introduction of ICTs into the global community. Organizations such as the World Educational Forum, UNESCO, the World Economic Forum, the Global Knowledge Partnership, and the Global Information Infrastructure Commission, among others, have provided extensive research on Digital Divide issues and their impact on developing nations. All

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<sup>8</sup> The 1999 Report of the UN Development Program

mention, of course, the critical importance of education and training and its intimate connection to the future economic viability of developing countries.

The 2000 World Educational Forum's Dakar Accords involving some 183 nations advocates for the eradication of basic illiteracy for all the world's children by 2015 and a 50% improvement in adult basic literacy by 2015 as well. Today, 20% of the world's population is illiterate with women at 30%, resulting in millions of people being fundamentally excluded from becoming active users and participants in the information society (Belnaves & Donald 2001).

Donald J. Johnston, Secretary General of OECD, remarked in a keynote speech delivered at the 2001 World Knowledge Forum in Seoul, Korea, "How well a nation performs in terms of knowledge innovation and diffusion of ICT determines its economic growth level....The knowledge economy will change virtually every aspect of our lives....we need to maximize the potential of knowledge we have especially in developing countries. Availability, accessibility, affordability, and [*capability*] need to be achieved through utilizing ICT and knowledge in our efforts to close the digital divide."<sup>9</sup>

The latest study, published in February 2002, is the first comprehensive, in-depth analysis on the impact of ICTs on the developing world. *The Global Information Technology Report 2001-2002: Readiness for the Networked World (GITR)* examines the economic and educational challenges of deploying ICTs in developing nations.<sup>10</sup> Sponsored by the Center for International Development at Harvard University and the World Economic Forum (2002), this joint study contains a series of individually authored thematic chapters on different aspects of ICT use within developing nations. These experts represent such organizations/businesses as McKinsey & Co, the Media Lab at MIT, and Sun Microsystems. This report also includes a 75 nation ICT profiles assessment that examines individual countries' major ICT challenges such as urban-rural splits in ICT usage, shortage of skilled ICT workers, and creating effective telecommunications policies. Lastly, a Networked Readiness index that ranks the 75 countries on their ability to leverage ICT networks is also included, with the U.S. ranking number one and Nigeria ranking number 75.

Geoffrey Kirkland, the Report's managing director, believes that success in the Networked World is not based solely on a nation's income level, but on other factors such as business climate, the educational system, and telecommunications policy. A major finding of the GITR study is the fact that ICTs have the potential to alleviate poverty and promote economic independence. Further in-depth study is needed, however.

Clearly, a comprehensive ICT and information literacy integration process cannot successfully address any developing nations economic and social needs without the inclusion of definitive parallel strategies to minimize their staggering illiteracy rates.

### **3. ICT ECONOMIC REALITIES IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD**

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<sup>9</sup> Johnston, Donald J. 2001. Keynote Speech. *World Knowledge Forum 2001 Korea*. Accessed: [www.wkforum.org](http://www.wkforum.org), January 2001.

<sup>10</sup> *The Global Information Technology Report 2001-2002*, [http://www.cid.harvard.edu/cr/gitrr\\_030202.html](http://www.cid.harvard.edu/cr/gitrr_030202.html)

Up until 18 months or so ago, ICT development and deployment had been a boon to most Northern economies. Then, stock market volatility and the demise of many dot-coms, and the events of September 11, 2002 created a seismic shift in the world marketplace, leaving many economies bewildered and concerned about the current worldwide recession. For many developing nations in the South, it was business as usual: economic calamity, social unrest, political instability, HIV/AIDS pandemic and illiteracy on the rise. Though the years, many studies have continually validated the causal relationship between levels of literacy and economic growth and development; low literacy rates equal low economic growth and development. According to Addo (2001) an educational crisis exists in developing nations, particularly in Africa, and as long as that crisis dominates the NGO/nonprofit landscape, deployment of ICTs in developing nations will follow the same socio-economic developmental patterns established during the Industrial Revolution; lateness, limited access, underutilization, and scarcity of resources. Professor F.K.A. Allotey, a Ghanaian physicist, offers the following observation,

