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Information Society Innovation Fund

The Information Society Innovation Fund (ISIF) is a small grants program aimed at stimulating creative solutions to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) development needs in the Asia Pacific region. It places particular emphasis on the role of the Internet in social and economic development in the region, towards the effective development of the information society throughout.

Its specific objectives are to:

• Encourage innovative approaches to extend Internet infrastructure and services in the Asia Pacific region

• Address issues of Internet sustainability and business models in challenging market circumstances

• Foster innovation and creative solutions to development problems by supporting new and creative uses of ICT applications

• Help development and public agencies identify new trends and actors in the area of ICT for development in the Asia Pacific region

• Generate awareness and foster sharing of innovative approaches to these challenges

ISIF is a refinement of both the PAN Asia Networking R&D Grant’s Program and the ICT R&D Grants Program for Asia and the Pacific.
Between 1997 and 2000, the PAN Asia Networking R&D Grants Program supported 25 projects totalling CAD 1.5 million. From 2001 to 2005, the ‘ICT R&D Grants Program for Asia and the Pacific’ awarded 56 projects with funding in partnership with United Nations Development Program-Asia Pacific Development Information Program (UNDP-APDIP), Asia Pacific Network Information Centre (APNIC), Internet Society (ISOC), and Microsoft. Both programs were administered under the Canadian International Development Research Centre (IDRC) support, the first by CCOHS (Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety), and the second by AMIC (Asian Media Information and Communication Centre, Singapore).

ISIF evolved after recommendations were adopted following evaluation and research conducted on the earlier two programs. Those recommendations detailed in particular that:

• Grant recipients should be provided substantive support to deal with issues related to research management, project implementation, and follow up.

• Efficient and direct communications be established with both past and current grant recipients on an ongoing basis.

• The mechanisms between the program partners be communicated in a clear and coordinated way

• The decisions and program directions be formally documented

• The entire program be evaluated, with clear mechanisms established to incorporate feedback and lessons learned of the program’s development

ISIF is a joint initiative between the IDRC, ISOC, and APNIC, proudly sponsored by the DotAsia Organisation, the registry operator for the .ASIA top-level domain.
Benefits of Small Grant Fundraising - by Sean O Siochrú

The current climate might not seem the most appropriate to argue the case for ICT grant funding of any kind, small or large. Many donors have retreated from dedicated ICT funding; commercial forces are extending ICT access into peripheral areas; and the implications of the global financial crisis for public spending have by no means fully worked through the global system. But a more nuanced examination of the trends reveals a more complex story suggesting that, in the context of using ICTs to promote development, significant opportunities are to be found in some areas and new ones are opening up.

The volume and efficacy of funding for ICTs for development has been shaped by several factors in the last couple of decades, to some extent following a ‘natural’ trajectory of a new technology as it moves from its early revolutionary potential towards mainstreaming across the economy and society.

The infrastructure phase of ICT for development

During the initial growth of ICT use in developed countries, from about the early 1990s, the focus of development policy was on ensuring that poorer countries did not get left behind. The terminology of the ‘digital divide’ came into vogue tied to a concern that a burgeoning ICT sector would see the gap grow wider between poorer and richer countries and, within poorer countries, between urban and rural areas. Emphasis was placed on building the human capacity for ICT implementation and on extending core infrastructure and access. These efforts achieved some success especially in urban areas and middle-income countries (although an enduring failure is the extension of high bandwidth rural backbone particularly in Africa and parts of Asia). However, the purely commercially-driven growth of the mobile phone exceeded all expectations, making inroads even into rural areas. Yet where ICT access was achieved, even to the limited degree offered by mobile and satellite technology, evidence accumulated through the 1990s indicated accessibility alone, and even affordability, for telephony, Internet, and other services were insufficient to induce positive development outcomes.

“The realization gradually dawned that effective use of ICTs demanded a focus on substantive content, on the capacities of the users, and on such matters as models to promote sustainability in the context of poor and marginalized communities.”

The first wave of public or donor telecentres was a reflection of this in countries such as South Africa and the Philippines. Telecentres were primarily a place where people could be supported to access the Internet affordably. Their relatively high failure rate can, in part, be attributed to the absence, despite the new approach, of any real change in thinking from the earlier era. Although the problem was recognized, solutions were only slowly observed.
Shift towards content and users

With the introduction of the new millennium, ICTs for development evolved into a second stage, from large-scale infrastructure and issues involving access, towards smaller, flexible technologies and initiatives that could be built from the ground up. From the outset, these were more closely linked to actual usage and content development.

Wireless networks, based on the 802.11 wifi protocols, became popular for development projects, offering low-cost, and easily-built and maintained access (Indonesia pioneered a citizen-centred do-it-yourself approach). The importance of embedding in the community became widely recognized, and in the context of telecentres, the failure to do so was a cause of many closures. The old model of a telecentre moved on. An evolving model - the concept of community-owned networks - emerged from several directions, where communities themselves could provide a wider range of services, from eGovernment and tourism, to VoIP-based telephony, leading to a multi-purpose ICT-based enterprise. Centres dedicated to providing specific content-based services also evolved, for instance, the provision of a range of eGovernment services in India. Both models pushed the issue of sustainability to the fore, the former by creating a community enterprise, the latter by securing core funding through the provision of government services.

As the emphasis switched towards particular groups of users and relevant content development, a more sectorally-driven focus inevitably followed. eHealth and eEducation projects and programs sprang up, though often based on the developed country models rather than those most appropriate in a development context. A gender empowerment focus began to emerge, given an early boost from the 1995 Beijing Summit on Women and sustained by organizations such as the Association for Progressive Communication and ISIS international.

Shifting towards a sectoral focus

Thus a number of interconnected trends overlapped, shaping the ICT for development environment, and encouraging a shift from:

- Big-technology and infrastructure towards small-technology
- Delivery technology towards applications, content, and knowledge
- Top-down implementation towards bottom-up and embedding in communities
- Once-off investment towards developing models that are sustainable and broadly interpreted, and
- Dedicated ICT sector funding towards mainstreaming and sectoral targeted funding


2. See: I on the Mouse: ICTs for Women’s Advocacies and Networking in Asia and the Pacific, AWORC 2001
Seen in this light the move by donors away from dedicated funding for ICTs begins to
make more sense – not so much a retreat, as a tactical shift sideways, at least in theory.
And a look at the bigger picture tends to reinforce this: overall investment in ICTs globally
is not declining, and the influence of what has been termed the ‘knowledge economy’ –
which relies intimately on ICTs – is growing in developed and developing countries alike.

With Internet access infrastructure largely (although by no means entirely) in place, the
focus of ICT for development assistance can legitimately move towards those sectors
in which the deployment of ICTs can make a real difference to poverty alleviation and
livelihoods. This often means a leading role for domain experts from the following sectors:

• Agriculture
• Health
• Education
• Enterprise creation and so forth

The emphasis on sustainability tends to reinforce this: initiatives and services that
are embedded in wider sectoral activities, especially if they emerge from government
priorities, are more likely to outlast their initial funding phases.

Thus, it seems likely that the overall volume of donor support for ICTs may not
be falling, at least relative to other areas. As seasoned commentator Mike Jensen
puts it in a review of the outlook for ICTs in international development assistance:3

“At the least, it seems that while aid budgets may be cut overall,
expenditure on ICTs is unlikely to be reduced any more than
other expenditure items. At best, we may be at an inflection
point in development support generally, in which information,
communication and knowledge management will see much higher
levels of use in development and much more pervasive adoption
of the technologies necessary to support them.”

