USAID GUYANA – Democratic Consolidation & Conflict Resolution Project

A Joint Government of Guyana – U.S Government Project

Civil Society Organization Strengthening Project

Final Report from DevNet

August 2008

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Executive summary

DevNet has been working with NGOs for many years providing web site and other Internet services as well as training. This project focused on helping NGOs learn about Internet tools and use them to collaborate and share information.

The project was of short duration and had two areas of activity. The first was a series of workshops and lab sessions with NGOs on relevant Internet tools. One workshop session was held in central Georgetown and three lab sessions held at the International Conference Centre. During the lab sessions participants used an email list to exchange messages and posted to forums.

The second area of activity was the setting up of the email list and web site with forums for use by participants. This was completed early in the project and used as a resource in the lab sessions.

An on-line poll was used to evaluate the project.

Background

DevNet has worked with government, non-governmental and community-based organisations in diverse sectors – peace education, literacy development, the arts, domestic violence, religious and cultural development, youth development and health - in their use of the Internet in the hosting of websites, and in the training of members of the organisations in the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to develop their advocacy, information and knowledge sharing processes, and in some cases to improve the efficiency of their operations.

This is part of DevNet's objective to support the integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) into Guyana's development. One application is the support of civil society organisations in their advocacy and social change activities, as well as to provide them with an easy mechanism to promote transparency and accountability in their own operations by making their information available to the public. DevNet's also works with government agencies and NGOs on the use of their websites and offers orientation in terms of participating in knowledge networks and mailing lists.

This project focused on helping NGOs learn about Internet tools and use them to collaborate and share information.

Methodology

The project began with work being started on the email list and web site. A web site was created at www.interact.org.gy using a content management package. Initially posting of news items was possible and later the creation of forums.

Invitations were send to 26 organisations inviting them to a half-day workshop and orientation on the use of the Internet for collaboration. This took place on May 19th, 2008. Topics covered included:

> email
> mail lists
> web sites
> forums
> VOIP
> instant messaging (IM)
> blogs
> social networking
> payment services

Practical demonstrations were done on-line showing some of the tools in use and the project web site.
A survey form was shared out to obtain information about participants use of the Internet.
A short report with pictures was postedto the web site and the email list used to notify participants.

Two lab sessions were planned during the next two months. These sessions were to give the participants experience using some of the tools described in the first session. There was some difficulty finding a suitable venue since good Internet access was essential for fifteen or more PCs. The only satisfactory location found was the new International Conference Centre at Liliendaall.

The first lab session on June 11th, 2008 (check date format) focussed (one s or two s's) on the email list and the project web site which had live forums available by this time. Sixteen persons attended from ten organisations. Participants were enrolled in the email list and the web site. Some participants had to created email accounts before they could do this. Participants sent an email to the list and some were able to post information about their organisation to the forums.

The second lab session on July 2nd continued from the first. There was some recapping since some participants had not attended the first lab session. Additional

topics introduced were blogging, instant messaging and wikis. Additional posts were made to the forums.

Assistance with building web sites was budgeted for two organisations and it was agreed to assist Family Research Program and Hope For All. No other organisations requested help. Purchase of domain names was paid for by the organisations and hosting costs were not covered by the project.

At this point in the project we reviewed our progress and decided that we were not getting the participation from the more senior members of CSOs and that there were some more organisations we had hoped would participate that had not responded to email. After consulting with GDCCR we extended the project to include one more lab session on August 12th. Printed letters were sent out to thirty-six organisations specifically encouraging senior persons to become involved.

This final lab session was held as planned at the same venue and repeated the same programme as the first lab session.

The final activity was the creation of an on-line poll to help evaluate the project. This was done and everyone on the list invited to complete it.

At this point in the project it was intended that participants would have gained the skills needed to use email lists and forums (at a minimum) and would start to use them for their organisation.

Results

1. Activity – Workshop and lab sessions

All sessions planned were held plus an additional third lab session.

The first workshop was attended by twenty-seven persons representing twenty organisations. Several people spontaneously expressed their appreciation for the workshop and said they had learnt a lot.

The handout used in contained in Appendix A and the results from the questionnaire are given in Appendix B. The questionnaire showed that those present ranged from those with little experience to those with wide experience. About half had had some experience with forums.

The second activity was the first lab session. Fifteen persons attended from eleven organisations.

The second lab session followed about a month later. Nine persons attended from seven organisations.

Both these activities went smoothly. There was some repetition since each session had persons who had not attended before who had to be signed up to the email list and the web site. During both sessions some posts were made to the forums as well as emails sent to the list.