We paid the price for not taking part in the industrial revolution of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century because we did not have the opportunity to see what was taking place in Europe. Now we see that information technology has become an indispensable tool. We can no longer sit down and watch passively. (cited in Addo, 2001, p. 144)

The continent of Africa is perhaps the strongest example of the least "wired" area in the world and possibly the clearest example of the major social, political, economic, and educational challenges faced by most undeveloped nations striving for full-fledged membership in the ICTs economic marketplace. The lack of access and the lack of ability to utilize critical information today for developing nations on that continent and in other parts of the world are reflective of their colonialist heritage and exploitive experiences with nations from the Northern Europe. In the table below, Dr. Wade W. Nobles<sup>11</sup> provides an interesting analysis of Africa's informational relationship with Europe during its colonial period, which may explain why globalism has perpetuated the colonial vestiges that still exist in Africa's on-going struggle for economic and technological independence (cited in Cosby, 2000):

Table 1: Africa's Informational Relationship with Europe (Colonial Period)

<b>Colonialism manifested by:</b>	<b>Political Colonialism:</b>	<b>Informational Colonialism:</b>
Removal of Wealth:	Exportation of raw materials and wealth from colonies for "processing" it into wealth and/or goods.	Exporting raw data, from a community for the purpose of "processing" it into manufactured goods (i.e. books articles, wealth..)
Colonial Right to Data and Claim:	Colonial power believes it has the right of access and use for its won benefit anything belonging to the colonized people	Scientists believe they have unlimited right of access to any data source and any information belonging to the subject

<sup>11</sup> Nobles, W.W. (1980) "Extended self: Rethinking the so-called Negro self concept," in Reginald L. Jones, ed., **Black Psychology**, NY: Harper and Row.

		population.
External Power Base:	Center of power and control over the colonized is located outside of colony itself.	Center of knowledge and information about a people or community located outside the community or people themselves.

This colonial residue has significantly hampered the ICT development in many African countries as well as other developing nations such as Bosnia, Kosovo, India, Macedonia, Albania, Croatia including the nations of Central and South America. U.S. Congressman Ed Royce of California warns that, “Africa must seize this opportunity, quickly. If African countries cannot take advantage of the information revolution and surf this great wave of technological change, they may be crushed by it.”<sup>12</sup>

For the NGO/nonprofit community around the world, communication and access to current information is essential and necessary for engagement in the ICT culture of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and, more importantly, for promoting economic self-sufficiency. Integrating the philosophy of information literacy within NGO operating cultures could provide the following benefits:

- Provide information literacy organizational sustainability strategies.
- Maximize efficiencies in technological skills of the NGO/nonprofit workforce and consumers.
- Promote better healthcare and educational opportunities.
- Elevate visibility of governance and human rights issues.
- Stimulate capacity building and agricultural enrichment projects.
- Support post conflict rehabilitation efforts.
- Enhance economic information flow within the NGO and consumer communities.

In addition, an NGO/nonprofit orientation incorporating information literacy principles and practices could also:

- Strengthen human and social capital.
- Enhance organizational integrity.
- Promote economic self-sufficiency,
- and optimize a community’s choices for greater success.

Although the issue of literacy has played a key role in the dialogue for action within international urban and rural communities, the concept of literacy, itself, is only the first step as the equalizer needed to expand the benefits of the ICT revolution within the developing nation community. Information literacy as the synthesis of all literacies has the capability of providing a solid systemic foundation for the mastery of information and communication technologies, particularly those beneficial to the economic growth of developing countries around the globe. Khoury (2002) notes that the importance of information literacy will only increase in the future as innovation continues to dominate as the primary determinant of economic growth.