A good example of the benefits of sectoral mainstreaming can be seen in rural
agriculture. Focusing ICTs towards agricultural development has the advantage of
investing in a sector that is critical to the livelihoods of a majority of people in poor
countries. Rather than one-off projects – most of which, at one point, seemed to
be pinning their hopes on conveying market prices to farmers – connecting with
existing agricultural support activities pays dividends. A recent review of the impact of
ICTs on rural livelihoods in Asia,4 covering a wide range of approaches, concluded:

“There is substantial evidence to conclude that the adoption of
ICT-based information systems by farmers depends on the reliability
of the information source and how credible and worthy of trust it
is. In many cases when the ICT system is introduced or operated
by a credible organisation, due to past experience of successful
partnerships, the rate of adoption is high.”

This also involves a reaffirmation of the centrality of the content, that is, what is being communicated, rather then how it is being communicated: 5

“The notion of an ‘application of ICT’ has inherent within it the idea that the domain of knowledge, in this case agriculture, is the key to success. In other words it is the value of the information and knowledge that is transformative. The ICT is a way of delivering that information.”

**Risks associated with the current funding trends**

Several risks are associated with this movement from dedicated to sectoral support, that is, from focusing specifically on ICTs as a whole to addressing ICTs in particular sectors.

First, the progression from core ICT funding to mainstreaming ICTs within other sectors is not without difficulty in terms of human capacities.

There is a very real danger that the specific local ICT for development expertise and the capacity to innovate in the ways needed to achieve this mainstreaming will be absent in the sector targeted.

What can happen is that an ICT component is inserted within a larger sector investment to reinforce other aspects of the support program, such as a telecentre aspect inserted into a wider agricultural support program.

While the idea may be sound, if telecentre best practice is not available or applied, the result may be a repetition of the mistakes already made. This can happen at the level of the donor institution, in the context of internal restructuring involving the elimination of a dedicated ICT section and the dispersal of experienced staff, as well as at the level of the government or other body implementing a program.

The specific ICT skills and capacities required for successful mainstreaming have also evolved from the early stages of ICTs. While technical skills remain in short supply in many developing countries, especially the poorest, and are all too often sucked into the highly profitable private sector, the bigger need is in skills relating to ICT for development. Mike Jensen makes the point:


“...there is unprecedented demand today for advice on how to use ICTs in [the] development programs area. This has certainly been accelerated by the fact that a much higher proportion of the poor now have access to at least some form of more or less affordable ICTs.” (Above p.7)

This expertise is not primarily about technology. The question is how to apply, adapt and adopt ICT technology in the context of development activities, and that certainly means experience in the processes of social development; needs assessments; social mobilization and empowerment; and sustainable community enterprise.

Many of the new skills needed are underpinned by a different philosophy. The provision of ICT expert knowledge from the ‘centre’ to the ‘periphery’ is less relevant. Often, the ‘experts’ in terms of applications and services are local populations, the people who actually work in agriculture, in health, and in education. The capacity to mobilize these skills, in the context of applying ICTs in these domains, is what is needed.

Similarly with communities themselves: the question posed is how to empower communities to enable them to take an active part in service delivery and even design and creation – a very different approach to that of a centralized infrastructure-driven model typified by early eHealth and distance education.

Looking to the medium-term future, perhaps the major challenge for developmental ICTs is the move to broadband applications among users. This can be seen as a distinct phase of development in which quantitative changes to bandwidth are leading to qualitative changes in services and applications and hence to the potential social and economic impact. Broadband, or higher, is rapidly heading towards ubiquity in richer countries, and is increasingly available in urban areas of poorer countries. Broadband, with its capacity to deliver real-time video and high-speed data from multiple locations, is far better suited to many services, among them health and education. Once again, this raises the possibility of reducing the effects of distance for peripheral communities.

Yet here even the physical presence of fibre optic cable is not enough to ensure access – for instance, virtually every district in Cambodia has fibre optic cable running through it, but few outside the provincial capitals can actually afford to use it, and regulation to support universal access is virtually absent.

The role of research and small grants

So what, in this context, is the role for small grants for research in ICTs for development?

Small grants are first and foremost small! Thus, their impact lies in their potential to generate ripple effects by various
A small grant allows organizations to explore and experiment in a context in which failure need not carry such a high price. This primarily comes down to two factors:

- Innovations that can enable people to overcome an existing problem or can open up new unseen possibilities
- Mechanisms to ensure rapid and widespread dissemination of that innovation

A small-grant need not target both of these at once. The emphasis may be on identifying and disseminating existing innovations, or on supporting a creative solution that already has access to a means of dissemination. But only the presence of both can, in the end, enable a small grant to have an ultimate impact beyond its scale. And both also present clear challenges to a grant-aiding body. If genuinely innovative ideas were easy to generate or even to identify, they would barely merit the title ‘innovation’ – often their truly transformative character is evident only in retrospect, through practice and repetition. A high attrition rate is thus to be expected. Furthermore, successful dissemination of a great idea is not inevitable: issues such as the appropriate medium – from policy-driven to word-of-mouth sharing – localization, and ensuring user reception, are critical.

In this context a small grant approach has one distinct advantage. Given the high-risk nature of innovation, a small grant allows organizations to explore and experiment in a context in which failure need not carry such a high price.

Large grants require very significant effort and failure can be a major blow to an organization. Thus, they tend to be far more conservative in terms of attempting innovation. But if a small grant scheme can expect a higher rate of failure, it must also try harder to learn from both successes and failures, in particular the process of innovation, the obstacles, and the facilitating factors.

The current phase of mainstreaming ICTs into a development context is still relatively early. ICTs remain rare in sectors at the forefront of improving livelihoods of poor people, and their deployment tends to cluster around government administrations. This relatively immature level of sectoral ICT saturation confers a second distinct advantage on small grants: the potential for innovation is higher than in mature deployment of ICTs for development, and both the potential and value of creative ways to spread innovation is high.

The above review suggests some areas in which innovation is potentially likely to be found – or at least needed – as well as mechanisms that might enable dissemination.

ICTs that complement traditional support systems for poor communities can yield dividends. Extension work in agriculture, as noted above, is a good example, as are fisheries and other areas of small enterprise. Instead of attempting to build sophisticated services from the ground up, examining what is already done to see how it can be improved through the use of ICTs, incrementally and across several areas, may be the best approach.

A small grant allows organizations to explore and experiment in a context in which failure need not carry such a high price.
An important area is to help key actors identify the emergence and evolution of trends both within and outside the context outlined above. Pioneering economies may make early mistakes but they will also have early successes. Different and unexpected actors may come to the fore at different times in terms of moving the ICT for development forward.

A somewhat similar argument may be made with regard to using ICTs to enhance media. With better domestic and donor-driven governance firmly on the agenda in so many poor countries, there is a case to be made for the developmental benefits of using ICTs to improve information dissemination. For example, through innovations that complement media that are already effective in reaching and giving voice to development concerns and marginalized communities. Radio is a good example of where ICTs can enhance content and widen scope.

Sustainable business models are certainly an area in which innovation is needed, especially where a purely market-driven model is simply unrealistic (as in many poor communities) or simply inappropriate. A sectoral focus allows the exploration of the models in which communities can effectively become involved in the delivery of traditional support services using ICTs. And the current bottom-up emphasis reviews how community resources, though cooperative mobilization can greatly reduce costs, deliver more appropriate services, and empower people. The concept of ‘sustainable’ can expand to encompass these wider meanings.