The final session followed much the same pattern. Nine persons attended from eight organisations. Five of these organisations had not previously been involved in the project. Again some persons had to seek help in creating an email account.
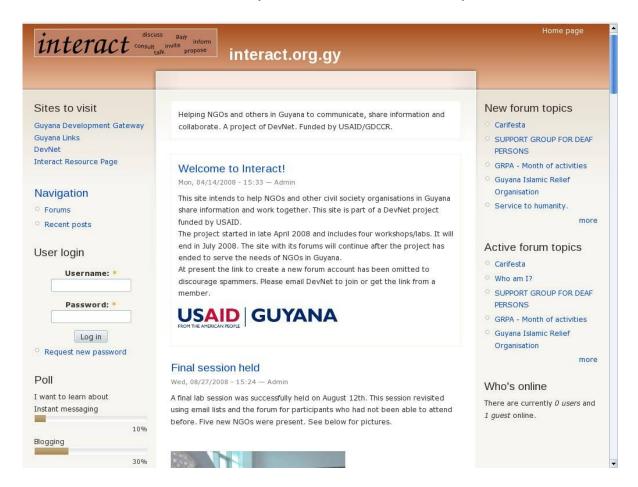
Two organisations (Family Research Programme and Hope For All) asked for help in creating a web site and this was agreed. FRP provided enough information to start a site and this was done. Hope For All has still to provide content for a site but the site will be created once this is done.

2. Activity – Website and list

The email list (cso_workshop@sdnp.org.gy) was set up early in the project and the web site also. Initially the web site did not have forums but these were added before

the first lab session. The site was created using the Drupal content management package. A resource page was also added as well as news items and pictures about the project. Those viewing the web site would have gained some insight into how such sites are created and used.

See below for a screen shot of the web site at the end of the project. The site will continue to be available for use by the CSOs as and when they need the resource.

Beneficiaries

The main beneficiaries of the project are the organisations and their members which participated in the sessions. In many cases more than one person attended from an organisation. At total of 48 persons representing 28 organisations participated in one or more sessions.

Since the web site is still available the number of beneficiaries will continue to grow.

Risks

The negative factors encountered were some heavy rain on the morning of the second lab, the lab venue being away from the centre of town and, more significantly, a slowness and hesitation of many persons to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the Internet.

The end of the project coincided with Carifesta which may have reduced the number of persons completing the on-line poll and delayed their reading of emails.

Evaluation

1. Activity – email list and web site

These were completed on time and were used throughout the project and worked as intended. Participation by those who had attended sessions in the email list and in the forums outside of labs was disappointing.

2. Activity - workshop sessions

All activities planned were completed. In addition a third lab sessions was added plus an on-line poll. Participation during sessions was very good although attendance at some sessions was less than anticipated.

Poll

At the end of the project emails were sent to the 48 members of the email list requesting them to respond to an on-line poll. The focus of the poll was the success of the project. Seven responses were obtained – not a good response for this type

of survey. The response was quite positive. A summary is given in the table below. The negative response to question 4 is puzzling as there were no other negative responses or comments. Possibly the question was misread.

Summary of poll results

1. How useful was this project for your organisation?			
Not useful at all	Not so useful	Useful	Very useful
0	0	1	7

2. In what way was the project useful?	
I learnt about new internet tools	6
I have started using email for the first time	0
I have used a forum for the first time	3
I have gained more confidence using the internet	5
I can now encourage my organisation to use these tools	7
Other: Motivate us to develop our own web site	1

3. The project aimed to increase collaboration between local civil society organisations like yours.	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not sure	Agree	Strongly agree
The skills taught will help achieve this	0	0	0	0	5
We will be using these skills right away	0	0	1	1	0
We are not ready to use these skills yet	3	3	0	0	0
We will be exploring these tools to see how we can apply them	0	0	1	6	0

4. The presenters did a good job	
Strongly disagree	1
Disagree	0
Not sure	0
Agree	1
Strongly agree	5
Comments	
1. Can't think of anything, some factors are just beyond our control 2. Needed more time to do more practical sessions	

5. What did you think of the lab venue at the Conference Centre?	
The venue was excellent	6
The lab was cold!	1
The location was difficult to get to	1
It is a good place for future lab sessions	5
Comments	
It give me the opportunity to visit the conference centre	

Names of organisations responding (optional)
1. GuyberNet

2. Guyana Responsible Parenthood Association
3. Guyana Islamic Trust
4. Hope Fore All
5. FRP
6. Guyana Forum for Lifelong Learning

Lessons Learnt and Recommendations

A recent project of DevNet which helped NGOs develop web sites gave the following comment in its report:

> "Email is still relatively new to Guyana (10 years) and many users are very cautious preferring to 'lurk' rather than become active on list and forums. This seems to be partly a cultural matter not just a reaction to a new means of communication."