<sup>12</sup> Ed Royce. Bridging the information technology divide in Africa. [www.digitaldividenetwork.org/content](http://www.digitaldividenetwork.org/content)

## 4. CHALLENGES IN THE NGO/NONPROFIT WORLD

*“It is not the situation that is the obstacle. It’s the lack of information to see beyond the situation that is the obstacle.” –Anonymous*

### 4.1. Challenges

The art of thinking critically, an acquired skill, is an essential core competency for information literacy practice and as such, increases the likelihood of individual civic engagement, democratic participation, and economic development. Therefore, the introduction and proliferation of information and communication technologies (ICTs) into the NGO/nonprofit workplace has heightened the need for information literacy skills training not only for the staff working in these organizations, but for their consumers as well. Community based organizations (CBO) -- for example, urban, suburban, and rural--are the hardest hit by these challenges because of limited budgets, tentative funder relations, and direct accountability to the consumer.

The process of training consumers on how to become information literate is paramount to the future credibility of any C.B.O. mission statement. Staffs and consumers of NGO/CBO organizations should create an organizational culture that fosters critical thinking and encourages intellectually curious users of information. In an ideal world, civic-minded individuals have the desire to know, seek and corroborate their sources before adopting any type of information. However, all citizens now living in the Information Age today need to learn how to identify, reevaluate, assess, and synthesize information in order to meet their daily needs for problem solving and decision-making.

At a Spring 2001 Research Forum sponsored by the Independent Sector in Washington, D.C. researchers, nonprofit leaders, foundation executives, corporate philanthropists, and technology experts from six continents came together to discuss the impact of ICTs on civil society.<sup>13</sup> The group discussed following issues (see: <http://www.independentsector.org/PDFs/factfind4.pdf>):

- The nonprofit sector is experiencing an organizational version of the “digital divide” – the technology gap between large and small nonprofits. Hardware, software, and technical assistance are not enough to close the divide; strategic planning and staff development and training are essential.
- The true impact the Internet will have on civil society is in “building community” bringing together groups of citizens who are united by shared values working for the public good, often spanning international lines.
- Organizations that use technology well are usually marked by strong support from the executive director, support from the board and the presence of a “key user” staff person.
- The Internet enables an organization to strengthen relationships with its current audiences as it enables targeted, fast, and consistent communication. It can also enable nonprofits

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<sup>13</sup> Independent Sector (2001). The impact of information technology on civil society: How will online innovation, philanthropy, and volunteerism serve the common good? Facts and Findings, (3) 2. Washington, D.C.: Independent Sector.

to reach out to new audiences through the use of search engines and “viral marketing” [techniques.]<sup>14</sup>

- Strategic use of technology is likely to require long-term collaborations with for profit and nonprofit partners.

Small and large NGOs and nonprofits alike continually face these issues on a daily basis and incorporating systemic organizational change takes careful planning and optimal timing. Adopting information literacy as a process for organizational learning is fundamental to improving the quality of life of the constituencies of NGO/nonprofits engaged in utilizing ICTs throughout their service delivery areas. For many NGOs/nonprofits providing direct human services, information literacy can also be characterized as the ability to identify and analyze a problem, then determine the appropriate information resources suitable for solving that problem.

***If information is, indeed, the lifeblood of nonprofit work, then effective problem solving is the backbone that maximizes the humanitarian efforts of that work.***

Effective problem solving is a learned, cultivated, literacy skill, one many staffs working within nonprofit organizations learn and/or enhance while on the job. Information literacy has yet to be systemically integrated within most national formal educational systems. As a result, in today’s workplace, most workers, white and blue collar, have not had direct exposure to the principles of information literacy. Thus, many trained professionals worldwide and, in fact, workers from all walks of life are experiencing various levels of functional information illiteracy.