Addressing the ‘broadband gap’ in rural areas can benefit from action at several levels. Innovative low-cost technologies are one, often piggybacking on one or another existing electronic or other infrastructure. Policy innovation is another: ICT regulation can have a significant impact in extending effective access to broadband to rural populations, amply shown in India and elsewhere.

A sectoral to ICTs for development also brings a need for cross-sectoral knowledge sharing. Thus success in one sector may, with some refinement, be replicable in another. Yet if each is now working traditionally within its own confines, this is unlikely to happen. Again quoting Jensen:

“As ICTs have become more mainstreamed, individual ICT experts in organisations can be the glue that helps projects in different sectors or different agencies build on each others’ experiences. However many institutions have not yet created ICT policies or staff positions which promote knowledge sharing between projects in different sectors...” (Jensen, above, p. 9)

Identifying and testing good practice in terms of cross-departmental and institutional sharing, for instance use of web-based platforms, might have significant potential here.

6. For some examples and ideas see for instance: APC’s Pro-Poor ICT Access Toolkit, http://access.apc.org/index.php/Pro-Poor_ict_access_toolkit_documents
Seán Ó Siochrú has over twenty five years’ experience in information and communication technologies (ICTs) and broadcast media for development purposes, mainly in Europe, Africa, and Asia. Clients include the United Nations Development Program (HQ, regional and country office levels), European Commission (several Directorates), UN Specialised Agencies (for example, IFAD, UNESCO, ITU), international development and aid institutions (for example, IDRC, DFiD, World Bank, USAID) and NGOs. Work includes program and major evaluation design - leading assignments of up to 13 partners, scope of up to 30 countries - policy/regulation consulting, researching and writing handbooks, manuals, and substantive reports. He has extensive direct experience of working with and participating in civil society organisations and NGOs from the local to global level, and various active roles during the UN’s World Summit for the Information Society. He originally designed the iREACH Program and remained its chief external advisor.
Foreword - By David Rowe, Rowetel

In February 2010, the Rowetel/Fongtil team received an AUD 38,000 ISIF grant to perform the world’s first Village Telco rollout in Dili, Timor Leste.

Up to that point, Rowetel had been part of an international team developing Village Telco technology, a low-cost high-performance system offering VoIP over a mesh network. However, despite numerous studies and analyses conducted by the Village Telco team, the technology had not been tested in a real-world deployment. The ISIF grant therefore supported this first crucial rollout of Village Telco technology in Dili. It funded a 100-node network across 3 sites, and supported training, maintenance, and travel costs over a 12-month trial period.

As many assumptions are made when developing a new system or product, it is important to determine their correctness through real-world deployments. The ISIF grant allowed us to verify those assumptions, and importantly, enabled us to determine whether the system was correctly designed. The grant also enabled us to gather valuable technical, end-user, and business feedback on the operation of a real-world Village Telco network.

Before the installation of a local telephone, people would have to walk hours to deliver messages or invitations. Similarly, remote villages had no communications except two-way radio, so again would have to walk to deliver messages. The power of a simple local telephone call has therefore had an enormous yet positive impact on the Timorese.

The ISIF grant kick-started this powerful first step towards low-cost, community telephony for the people of Timor Leste. It is has been so successful that the Timorese team members have decided to move forward and greatly expand the network in 2011 with their own funds.

David Rowe, is an electronic engineer living in Adelaide, South Australia. In 2006 he quit corporate life as an Engineering Manager to become an open source developer. He now develops open telephony hardware and software full time, releasing it Free (as in speech). He believes that a telephone call should be a human right, not a privilege. He has been part of the teams developing projects such as the Oslec open source line echo canceller, the open hardware IP0X range of embedded Asterisk IP-PBXes, and the Mesh Potato – an 802.11bg mesh router with telephony.
ISIF Overview

The ISIF Secretariat and its funding partners agree that small grants funding is an effective way for the development of technical and social innovation as it allows organizations to take risks in expenditure, increasing the chances of innovation.

Small grants create opportunities to expand core knowledge that may result in future technological advances and applications. In particular, ICTs have become instruments for social and economic development worldwide. Therefore it is critical that Internet infrastructure services are available that:

- Are affordable and efficient
- Use innovative Internet applications
- Have successful and sustainable models for the provision of Internet services
- Operate business environments that can become commercially competitive and sustainable

How the ISIF Grants Process Works

ISIF funding partners are actively involved in the entire decision-making process. They have appointed APNIC as a Secretariat to manage and administer the funding provided by the IDRC, ISOC, and APNIC and the sponsorship provided by the Dot Asia Organisation. The Secretariat supports the knowledge dissemination strategy for supported grants based on a reporting schedule, and the promotion of the ISIF fund and its objectives at both regional and global forums.

Since the program’s inception in 2008, partners and sponsors have contributed a total of AUD 640,000 to the grants fund. Administration costs have been supported by the IDRC through a separate contribution of around AUD 500,000.

The ISIF program is defined and managed by a Steering Committee (SC), which makes decisions by consensus. The SC is composed of one representative of each funding partner. SC members review the program objectives, methods, and documentation to ensure the program aligns with ISIF objectives and internal processes. It works closely with the Secretariat in planning and evaluating activities. New partners are kept well informed and engaged with all aspects of the ISIF program, and liaise with the founding SC members where appropriate.

Selection process

The Grants Evaluation Committee (GEC) reviews grant applications and makes grant selection decisions by consensus. It includes two voting members appointed by each partner. The GEC uses an Online Evaluation System, which has been crucial in the storage, review, and analysis of the applications received. The partners have discussed the Online Evaluation System in detail and provided feedback on how to improve it for future rounds of funding. Examples of previous improvements are the simplification of application formats and modification of the process used to pre-screen the proposals received.
Evaluation of Proposals

The different stages in the selection process offer the opportunity to identify ways to coach or improve the applications received to finalize them into complete project proposals.

During this process, the GEC guides the Secretariat in identifying potential weaknesses and strengths in the proposals that might require more support from the ISIF Secretariat in terms of capacity building, networking, and/or promotion.

Online Evaluation System

The Online Evaluation System allows applicants to submit a basic application form with contact information and upload their proposals (using the format provided). Applicants receive an ID confirmation number to track their submissions.

The system allows GEC members to access all applications, forms, and comments from other GEC members online. The system offers the flexibility to recover and reassess evaluations made from any basket at any time, enabling the GEC members to change their ranking and edit their comments.

The system was originally developed in 2003 to support a capacity-building program for wireless projects in Latin America. After translating the source code from Spanish, the software was adjusted to the needs of the ISIF program and was implemented during the 2008 call for applications.

In 2009, following the selection of the 2009 projects that were awarded funding, the Partners discussed in detail the Online Evaluation System and provided feedback on how to improve it for the second round of funding. Changes included simplification of the formats and modification of how the proposals were pre-screened.

The amount of applications received and the diversity of technologies and topics proposed posed a great challenge to the GEC, as it increased the complexity of the analysis required to select the grant winners.

Using the Online Evaluation System, the Secretariat and the GEC work intensively to review the proposals and start the evaluation by assessing the applications and grouping them into four different baskets.
Pre-screening basket: The ISIF Secretariat reviews the proposal’s alignment with ISIF objectives and eligibility criteria. Approved applications are moved to the initial assessment basket.

