Volunteer

Actors

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Civil Society in the Information Society

Editorial
A Perspective

Contents

The International Community has decided to design the future society in the framework of the Information Society and three sectors of governments, private sector and civil society organizations are involved. Two Preparatory committees have been held and a draft plan of action has been prepared. A series of regional conference have been held too to create consensus at the regional level. During the Prepcom II, As result of meetings of representatives of the Volunteers Actors (Iran Civil Society Organizations Training and Research Center -ICTRC) with the organizers (ITU and UN) and other civil society participants, the ICTRC was selected as the civil society focal point for the Middle East and West and Central Asia.

To inform all civil society stockholders on the process and outcomes of previous conferences, to harmonize and collect all views and concerns of these stockholders regarding the plan of action and draft declaration of the WSIS, and to evaluate and review the ICT status of WA region and to prepare a civil society regional action plan and a declaration on WSIS objectives and ICT in the region, the Center decide to hold a regional civil society forum on the Information Society from 26 to 28 August 2003 at Kish Island.

Apart from all the activities done to realize such forum, this issue of "Volunteer Actors" discusses the important topics of the forum.

In the first paper, Dr Sohrab Razzaghi, Director of ICTRC and Professor of Political Science, raises a series of challenges and opportunities that the civil society organizations face in the Information Society. In the next paper, written by me, I have focused on a phenomenon in Iranian context that has affected the young people in Iran – weblogs. This phenomenon has been the main topic of debates and discussions among civil society organizations. The next article has been edited by Dr Boyan Radoykov, Program Specialist of the Information Society Division of UNESCO, entitled: "Empowering Youth in the Information Society", discusses about the role of ICTs in empowering the youth. The paper has been presented in 10th International Conference of "iearn" in Japan. I thought the paper can be useful for Iranian readers and also for the experts from the region since the paper contains important and significant points regarding the ICTs and the new prospects for progress in the creation and exchange of knowledge. A general look at the WSIS, the objectives and its preparatory meetings is the content of the next section of the Volunteers Actors.

The next paper looks at the activities of the Art and Science Foundation in the framework of ICTs and young people in Iran. The experience of this non-governmental organization can be regarded as examples of 'best practices' in the field of ICTs education in Iran or even in the Middle East countries. "Women and ICTs: the realm of the Information Society" is the title of the next paper written by Dr Shirin Ahmad-Nia, a university professor and activist working at the Institute for Women's Studies and Research. The paper discusses whether ICTs are gender neutral or not. An interview with Dr Yahya Tabesh, board member of Sharif University is the next part of the Volunteer Actors. In this interview, we have tried to discuss different aspects of ICTs in Iran.

The explosive growth of the on-line world has given place to a variety of poorly understood vulnerabilities and also to a lack of clear legal rules, especially in the international setting. That's why in the next issue Mr Ali Sadoughi discusses the security within the Information Society, a security for all citizens. The last paper has been written by Saeid N. Neshat, a human rights activist in which he has studied the issue of "access to information" in human rights documents. I am so thankful to him for his generous assistance during the whole work of editing.

Civil Society in the Information Society:
Existing Challenges

By Sohrab Razzaghi

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The application of modern information and communication technologies (ICTs) in all aspects of life, has given raise to a new wave of revolution all around the world and an information society has been emerged. The information society is a society with different actors that communicate with each other and with the outside world via network communications or computer-based communication system.

The governments through the world have welcomed these sorts of technologies and have expressed willingness over great investment on them for the sake of sources and opportunities that ICT can provide in the area of training, commerce, business, economy, medicine, governmental activities, etc… Among them, some countries have embarked on constructing a national information infrastructure. There is no doubt that information society or information networks provide a type of structure and a new social environment ahead of its dwellers so that it can be expected that a fundamental revolution and change in all aspects of human life in 21st century.

The information society is an interrelated whole that includes information economy, information culture, information government and politics, and an environment of research and development (R&D). The information society is the product of information and communication technologies. What is so important for the civil society organizations in the information society is how to change the traditional borders of public and private spheres into the new social structure. This is a great challenge for the civil society organizations of a country like Iran whose telecommunications and information technologies, as the main means of infrastructure of the information society are exclusively in the hands of the government.

The most important issue for civil society organizations facing this wave of change, is to gain the potential and capacity of participation in shaping the policies and in decision-making process for development and engineering of the information society.

Free Access to Information

In spite of the fact that expansion and spreading the new information and communications technologies have totally changed the factors and conditions involved in access to information and as a result the prospect of people's access to their required information, no global agreement has been reached on the features of free access to information, the

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standards governing on this access and rules and regulations that can guarantee free access to information in all societies. If free access to information is regarded as a fundamental human right in the information society, then the conditions to realize this right at both national and international levels is to be provided to.

Free access to information is the cornerstone of a free society. A question is raised here: What kind of information is to be accessible to public? And whether any information are necessarily supposed to be available to all? What would come on competitive advantage and the right to intellectual property?