#### **4.2. The P.I.K. Approach™ -People, Information, and Knowledge-Making the Connection**

The P.I.K. Approach™ is a dynamic learning process that challenges organizations to embrace proactively the current ICT paradigm by developing information literacy capabilities within every aspect of their organizational infrastructures and service delivery systems. The five areas listed below constitute the key components required to design a comprehensive ICT/information literacy environment:

- Cognition: How people think and learn
- Computing: Hardware/software
- Telecommunications: Telephone, wireless, radio, etc.
- Information resources: Print and electronic
- Information seeking skills: How to determine information needs and how to find the answers to questions

Critical questions must be asked before any plan can be actualized within NGO/Nonprofit settings:

- How do people think and learn?
- What are their present skill levels in computing and telecommunications?

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<sup>14</sup> Viral marketing is any strategy that encourages individuals to pass on a marketing message to others, creating the potential for exponential growth in the message’s exposure and influence. <http://www.wilsonweb.com/wmt5/viral-principles.htm>

- How familiar are they with diverse information resources and how do they apply information seeking skills at home, in school and/or in the workplace?

These are issues germane to developing any type of information literacy learning process, particularly within diverse organizational cultures. Failure to address adequately these critical issues will undermine the development of any ICT/information literacy strategic plan.

Most large and small NGO/nonprofits around the world share a similar set of global concerns. On a more micro level, smaller human service NGO/nonprofits are also experiencing severe knowledge management challenges. The following list of challenges directly impact their ability to cope with the introduction and/or modest expansion of ICTs within their operational environments:

- Day to day reality of running and sustaining a community based organization.
- Lack of trust in varying degrees between providers, government representatives, funders, and constituents.
- The absence of organizational information literacy capabilities.
- Lack of knowledge management structure within organizational culture.
- Sporadic learning resulting in a hybrid of just in time learning.
- Opportunities for learning are relegated to program evaluation activities and/or organizational development issues.
- Collection of data and the measurement of outcomes required by funding sources.
- Communication/expectations between funders and NGO/nonprofit leadership.
- The need for a knowledge broker to assist in the flow of information management.
- Limited use of ICTs due to lack of time, training, and funding.
- Traditional ways of communication, face-to-face, still preferable.
- Limited staff time for innovative programming.
- Minimal replicability of effective programs.
- A need for “lessons learned” from both successful and unsuccessful organizational experiences.
- Consistent utilization of indigenous knowledge assets.
- The economic climate of local communities (Drugery & Sepulveda, 2000).

The ICT environment for NGO/nonprofits is at a critical stage. Significant strides have been made in the *introduction* of ICTs to the NGO/nonprofit world. Yet, the absence of an information literacy/ “*FITness*” perspective<sup>15</sup> within the operational framework of these organizations will continue to perpetuate the viability of the Digital Divide.

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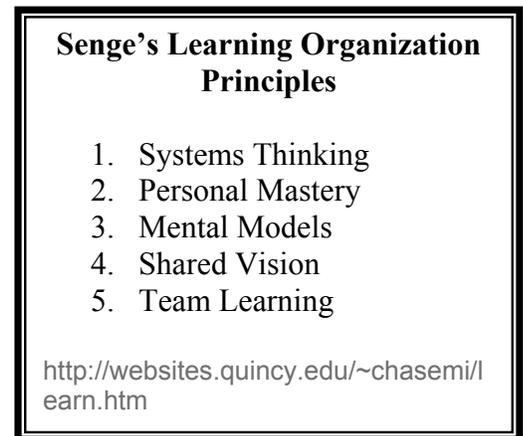
<sup>15</sup> “*FITness*” – *Fluency in Information Technology*, National Research Council, 1999. A report published by the National Research Council that articulates that fluency in information technology requires a higher level of cognitive ability than that required of computer literacy. <http://books.nap.edu/books/030906399X/html/index.html>

## 5. NGO/NONPROFIT INFORMATION LITERACY STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS—A LEARNING COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONAL APPROACH

Former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Thomas P. “Tip” O’Neill was noted for saying that “*All politics is local*” whenever important social, economic, educational and political issues required local community collaboration and involvement.