Initial assessment basket: GEC members assess the proposals working in teams (two GEC members per team, three teams). Team members must accept or reject the proposals. Proposals accepted by two GEC members are moved to the Full Review basket. Rejected proposals stay in the Initial assessment basket and can be reassessed at any time.

GEC assessment basket: Only proposals with two votes passed the GEC assessment. During this step, all six GEC members have to comment and rank the applications based on the eligibility criteria. Finally, GEC members vote for the ones they have selected for in-depth analysis during the face-to-face meeting. The final selection is then moved to the Shortlist/Winners basket.

Shortlist basket: Final selection. The organizations responsible for these applications will be contacted by the Secretariat to finalize their proposals and provide clarification on any GEC questions. GEC members will approve funding based on the feedback provided.

GEC considerations

The 355 applications received were analyzed to identify:

- The amount of applications submitted by each economy
- The legal status, human resources (size, skill levels, and gender), and current/future sources of funding of organizations applying for ISIF funds
- Major difficulties faced in the region where ICT projects are contributing to improvement/change
- Major focus areas/topics targeted by the project per economy
- Primary use of the funds requested

The information provided to the GEC as part of the Background/Justification section of the application form provided the GEC members with valuable information about the political, economic, social, and cultural contexts of:

- Where the projects would be implemented
- The communities that were meant to participate
- The reasons why the proposed intervention was desired and considered innovative
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-screening by ISIF Secretariat: 148 applications received. 35 applications were rejected for being incomplete, duplicated or from an area outside of the Asia Pacific.</td>
<td>Pre-screening by ISIF Secretariat: 207 applications received. 7 applications were rejected for being incomplete, duplicated or from an area outside of the Asia Pacific.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEC assessment: 113 applications were split into 2 groups (3 GEC members per team). Every GEC member indicated their preferred applications based on 3 categories for full review: must do, should do, and maybe.</td>
<td>Initial assessment: 136 applications were split into 3 groups (two GEC members per group).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full review: 18 proposals.</td>
<td>GEC assessment: 64 applications were selected for full review based on the Online System Evaluation scores and comments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shortlist: 11 proposals were shortlisted and 11 received funding.</td>
<td>Full review: 21 proposals.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shortlist: 9 proposals were shortlisted and 8 received funding.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Grants proposals selection**

While there was a clear focus on development issues during both calls for applications, the 2010 applications additionally proposed a wide range of complex technical innovations, providing a comprehensive technical analysis of the IT solutions proposed. The following have been categorized into investment in innovation:

- **Technical**: Deploy or upgrade IT infrastructure to improve service provision at low cost; technical standards research and implementation; network security and monitoring.

- **Access provision**: Lack of access for groups with specific vulnerabilities, such as children, youth, women, people with disabilities, rural communities, workers’ rights, entrepreneurship, and so forth; ICT policy development.

- **Content and services provision**: Lack of specialized online services and applications (mobile, web) for specific users/uses in local languages/platforms; media integration.

- **Capacity building**: Lack of localized education/training materials, online platforms and/or workshops used directly by community members.
## Research findings about prospective applicants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Statistics</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Applications received</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economies participating</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average amount requested</td>
<td>USD 29,000</td>
<td>AUD 37,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of funds requested</td>
<td>Equipment 28%</td>
<td>Equipment 44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Salaries 33%</td>
<td>Personnel 32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research 5%</td>
<td>Research 8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional services 6%</td>
<td>Professional services 12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Support services 1%</td>
<td>Support services 1%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Training 1%</td>
<td>Training 1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>International travel 0%</td>
<td>International travel 2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainability strategy in place</td>
<td>Sustainability strategy 68%</td>
<td>Sustainability strategy 58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No sustainability strategy 7%</td>
<td>No sustainability strategy 29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not provided 24%</td>
<td>Not provided 13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average project duration</td>
<td>10.9 months</td>
<td>11.4 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposals rejected (incomplete, duplicated, or from an ineligible economy)</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposals approved by ISIF Secretariat</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposals reviewed by GEC</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposals for full review</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposals shortlisted</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proposals funded</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Geographical distribution

During 2009, 148 applications were received from 22 economies. The highest percentage of applications came from India, followed by the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, and Indonesia.

During 2010, 207 applications were received from 25 economies. India submitted the highest number of applications, followed by Malaysia, Bangladesh, and Pakistan.

Cambodia, Korea, Laos, the Maldives, New Caledonia, Palau, and Samoa submitted applications for the first time. Also, for the first time, the program received three applications submitted by organizations collaborating from different economies (New Zealand/Vietnam, Australia/Timor Leste, Laos/Cambodia) and one application for regional implementation.

Prospective applicants: organizational profiles

51% of the proposals received during the previous calls for application were submitted by small-sized organizations, with up to 50 staff members. Large-sized organizations (more than 100 staff members) submitted 31%, while medium-sized organizations (51 to 100 staff members) were responsible for the submission of the remaining 19%. The average team size for 2009 was 1.8 members, while 3.6 was the figure for 2010.

Although female participation in the project teams was not equal to male in any of the previous calls for applications, the amount of female staff increased considerably in 2010. During 2009, of the 181 staff members that planned to support project activities, 53 were female (71% males and 29% females). During 2010, 195 female staff were included as team members and team leaders, out of 612 staff listed (68% males and 32% females).

The contribution of the team members’ expertise to ICT development was identified in a variety of subjects:
Another interesting characteristic of how teams have been structured was the high percentage of staff members who were nationals from the country where the activities were planned (99% in 2009 and 92% in 2010). Although international team members were listed too, only a few projects listed foreigners as team leaders.

These figures, along with the areas of expertise listed and the high academic levels achieved (most teams had at least one PhD graduate), indicate a high technical capacity and the skills to produce innovative solutions to developmental problems.

The high percentage of funds requested to support payments towards personnel (40% in 2009 and 45% in 2010) highlight a need from organizations in the region to retain qualified staff, rather than support staff training/capacity-building exercises (1%).

Most of the funds requested were linked to staff member salaries, professional services from consultants, and support services personnel as seen in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personnel</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional services</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support services</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equipment</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research expenses</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff training/capacity building</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International travel</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In terms of legal status, most of the applications submitted in both calls for applications came from Non-Governmental Organizations and non-profit organizations, followed by universities and private sector companies, as shown below:

Prospective applicants in 2010 indicated a variety of sources of funding to support their operations. Government funds and grants were the most common.

**ISIF Support: More than Funds**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contracts</th>
<th>Trust funds</th>
<th>Donations</th>
<th>Fees</th>
<th>Product sales</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Earned income</td>
<td>Exhibitions revenue</td>
<td>Consultancies</td>
<td>Grants</td>
<td>Government funds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial reserves</td>
<td>Corporate funding</td>
<td>Aid agencies</td>
<td>Sponsorship</td>
<td>Market shares</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The grant recipients’ workshops provided the added benefit of face-to-face interaction and collective reflection about common problems and how to address them.

**Workshop for proposals development 2008**

Following the key recommendations provided by the Learning Forum held in Singapore in 2007, ISIF brought together the most promising applicants to present their proposals and meet with fellow applicants and GEC members in December 2008.