This continues to be true despite efforts made by this project to encourage participation. While there was satisfactory participation in the sessions there was not as much transfer of skills in to daily activities as had been hoped. Apparently the motivation was not sufficient at this time. It may require the motivation of a issue of great interest to those concerned to overcome this reluctance such as a funding opportunity or major controversy.

It was noticeable that the younger participants were more inclined to become active than the older ones.

Recommendations for future projects of this type:

1. A project of this type would be more effective over a longer period given the time it takes to bring about changes to the way in which NGOs function.

2. More attention needs to be given to the wider public attitudes to the use of lists and forums, to the Internet and to information in general. Public education is needed regularly over a significant period of time.

Appendix A

A non-governmental organisation promoting ICT for development

Internet Communication for CSOs

Introduction

How can the Internet help your organisation?

What tools does the internet provide?
- email
- mail lists
- web sites
- forums
- VOIP
- instant messaging (IM)
- blogs
- social networking
- payment services
- others

Email

What is email?
Ways of accessing email
- web mail
- internet mail (POP/IMAP)
Using email
- dos and don'ts
- sig
Mail lists

Web sites

Getting a web site
Ways of using a web site
Accessibility

Forums

What is a forum?
"An Internet forum is a web application for holding discussions and posting user-generated content. Internet forums are also commonly referred to as Web forums, message boards, discussion boards, (electronic) discussion groups, discussion forums, bulletin boards, fora (the Latin plural) or simply forums."

Using a forum
Examples
www.interact.org.gy
www.guyanapalace.com

VOIP and IM

What is VOIP?
"Voice-over-Internet protocol is a protocol optimized for the transmission of voice through the Internet."
Examples - skpe

What is IM?

"Instant Messaging (IM) is a form of real-time communication between two or more people based on typed text. The text is conveyed via computers connected over a network such as the Internet."
Examples – WLM, AIM,YM

Blogs and social networking

What is a blog?
"A blog (an abridgment of the term web log) is a website, usually maintained by an individual, with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse chronological order. "Blog" can also be used as a verb, meaning to maintain or add content to a blog."
Examples – see http://www.devnet.org.gy/guylink3.html#blogs

Social networking?
"A social network service uses software to build online social networks for communities of people who share interests and activities or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others.

Most services are primarily web-based and provide a collection of various ways for users to interact, such as chat, messaging, email, video, voice chat, file sharing, blogging, discussion groups, and so on."
Examples
www.facebook.com

Payment services

What are payment services?
Examples
www.paypal.com

Other stuff

RSS
Podcasts
Videos
Pictures
VR
Surveys online

Resources

http://askbobrankin.com/
http://www.internet4charities.org.uk
http://www.itforcharities.co.uk
http://www.techsoup.org
http://www.icthubknowledgebase.org.uk
http://www.npowerseattle.org/

Appendix B

Information form – results

Number of respondents: 26

Note that many questions allowed more than one response and that a few respondents omitted one or more questions.

Do you have a PC or laptop?

No	2
Yes – at home	8
Yes – at work	6
Yes - both	10

How do you usually access the internet?

DSL	12
Dialup	17
Internetcafe	2
Wireless	5
Do not usually do so	0

How much time do you spend on line per week?

< 15 Mins	3
15 Mins to 1 hour	2
1-3 hours	6
3-7 hours	4
> 7 hours	11

Which have you used so far this year?

Internet phone at cafe	6
Skype on your PC	4
Email	25
Browsing	19
Forum	5
Instant messaging	13
Social networking	12
None	1

What kind of email do you use?

Do not use email	0
Webmail	19
Internet email client	13

How many emails do you get per week?

1 or less	0
2-5	3
6-10	4
11-30	10
> 30	8

Have you been able to find information you need using a search site like Google?

Yes	26
No	0

Have you posted comments on a forum or blog?

Yes	11
No	14

Appendix C

List of organisations attending

Achievers Youth Development Association
Adult Education Association
Central Corentyne Chamber of Commerce
ECHO
ECO1
Family Research Programme
Georgetown Chamber of Commerce and Industry
Guyana Citizens Initiative
Guyana Forum for Lifelong Literacy
Guyana Islamic Relief Organisation
Guyana Islamic Trust
Guyana Organisation for Indigenous Peoples
Guyana Red Cross Society
Guyana Responsible Parenthood Association
Guyana Youth Business Trust
Guybernet
Habitat
Help and Shelter
Hope for All
Justice for All
National Commission on Disability
National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Guyana
NGO Forum
Partners of the Americas Guyana
Peace Builders Network
St Francis Community Developers
Varqa Foundation
Youth Challenge Guyana

Total: 28