Thus, an NGO/nonprofit information literacy strategic planning process is an extremely political activity. It necessitates representation from a cross section of key stakeholders within the local urban and/or rural communities, particularly when focused on such issues as illiteracy, information literacy, economic development, and the use of ICTs. NGOs and nonprofits engaged in this activity might benefit from using Peter Senge’s principles as the basis for developing a learning community organizational approach as the context in which to bridge the social capital needed to create a meaningful strategic planning process (See Figure 2). Equally important is the integration of the expertise of the library and information science professional to serve not only as a chief navigator channeling the seas of information, but also as a key team player. Furthermore, included in the process is the utilization of Geographic Information Systems (GIS), which maps out a community’s strengths and need areas.

Figure 2



Having established the organizational framework to engage in an information literacy strategic planning process, we now can begin the work of strategic planning. Designing the process involves four phases in addition to an implementation and review process:

### ***First Phase - Develop a Vision Statement:***

A vision statement articulates a glimpse of the future for an organization. A shared vision, shared responsibility, and building community are the precursors to and set the tone for an information literacy strategic planning process. Smaller NGOs/nonprofits spend little time on this aspect of organizational development. The creation of a vision for any organization, urban or rural, is critical in setting the foundation for an improved standard of living while responding to ever-changing community needs. It is essential to focus on the future in order to continue to meet the needs of an expanded consumer base. It should be reviewed, at least, on an annual basis not only by the board of directors, but the staff and community as well.

### ***Second Phase - Environmental and Internal Scans Analysis:***

Environmental Scan:

Planning in today’s dynamically charged global marketplace, small NGOs/non profits need to maintain a vigilance concerning environmental influences and the impact of those influences on

their day-to-day operations such as the rapidly changing ICTs arena. Conducting internal/external environmental scans allow NGOs /nonprofits to evaluate:

- Macro environmental analysis that looks at the technological, political, social, educational, and economic forces.
- The specific nature of the NGO/nonprofit industry growth and the dynamics of the competition.
- Specific competitors, funding sources, labor force, and community ambiance.

*Recommendations:*

- Contact local key stakeholders, existing funders, and any private sector alliances to identify perceptions of organizational effectiveness.
- Conduct individual interviews, focus groups and utilize applicable culturally appropriate survey strategies and instruments.
- Conduct organizational information audit.
- Review ICT infrastructure and functionality.

**Internal Scan:**

Many small NGO/non profits have totally inaccurate perceptions of the state of their organizations' internal affairs. This analysis also informs the organization whether it has the capacity to respond to the needs of the community and/or engage prevailing opportunities. It is only through this deliberate, methodical approach that a meaningful organizational profile can be attained.

*Recommendations:*

- Conduct an organizational SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)

***Third Phase - Strategic Posture:***

Developing a strategic posture determines the organization/community overall plan of action. Developing a mission statement and setting goals and objectives requires the integration of the SWOT analysis results, both environmental scans, and the establishment of an implementation and review process.

*Recommendations:*

- Adopt a "Community of Practice"<sup>16</sup> culturally appropriate model as an ad hoc advisory planning team. This would include a representative cross section of urban/rural community members- i.e. key stakeholders such as indigenous networks, farmers' associations, women's groups, elders, youth, workers/laborers, librarians,

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<sup>16</sup> Community of Practice – a non-hierarchical gathering, developing around things that matter to people. As a result there practice reflects the members own understanding of what is important. Obviously outside constraints or directives can influence this understanding, but even then, members develop practices that are their own response to these external influences. Even when a community's actions conform to an external mandate, it is the community – not the mandate- that produces the practice. In this sense, communities of practice are fundamentally self-organizing systems. (Wenger, 1998) Communities of Practice: Learning as a Social System, Etienne Wenger, Systems Thinker, 1998 <http://www.co-i-l.com/coil/knowledge-garden/cop/lss.shtml>

teachers/educators, local business, private sector partners, and government representatives.