During the workshop, representatives from nine organizations shared their proposals and organizational profiles. Through a series of individual and collective exercises, the teams were able to refine and focus their project designs based on the feedback they received from the group and the GEC members. Part of this exercise allowed gender considerations to be emphasized and clarified in the proposals on a case-by-case basis.
The workshop was an innovative approach to finalize the proposals evaluation process and provided the GEC members with a unique argument to grant funds to the selected recipients. It allowed the GEC members to discuss face-to-face the ideas presented in each proposal, challenge the technological solutions proposed, and suggest methodological changes to the original proposals submitted. The workshop allowed detailed discussions in a relaxed and informal environment. Participants appreciated the way the workshop was conducted and did not feel that they were competing against each other for funding. They accepted the feedback expressed by the group about their original ideas as a genuine effort to support project implementation.

As Michael Ginguld from Airjaldi Networks, India explains:

“The workshop provided the environment needed not only to discuss the proposals submitted, share knowledge and perspectives about innovation in ICTs, but also to develop mutual trust and respect among the applicants and the ISIF representatives.”

Two organizations were unable to participate due to the difficult political environment in their home countries (Pakistan and Thailand). Participation at the workshop was not a funding prerequisite so these two organizations submitted all of their preparatory work online, including the requested changes to their original proposal. Their proposals were eventually accepted for funding.

All participants were invited to participate in the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) after the workshop. Participants submitted essays about their experience at the IGF event on the ISIF Recipients’ wiki.

After the workshop, the shortlisted candidates finalized their proposals based on the feedback received and resubmitted them one month later. The SC approved the final list of selected grant recipients and a public announcement was made.
Workshop for administrative procedures, reporting, and networking 2010

The 2009 grantees suggested the development of a workshop to reach a common understanding about the administrative procedures ISIF has in place, including the development of financial and technical reports. The 2009 group also expressed how useful it was for them to interact with other grantees, and suggested that ISIF provide the same opportunity for the 2010 group.

Thanks to additional financial support granted by the IDRC, the 2010 grant recipients were able to participate in a workshop focused on administrative procedures, reporting, and networking. Only one representative was unable to attend due to visa difficulties. The workshop was held at the APNIC office in Brisbane, 23-25 November 2010.

The group worked to identify the strengths and challenges faced by the project teams and reassessed their project’s scope, to establish concrete contributions to innovation and development. The agenda included sessions clarifying questions about technical and financial reporting, and addressing doubts about the reallocation of budget lines and exchange rate policies.

All participants prepared presentations to the group (and to a group of APNIC staff) about their project implementation, the status of the project activities, and troubleshooting. The group discussed future plans, and provided feedback to one another.

It has been recommended that for future grant recipients, funds for both workshops are secured and alternative sources of funding be considered. Working sessions through online tools such as SecondLife, which promote interaction, exchange, and collaboration in real time, should be explored. Such interactions benefit applicants with experience and group knowledge to improve their proposals and when selected, get a deeper understanding of the administrative procedures required to manage ISIF funds. It also helps them prepare better reports to share the lessons learned during project implementation as well as project results and deliverables.
**Jaroka Telehealthcare System**

A health database allowing Lady Health Workers (LHWs) to share patient information using SMS technology, tracking the incidence of disease and establishing the appropriate course of treatment with the support of specialist opinions. Utilizing the high mobile penetration within Pakistan, the Jaroka Telehealthcare System not only promotes access to a comprehensive mobile database, but also maps the incidence of diseases in defined geographical areas, enabling rural health practitioners to better track the spread of disease. The System proved essential during the Internally Displaced Persons Crisis in 2008-2009, its success attracting the attention of other prominent Pakistani organizations, such as Lakhani Group, interested in using the technology.

**Rowetel and Fongil Village Telco**

The establishment of a low-cost telephone network and IP backbone in Dili, Timor Leste based on a ‘mesh potato’. Dili’s mesh potato currently operates on 100 nodes, using mesh technology to deploy a WiFi network supporting VoIP, thereby providing a free phone network and an affordable Internet backbone to one of the poorest countries in Asia. Rowetel also received additional funding from ISOC, which allowed Rowetel to supply more hardware and provide more training to the Dili locals.
Health Emergency Disaster Information System (HEDIS), Synapse Health

An emergency information system in the Philippines that utilizes SMS technology and Google maps for use during disaster events by gathering and disseminating vital information during periods of infrastructure failure. This model will form the basis of a similar system for the United Nations Millennium Development Goals Fund (UN MDG-F). This project has also enabled the development of similar technologies, such as the World Health Organization’s (WHO) Surveillance in Post Extreme Emergencies and Disasters (SPEED), which again uses a telco-proved short access number, SMS, and Google Maps. The SPEED system has been endorsed for nationwide implementation as a joint project between WHO and the Philippine Department of Health and has already been used in a number of recent emergency situations during 2010-2011.

Hindi-Urdu Language Translation and Transliteration Tool

A bi-directional, web-based, Hindi-Urdu Language Translation and Transliteration Tool allowing users to quickly convert Urdu web pages to Hindi and vice versa. Despite sharing a common grammatical structure and 70% of commonly used words, Hindi and Urdu are expressed in mutually incomprehensible scripts. This transliteration component of the system therefore allows literate Hindi speakers to read Urdu texts in their own language and vice versa. This system has already been used as a base for further development of similar projects such as the Urdu Optical character recognition (OCR) system.
Grant recipients reports

The report format was designed to describe project activities, capturing lessons learned, decision-making strategies, and processes that have contributed to the achievement of the project’s objectives. Funds were released based on the SC’s approval of progress reports, both technical and financial.

Final reports were submitted between February and July 2010. More than half of the grant recipients requested time-only extensions to finalize their project activities, mainly due to staff rotation or specialist recruitment difficulties. Final project reports from the 2009 grant recipients were reviewed and edited by the APNIC Communications Area and are publicly available on the ISIF website under a Creative Commons License. This license allows others to use, translate, share, and build upon the work non-commercially, as long as they credit the authors and license their new creations under identical terms. Each grant recipient, following the same licensing scheme, released project results on their own websites, for example software for download.

These reports illustrated how the teams from the organizations supported have applied their ingenuity and outstanding commitment to the benefit of the Asia Pacific community and beyond, testing their ideas, producing software and applications to address local needs.

Information from these reports has been used for both Marketing and Resource Mobilization campaigns. Project profiles, report summaries, and full reports have been showcased by the media and in different meetings in the Asia Pacific. ISIF has developed a step-by-step campaign to promote project results to regional IT media, ensuring projects and organizations are acknowledged within their own economies.
2009 Projects

1. “Development of emergency networks training and tools kit” The Internet Education and Research Laboratory (intERLab), Asian Institute of Technology, Thailand.

2. “Capacity building for female health workers in rural areas through the use of ICT and mobile based tele-healthcare” The School of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science from the National University of Science and Technology, Pakistan.


4. “Broadband Internet access for rural areas of Vietnam using WiMAX technology via television broadcasting infrastructure”. The Bac Ha International University, Vietnam.

5. “VoIP as a model applicable to developing countries” One Destination Center, Indonesia.

6. “Web-based transliteration and translation system between Urdu and Hindi languages” Punjabi University, India.


8. “Localised high-performance e-mail for telecentres and schools” The Department of Computer Science & Engineering from the University of Moratuwa, Sri Lanka.


10. “AirJaldi bandwidth maximizer – proving concepts, demonstrating potential and viability” AirJaldi Networks, India.

2010 Projects


3. “Accessibility for the Print-impaired (ALIPI)”. Servelots Infotech Pvt Ltd, India.


5. “Empowering mountain community to maintain and build wireless network through localized support kit and training”. E-Networking Research and Development (ENRD), Nepal.


Research findings about funded projects

From the pool of applications received in 2009, 11 proposals were selected for full funding, distributed among the following economies:

- India (2)
- Indonesia (1)
- Nepal (1)
- Pakistan (1)
- Sri Lanka (3)
- Thailand (1)
- The Philippines (1)
- Vietnam (1)

In 2010, 8 proposals were selected for full funding, distributed among the following economies:

- Australia (1)
- Bhutan (1)
- India (2)
- Nepal (1)
- Sri Lanka (2)
- Vietnam (1)

In total ISIF has funded 19 proposals in 10 economies.

The successful projects showcase innovation, cooperation, and technical knowledge, and they have the potential to create social change in their communities.

The proposals focused on research and development of innovative solutions to support localization, health provision and diagnostic services, disaster management, IT security, e-trading, accessibility, wireless, and IPv6 deployments through applications development, training, capacity building, and infrastructure development.

The total amount of grants allocated for 2009 was USD 321,701.06. The majority of the funds supported remuneration for people directly involved in the project implementation, either by full-time jobs (salaries) or consultancy fees/part-time positions (professional and support services). The situation was very similar to the funds allocations for 2010. The total amount allocated was AUD 317,830.22.
**2009**
- 5 Universities
- 1 Research centres
- 1 Private sector
- 3 Non-profit organisations
- 1 Network

**2010**
- 2 Universities
- 1 Government organisations
- 1 Private sector
- 2 Non-profit organisations
- 1 Public corporation

**2009 Expenses**
- Equipment 18%
- Personnel 28%
- Professional services 17%
- Research expenses 22%
- International travel 6%
- Training 0%
- Support services 8%
- Others 1%

**2010 Expenses**
- Equipment 27%
- Personnel 29%
- Professional services 11%
- Research expenses 8%
- International travel 18%
- Training 12%
- Support services 5%
- Others 0%
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recipients 2009</th>
<th>1st installment</th>
<th>2nd installment</th>
<th>3rd installment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bac Ha International University of Hanoi. Vietnam</td>
<td>15,458.79</td>
<td>7,494.18</td>
<td>-3,931.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Destination Center. Indonesia</td>
<td>15,000.00</td>
<td>12,000.00</td>
<td>2,669.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>School of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science (SEECS). Pakistan</td>
<td>13,618.43</td>
<td>10,894.74</td>
<td>655.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SynapseHealth. The Philippines</td>
<td>19,038.24</td>
<td>7,322.40</td>
<td>1,699.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interlab. Thailand</td>
<td>18,000.00</td>
<td>9000</td>
<td>2,766.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Colombo, School of Computing. Sri Lanka</td>
<td>15,000.00</td>
<td>12,000.00</td>
<td>2,999.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punjabi University. India</td>
<td>14,948.00</td>
<td>11,958.40</td>
<td>-5,105.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal Research and Education Network. Nepal</td>
<td>17,999.50</td>
<td>8,999.75</td>
<td>4,100.92*</td>
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<td>Dept. of Computer Science &amp; Engineering. University of Moratuwa. Sri Lanka</td>
<td>12000</td>
<td>15000</td>
<td>3,005.66</td>
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<td>Horizon Lanka Foundation. Sri Lanka</td>
<td>19406</td>
<td>7463.64</td>
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<td>AirJaldi Networks. India</td>
<td>14960.5</td>
<td>11968.4</td>
<td>2,985.50</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>175,429.40</strong></td>
<td><strong>99,101.51</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,064.85</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Tables notes:**

*Travel grant to attend the ICT4D 2010 conference in London, as the meeting was scheduled after the project closing dates.*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total grant approved</th>
<th>Total grant received</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21,571.81</td>
<td>19,021.78</td>
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<tr>
<td>29,669.00</td>
<td>29,669.00</td>
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<td>25,168.20</td>
<td>25,168.20</td>
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<tr>
<td>28,660.24</td>
<td>28,060.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29,766.07</td>
<td>29,766.07</td>
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<tr>
<td>29,999.77</td>
<td>29,999.77</td>
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<tr>
<td>25,902.32</td>
<td>26,906.40</td>
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<tr>
<td>30,004.91</td>
<td>30,004.91</td>
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<tr>
<td>29,583.80</td>
<td>29,583.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29,885.14</td>
<td>29,855.14</td>
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<tr>
<td>29,993.75</td>
<td>29,993.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>310,205.01</td>
<td>308,029.06</td>
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<td>Recipients 2010</td>
<td>1st installment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bac Ha International University of Hanoi Vietnam</td>
<td>20,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Institute of Fisheries &amp; Nautical Engineering, Sri Lanka</td>
<td>20,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Servelots Infotech Pvt Ltd. India</td>
<td>20,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhutan Telecom Ltd – Druknet. Bhutan</td>
<td>20,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-Networking Research and Development (ENRD). Nepal</td>
<td>20,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Colombo, School of Computing Sri Lanka</td>
<td>18,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rowetel Australia</td>
<td>32,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garhwal Community Development and Welfare Society, India</td>
<td>19,985.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>169,985.00</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total grant approved</td>
<td>Total grant received</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40,000.00</td>
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<td>40,000.00</td>
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<td>39,791.32</td>
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<td>40,000.00</td>
<td>39,816.07</td>
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<tr>
<td>40,000.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>40,000.00</td>
<td>38,830.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38,259.00</td>
<td>39,795.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39,971.22</td>
<td>38,463.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>317,830.22</td>
<td>302,029.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretariat's responsibilities</td>
<td>Lessons learned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staffing for program planning and delivery with support by the Communications, Technical, and Business Areas.</td>
<td>Senior management provided support to the ISIF Secretariat operation through their decision-making capacity, active and focused participation during the selection procedures, evaluation programs and resource mobilization activities. Hosting organization staff had opportunities to engage and contribute to the program’s development. Integration of ISIF’s administrative, financial, and technical procedures with APNIC as the hosting organization has been a key element facilitating interaction through specific requests and producing timely deliverables.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication with prospective applicants, grant recipients, and program partners and sponsors</td>
<td>Communication with all stakeholders has always been proactive, open, and responsive. The Secretariat defined very clear expectations, actions, and deadlines and sent reminders so all activities were conducted in a timely manner. Mailing list spaces were the preferred choice when promoting informative dialogue and participation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective public and private web sites (including mailing lists and other electronic communication services)</td>
<td>It is important to notify all stakeholders about any server outages or maintenance activities. Private web spaces built for the use of the stakeholders did not raise enough interest as tools for information exchange and networking. Stakeholders had expressed their preference to use public websites under the isif.asia domain to document the progress of projects, to be used in a more strategic way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicity for the program; event management</td>
<td>The Secretariat has had the support of an experienced team to design and develop all promotional activities and campaigns, including the development of on-site and off-site events. The support from the APNIC Communications Area allowed the development of a coherent communication strategy based on facts and project progress. It has been recommended to explore alternative promotional opportunities for ISIF, by participating in at least three communication/IT events in the AP region.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secretariat’s responsibilities</td>
<td>Lessons learned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Dissemination of project achievements and results                   | A reporting policy was developed by the Secretariat with the express interest of promoting project outcomes and methodologies. Final reports have been made available for download using a common template but highlighting the particularities of each project.  
All the campaigns to promote project results (press release and media coverage per economy, and IT media, participation in communications/IT events) were based on project reports and data collected from the grant recipients, providing evidence of their progress, and reinforcing the credibility of the program. |
| Monitoring of the projects’ progress                               | The projects have been successfully monitored online using a variety of online tools. Generally, the technical project leaders were more comfortable reporting on their project’s progress and were more willing to utilize the online collaboration tools if comfortable writing in English. It has been a common element that if the project leader is comfortable sharing the lessons learned during the project implementation, the project team is more willing to document processes via image/video/audio. The grant recipients have recommended that the Secretariat organize project visits. |
| Outsourcing the project evaluation and facilitation of program forums and workshops | The support provided by trained facilitators with relevant extensive technical knowledge proves necessary to guarantee that the objectives of the workshops were achieved. Resource mobilization and evaluation strategy are specific areas where external support is also necessary. However, these efforts should be accompanied by concrete capacity-building exercises to guarantee continuity and investigation of any defined plans. |
| Financial administration and reporting                             | All the procedures and formats used to effectively administer grants were audited, transparent, and responsible allowing clear communication and accountability. The quality and accuracy of the reports improved once the grant recipients were able to report in their own currency, using a flexible approach for exchange rate losses (to guarantee the amount approved is the amount to be used for implementation). |
Evaluation and Resource Mobilization strategies