- Adoption and orientation to NGO/Nonprofit Organizations' Information Literacy Standards.<sup>17</sup>
- Adopt Senge's Learning Organization Principles, using culturally appropriate formats.
- Create a consortium alliance with local and national library and information science professionals.
- Develop targeted sustainable NGO and intra-community mentor partnerships as well.
- Co-Sponsor a local information literacy community forum. Once established, the local coalition can create an information literacy community-learning plan in conjunction with a mentoring NGO.
- Identify creative funding strategies.

#### **Fourth Phase - Action Steps**

- **Develop Mission Statement:** The mission statement offers a clear word description of the nature and service of the organization and/or community group. It is broad in scope and offers an outline of what the organization will do, whom it will serve and how it will manage change using culturally appropriate formats. A mission statement must answer four questions:
  - What type of service (s) is to be provided?
  - What will be the primary goal(s) of the service(s) to be provided?
  - Who will the organization presently and futuristically serve?
  - How will the issue of change be addressed to meet the on-going ICTs needs of constituents?
- **Goals and Objectives-Short/interim/long term:** Goals and objectives should be defined in outcome terms rather than action statements. They must be measurable. They must be realistic, yet challenging. They must be communicated and, most importantly, replicable. The following five areas must be included in Goals and Objectives: Marketing, Operations, Human Resources, Sustainability, and Finances.

#### *Recommendations:*

- Develop a community information clearinghouse/telecenter or like entity, appropriate for the targeted community.
- Identifying intermediaries/umbrella organizations to facilitate relationship development and additional funding support.
- Determine culturally appropriate models and timetable for program/service replicability.

#### **Implementation:**

- Delineate and prioritize the goals and objectives with specific timelines and individual(s) and/or groups responsible. This activity results in the development of a Gantt Chart which is a useful management tool for the implementation and monitoring of the strategic plan.

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<sup>17</sup> Jackman and Jones. (2002). The P.I.K. Approach and NGO/Nonprofit Organizations' Information Literacy Standards.

**Review Process:**

- Identify, document, and commit to a review strategy, updating the strategic plan on a quarterly basis.

Our goal is to create an environment that embraces an ICT culture built upon an information literacy foundation. This culture must incorporate and utilize the identified strengths while concurrently facilitating the need areas of the target communities.

Prioritization is a key element in the design of any strategic plan. Human Service NGOs/nonprofits deal with multiple priorities on a daily basis. However, they are also prone to the “issue of the moment” and external demands utilizing a tremendous amount of organizational resources. As a result, they lose sight of the overarching strategic positioning of their organization. These organizations are usually reactive versus proactive in carrying out their missions. It is this type of routine response that prohibits them from taking advantage of the technological paradigm shift occurring today and positions them behind the proverbial “eight ball.”

Providing human services in our global society while attempting to respond to their constituency’s multiple needs, is a “Catch 22” for many of these community organizations including NGOs. That is why the immediate adoption of the P.I.K. Approach™ is critical to the future mission and continued viability of these organizations.

Incorporating the following Information Literacy Standards, listed in Table 2, within the mission statements and operational infrastructures of NGOs/nonprofits provides the necessary framework to strengthened their literacy and economic self-sufficiency goals as well as enhance the quality of life issues in their respective communities. These standards, developed by the Association of College and Research Libraries and adopted and enhanced by the Council of Australian University Librarians, provide the transformative environment needed to successfully manage the challenges of ICT integration in the years ahead.

Table 2: Information Literacy Standards

<b>Information Literacy Standards<sup>18</sup></b>
1. Recognize the need for information and determine the nature and extent of information needed.
2. Access needed information effectively and efficiently.
3. Evaluate information and its sources critically and incorporate selected information into their knowledge base and value system.
4. Classifies, stores, manipulates, and redrafts information collected or generated.
5. Expands, reframes, or creates, new knowledge by integrating prior knowledge and new

<sup>18</sup> Copyright by the Association of College & Research Libraries (2000) & Council of Australian University Librarians (2000).

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understandings individually or as a member of a group.

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6. Understand cultural, economic, legal, and social issues surrounding the use of information and uses information ethnically, legally, and respectfully.

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7. Recognizes that lifelong learning and participative citizenship requires information literacy.

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## 6. EPILOGUE

*“Information literacy is the official language of the ICT universe and as such is the precursor for individual optimal performance as a lifelong learner.”<sup>19</sup>*

From a practitioner’s perspective, promoting information literacy practices and principles within the NGO community can viscerally impact the tragic condition of illiteracy so prevalent around the world today while advancing, at the same time, the goal of economic self-sufficiency. Andy Carvin of the Benton Foundation underscores the fact that the issue of literacy must be confronted at the most basic level in order to provide individuals with the opportunity not only to use technology effectively, but more importantly, to develop integrative information literacy capabilities as well. Although there is a stratified confluence of international organizations and governments attempting to grasp the tip of this iceberg, there remains a huge facilitation gap in the coordination of these efforts at the local, regional, national, and international levels.<sup>20</sup> They too must serve as role models and adopt information literacy as the language of the ICTs universe.

Effective partnership requires just not changes in procedures, but changes in mindsets so that all partners – including external support agencies – see themselves as learners rather than experts (p.125).<sup>21</sup>

Through maximization of the current international collaborative efforts, a comprehensive coordinated inclusive approach on the part of these organizations can, indeed, enhance the reality of the Dakar Accords by 2015.

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<sup>19</sup> Jackman and Jones. 2001. *Keynote Address*, Annual Meeting of Iowa Library Association.

<sup>20</sup> INFODev -The Information for Development Program

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization

ITU – International Telecommunications Union

GDOI – Global Digital Opportunity Initiative, a recently established (February, 2002) global public private partnership committed to assisting developing nations with pro-bono expertise and resources to create e-strategies and solutions that advance development goals is the brainchild of the Markle Foundation and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

G-8 Dot Force – The Digital Opportunity Task Force includes key stakeholders from G8 countries, developing nations and private/public nonprofit organizations. <http://www.dotforce.org/>

<sup>21</sup> World Bank Voices of Poverty, Civil Society, Chapter 4

<http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/voices/reports/canany/ch4.pdf>

Daniel J. Boorstin, a historian and former Librarian of Congress, offers an insightful observation on the importance of consumers' information literacy needs now and in the future:

What we need...is a knowledgeable citizenry. Being knowledgeable is active...We must become knowledgeable ourselves. Knowledge is orderly and cumulative...Information tends to drive out knowledge. Being passive, information is 'easier' than knowledge. Being so prolific, it is more frequent than knowledge. Yet being merely informed' is to be at the mercy of the senders of messages. One may be informed, but the thinking was done by others. Being knowledgeable puts one in the position to be a sender of a message. One 'knows' something. In an information society, information is slavery to the thoughts of others; knowledge is power and freedom to do one's own thinking. (cited in Lenox and Walker, 1993, p. 323)

It is the civic responsibility of NGOs/nonprofits and consumers alike to be vigilant in making certain that information literacy opportunities are fundamentally integrated throughout the administrative structure and the service delivery systems of the organizations serving their communities. In that way, NGOs/nonprofits working in developed and developing nations with varying degrees of access to information and communications technologies (ICT) will be capable of maximizing the utilities of available ICTs in spite of the age of most hardware and software. Fortunately for the NGO/nonprofit community, an information literacy culture is not solely dependent on the availability of the latest hardware and software applications. Information literacy is the sum total of the P.I.K. Approach™ experience, a dynamic learning and strategic planning process committed to the agenda of lifelong learning, sustainability, and economic self-sufficiency.

Whereas indigenous knowledge is a cornerstone of economic viability for most developed and developing nations, the integration of information literacy principles and practices within these countries will bridge the divide now paramount on so many minds within the international community.

Perhaps, Mahatma Gandhi said it best, "we must be the change we wish to see."<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> [www.gandiinstitute.org](http://www.gandiinstitute.org)

Available at:

<<http://www.nclis.gov/libinter/infolitconf&meet/papers/jackman-fullpaper.pdf>>

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