The ISIF Program Evaluation Plan was developed from 16 January 2010 until 20 January 2011. The main work was conducted by the ISIF Secretariat, with support from Sonal Zaveri, a facilitator hired by the DECI project, using Utilization-Focused Evaluation (U-FE) as a framework. U-FE is not an evaluation method, but a philosophy, with the aim of designing an evaluation plan with a very clear understanding of what the organizations want to use the evaluation for. This way, the evaluation is meaningful for the organizations and future project teams.

During a meeting hosted by the IDRC Evaluation Unit and the DECI project in Penang, Malaysia, on 11 June 2009, five IDRC-funded projects were invited to participate (SIRCA, DREAM-IT, PANACeA, ISIF, and LIRNEasia). The DECI Facilitator conducted a workshop from 26 to 29 April 2010 at APNIC to finalize the ISIF evaluation plan, which included a set of three key evaluation questions to guide the process. The evaluation findings were used to strengthen the Resource Mobilization strategy, conceived shortly after a workshop held in Cebu, The Philippines, from 27 to 29 May 2010. This workshop was facilitated by Venture for Fundraising where two IDRC-funded projects received specific support in this area.
The three evaluation questions were:

1. How effective was the ISIF approach/methodology to encourage innovative projects to apply?
2. How effective was the ISIF mentoring practices and administrative support during the implementation process?
3. What were the lessons learned from this investment? What worked and what did not work? Why?

To find answers for each question, the ISIF Secretariat engaged two major evaluation tools to support the evaluation plan:

1. Data analysis of the applications received.
2. An online survey.

Both activities were designed and implemented in house, with support from relevant APNIC areas.

**Online survey**

The survey was open from August to September 2010. Electronic invitations were sent to all former applicants and also to those that requested support but did not submit applications.

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8 DECI- Developing Evaluation Capacity in ICTD. The project is funded by the IDRC.
The survey was designed to compile feedback about the ISIF Secretariat’s performance including the application process but focused on the administrative support the ISIF Secretariat provided to the grant recipients.

The survey received 90 responses (mostly from former applicants of the 2009 call for applications), current grant recipients, and prospective applicants. These are our findings:

• From the 90 responses received, 11.1% (10 responses) came from interested parties that had not applied for ISIF funding. These survey participants provided suggestions to widen the eligibility criteria and simplify the application form.

• 79.5% of the survey participants applied for grants during 2009.

• 36.5% identified the website as the preferred mechanism to find information about the program.

• 26% identified general web searches as the preferred way to find out about the ISIF program.

• 54.8% indicated that the application form met their expectations, however, requested further clarification on the eligibility criteria and budget information. 34.2% indicated that they requested assistance from the ISIF Secretariat to complete the application form.

• 85% of the survey participants rated the responses provided by the Secretariat as timely and useful. 60.3% needed between 2 and 7 days to complete the application form while 38.7% needed more than a week to be able to complete the application form.

• 75% indicated that they had applied for funding to other grants programs, with different project/proposals. Only 25% submitted the same proposal they developed for ISIF funding to other sources of funding and 77.1% indicated they were not funded by any other source. Other sources of funding listed were: local government and philanthropists, the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, UNDP, DFID, MJF, dNET, IBOP Asia, the PH Commission on ICT, Nexus Technologies Inc. Philippines, Intel Corporation, Satpura Intigrtet Rural Development Institution, and the Global Social Benefit Incubator (Santa Clara University).

• 77.1% of the applications that were submitted were not funded by any other sources. Former applicants provided information about other funding programs they applied for and that information was included in the review for potential partners/sponsors for the ISIF program. Large IT corporations, government programs to promote ICT4D, and international aid agencies funded 22.9% of the recipients.
The second section of the survey was addressed to former and current grantees. All of them participated and provided relevant feedback about the grants administration. These are our findings:

- 69.2% of the survey participants indicated that they were able to achieve most of the outcomes originally intended in the project proposal mostly because the projects were still ongoing at the time of the survey. 61.5% indicated that the outcomes were expected.

- The survey participants indicated that at the economic level, the majority of the expected changes occurred at the community and beneficiaries level, with 75% and 50% respectively. Several examples were provided for reference. To list one, a project working on VoIP solutions verified that significant savings on local and long distance calls were available for network users.

- The survey participants indicated that at the social and cultural level, expected changes occurred at the organizational and beneficiaries levels, with 55.6% and 44.4% respectively. Several examples were provided for reference. To list one, a project working on health care provision in a very rural and traditional community, indicated that it was widely accepted by the community that female health workers should receive proper training to provide a better service.

- The survey participants indicated that at the relationships level, project activities and their implementation allowed them to establish active collaboration with various sectors, such as NGOs, the private sector, government, and academic institutions. However, they are not confident that the links will remain as active after the projects are finalized, as organizations might need to devote their energy and resources towards their current initiatives. Regarding relationships with the beneficiaries, survey participants indicated that although a relationship was established with the beneficiaries, it was too early to assess its impact in terms of project ownership and sustainability.

When asked about the administrative support that the ISIF Secretariat provided to grant recipients, the survey participants indicated a very strong satisfaction with the mechanisms in place. For the purposes of this survey, the administrative support was divided into:

1. Basic services.
2. Additional services.

Under basic services, survey participants were asked to evaluate four services:

a. Direct communication with the Secretariat
b. Contract preparation
c. Funds transfers and payments
d. Templates and support to develop technical and financial reports
The list of additional administrative support services covered:

a. Access and use of documentation tools such as an internal wiki, public website, and photo pool.

b. Provision of relevant information such as technical articles related to project activities and external funding opportunities for future development.

c. Promotion of project results, new contacts, and networking strategies.

d. The proposals preparation workshop.

• 53.8% of the survey participants indicated that direct communication with the Secretariat was outstanding and ranked it as the most important factor facilitating grant administration. Participants indicated that other basic support provided through: 1) Contracts preparation; 2) Funds transfers and payments; and 3) Templates for technical and financial reports, exceeded their expectations.

“We have received fantastic support, cooperation, understanding, and acceptance from the Secretariat and the SC when we needed to make changes to our project. The Secretariat must be complimented for focusing on the merits of projects and not letting any bureaucratic hurdles get in the way of their decision making”.

• 50% indicated the quality of the additional support services provided exceeded their expectations, particularly the provision of relevant information such as technical articles related to project activities and external funding opportunities for future development. Survey participants suggested that the ISIF Secretariat formally endorse former/current grant recipients’ proposals to secure other research grants.

• As mentioned before, 75% of the survey respondents had applied to other grant programs in the past. When asked to compare the services provided by the ISIF Secretariat as part of the administrative support, 66.7% marked it as outstanding; 22.2% indicated it exceeded their expectations, and 11.1% considered that it just met their expectations. Comments highlighted several positive aspects of the administrative support services, from following its own schedule, simplicity and clarity of administrative requests, the Secretariat’s openness in addressing problems on a case-by-case basis, to flexibility and understanding of the projects’ circumstances.

“I have received grants from large organizations which used face-to-face interaction between the grant recipient and funders. ISIF, on the contrary, accomplished the entire process of selection and funding remotely, through electronic communication which requires a very high level of meticulous and progressive thinking”.

• On the last section of the survey, the Secretariat asked about training needs, specifically to identify if, in order to complete the projects, the grant recipients
required additional skills not considered in the original proposal. 91.7% of the respondents indicated that they did not require additional training, and that they were able to complete their projects without any additional capacity building investment.

**Capacity building**

Ensuring that program administration is transparent and that funding partners are kept informed further encourages their support and guidance, which has been invaluable for ISIF’s development. The ISIF Secretariat provided assistance to project grantees by developing forms and procedures according to APNIC policies and Australian regulations to prepare contracts, reflect expenditures, authorize payments, store bank information, and so forth. Payments were processed based on approved expenses using the original budget as a guide allowing budget-line reallocations with pre-approval. The ISIF funding partners were kept informed on how the money was used and they authorized any major changes made.

APNIC developed a wide marketing campaign, expanding their contact networks to reach out to APNIC Members, formal education organizations, research institutes, government agencies, and so forth. It utilized and compiled contact databases provided by the project partners. The campaign focused on providing visibility to the ISIF program and acknowledging the important contributions of the funding partners and sponsors.

The campaign included the development of a brand with clear and consistent messaging and graphic applications. It provided a unique opportunity for APNIC and ISIF funding partners to stress their key messages to people searching for innovative approaches to development problems via ICTs. The campaign also served as a tool to identify organizations in the region. All informational products were developed to serve the ISIF timeline and followed APNIC communications policies.

**Future development**

ISIF’s small grants funding has demonstrated considerable success evidenced by selected projects leading the way in innovative approaches to the extension of infrastructure in the Asia Pacific region.

The ISIF program is looking to expand its activities and invites interested parties to support the program allowing a greater number of projects to be implemented in developing communities across the region. Investment in ISIF activities will:

- Maintain and diversify support for ICT and Internet related research and development.
• Support regional research that can help Internet growth in our region.

• Facilitate networking and information building throughout the Internet community.

Leading organizations support us in our objective to foster innovation and socio-economic development. Partners and sponsors offer their experience, advice, and regional vision so we are constantly aware of innovation initiatives that will benefit from ISIF funding. A major point of difference that our partners and sponsors appreciate is a fluid communication and collaboration with the ISIF Secretariat.

Organizations and individuals are welcome to support the program through partnership and a variety of sponsorship packages. ISIF funds will be used to:

• Support local groups and organizations to design and test technical solutions to local issues.

• Provide mentoring to prospective applicants throughout the entire application process and promotes networking among grant recipients and committee members. This enables these fledgling projects to share information and experiences during the funding period and beyond.

ISIF offers large donors flexibility in their sponsorship portfolio. This allows donors to spread their contributions across a wide range of development projects and geographical areas.

ISIF Partners are crucial to the success of the program. Their financial contributions and active participation in ISIF committees support innovative, ICT projects that address issues facing local communities across the Asia Pacific region. Contributions range from AUD 50,000 to 100,000, where 75% goes toward project funding and 25% funds ISIF mentoring, workshops and collaboration strategies. Partners are members of the ISIF SC, taking directly part in all aspects of the program operation decision-making process. Partners can also appoint a representative on the GEC to be, in charge of the selection of final grants recipients. Additionally, partners can access a series of branding/marketing benefits provided by the ISIF Secretariat, such as use of logos for promotion purposes and tailored communications activities aligned with their own communications and philanthropic activities.

Sponsors support will help expand the ISIF program by funding more projects every cycle or by expanding professional development opportunities for grants recipients. Sponsorship contributions range from AUD 100 to AUD 5000 in our Standard Packages, and from AUD 10,000 for the Bronze tier to AUD 50,000 for the Platinum Tier of our Premium Packages.
From ISIF fund recipients

Examples of the achievements at former ISIF grant recipients keep inspiring us to continue supporting, experimenting, and testing innovation. In time, these ideas may be transformed into useful instruments for development, recognized by others, and integrated into wider initiatives. ICT professionals in the Asia Pacific found that the opportunity provided by competitive small grants nurtures their capacity to explore without the risks associated with big investments.

For example, the Jaroka Tele-healthcare project, a joint collaboration between UM Healthcare, NUST, and APPNA, has won the Billionth Award’s Health category, honoured for its interactive interfaces, innovative design, aesthetic value, accessibility, and, most of all, its relevance of content and utility value. This project aims to provide better access to healthcare for rural and destitute communities across the globe.

Outcomes from ISIF-funded projects have been leveraged by other initiatives and integrated to their developments, enabling the availability of better solutions. The transliteration module from Urdu to Hindi developed by the Punjabi University in India has been integrated into the Indian Language Machine Translation (ILMT) pipeline for Urdu to Hindi. The ILMT is a consortium of Indian organizations working since 2006 to break the language barrier in a multilingual nation like India.

Another example comes from the HEDIS (Health Emergency Disaster Information System) project, developed by Synapse Health in The Philippines. HEDIS is a mobile and Internet health information system for use during disaster events, using Google Maps as a GIS. The completion of the HEDIS project enabled the development of technologies that can be applied to other related projects, such as SPEED (Surveillance in Post Extreme Emergencies and Disasters), an initiative of the World Health Organization and the Department of Health and deployed at a national level.
**Program partners**

**IDRC | www.idrc.ca** - The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) is committed to being an active ISIF funding partner and contributed AUD 136,384 for the first round and additional support of AUD 110,000 to APNIC, to cover administrative costs.

**ISOC | www.isoc.net** - The Internet Society (ISOC) is committed to being an active ISIF funding partner and contributed USD 75,000 for both the first and second round. ISOC is committed to participating in at least one more round of funding of USD 50,000.

**APNIC | www.apnic.net** - APNIC has contributed funding of USD 100,000 for the first round and AUD 110,000 for the second round. APNIC is committed to supporting future rounds of funding and will continue hosting the Secretariat’s activities.

**Program sponsor**

**DotAsia Organisation | www.registry.asia** - DotAsia contributed as a sponsor, with USD 50,000 for the first round and AUD 20,000 for the second round. The DotAsia Organisation has indicated a strong interest and willingness to continue participating in the ISIF program although conditions may be different.
The Information Society Innovation Fund (ISIF) is a small grants program aimed at stimulating creative solutions to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) development needs in the Asia Pacific region. It places particular emphasis on the role of the Internet in social and economic development in the region, towards the effective development of the information society throughout.

This booklet provides a comprehensive review of the ISIF Program from 2008 to 2011. The program seeks to expand its activities in the future and invites interested parties to support the program. Please contact the ISIf Project Officer at: info@isif.asia

www.isif.asia