A glance at the widespread information existing on existing electronic networks (internet) indicates that the access to a great portion of this information requires getting permission from their owners who protect their information by mean such as passwords, copyright regulations, trade marks, etc. Due to the fact that a great portion of the information is owned by the western companies and communities, this has in turn created a sort of digital divide. Beside free access to information, especially in the unprivileged regions and societies requires access to new communicational and information skills to use them. Furthermore, at the international and global level, there are two important factors that erase the image of a free access to information.

1. At the international level, globalization of media and ICTs mostly reinforces the one-way flow of information from the North to South.

2. At the domestic level, the fact that telecommunication infrastructures and communication technologies are owned by the government, limits the possibility of their equal distribution to all regions.

Digital Divide

There is a lack of consensus on the indices of the free access to information, criteria and governing standards of free access to information and also the rules and regulations that can guarantee the free access to information in all societies. This has caused an ever-increasing digital divide or gap between those who have access and those who

have not access, at both domestic and international levels, especially in developing countries where there are some people who are not able to take advantage of ICT in their daily life due to reasons such as lack of electronic literacy, lack of knowledge in the field of ICT usage, or lack of funds to pay for the costs of ICT.

This has caused the growth of a marginalized class in the information society. It seems that the gap between capital and labor class in the industrial society has been replaced by a digital divide. In this regard, the civil society organizations have two challenges on their path towards strengthening of civil society.

1. Providing opportunities and conditions to spread electronic literacy among the citizens especially women and the youth in the unprivileged regions so that people can have the opportunity to use ICT in all aspects of their lives and enjoy free access to information.

2. Creating public sphere centers through which people with the low funds can buy and pay for ICT costs and enjoy the access to information by spending less money.

Besides, civil society organizations should assist various people and communities to create their local content in their own languages on the information networks. They should be able to develop their own information networks. They should be able to develop electronic applications and functions relevant to their requirements.

In this way, they are able to get access to key information in the general fields, general service, investment, capital, information about the market and even exchange of currencies and etc. In general, in an information society, it is the main precondition of the empowerment that citizens can enjoy digital opportunities.

Not responding to the digital divide or information gap, seriously weakens the possibility of a sustainable and harmonious development at the domestic level. The access to information in the information society is the first condition of political participation in the information society. Therefore, information society organizations while taking the above empowerment measures must make serious efforts

to fill in the information gap by ratifying and creating a common responsibility at the international level.

Rule of Law in the Information Society

The information society lacks the political borders that separate each society from the global information society. From the infrastructural point of view, each national information society is necessarily a connected component related to the universal information society and global information infrastructures. Free access to new information and communication technologies and media can not change this fact that who is really controlling and ruling over these media? Or the law of which country or group of countries is to be exercised on the activities over the current network?

A global information society requires a distinct legislative system in which the value of contributions offered by the people, companies and governments involved in this active process is formally recognized. This legislative system is to include subjects such as freedom of speech, data protection, access to information, right to privacy and security of the networks, work environment privacy, the right to cultural and intellectual property, public access to information required for human development, the subjects related to general territory and appropriate use and access to general service and democratic participation of people, issues related to market, structures and rules for owning the media and the telecommunications etc.

The legal system governing the information society has two dimensions: technical laws and regulatory laws that should be drafted by the states and the international community. Since nowadays a great portion of communication and information infrastructures existing in the global information society and operating softwares are produced by the states and multi-national and transnational companies, therefore, a kind of an information and legal oligarchy can be found concerning the technical laws governing the information networks. Besides, as regards drafting the international laws, it seems that all states have not active participation or involvement. If a free and democratic information society is intended, then the rule of law should be based on a democratic participation.

Thus, considering the borderless nature and characteristics of the ICTs, there should be an appropriate framework to be developed to determine the legal and legislative competency of states and other actors involved in the information society.

Diversity of identities, cultures and languages

"Buy a computer and learn English or get an ax",
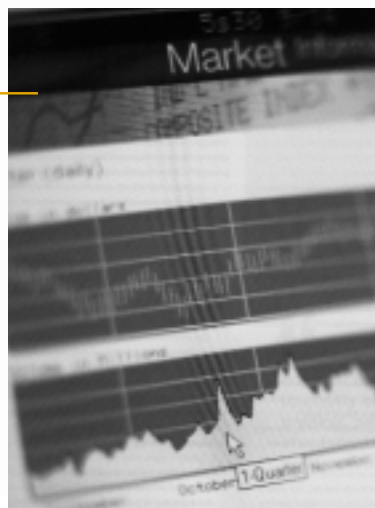
is the best possible sentence that describes the trend of information society in the present circumstances. Although the technologies forming the information society can help or weaken the   sustainability of cultural, lingual and identity diversity, the prevailing trend in today's globalization age, tends to regard various identities, cultures and languages as obstacles against global information society, and there are efforts to harmonize identities, and resolve them into a global culture, one identity and a single dominant language.

This will definitely weaken stability of the global information society. The world needs to develop a model of an information society which is based on cultural variety as an "investment" in which lingual and identity diversity serve as a "vehicle" of the stable development. The information society based on harmonizing cultures, identities and languages is not accepted from an economic point of view as well as a political or social view.

Variety in culture, languages and identities is a significant factor for developing a sustainable information society from many points of view as follows:

1. Formal recognition of the cultural, lingual and identity diversity encourages different societies to participate in expansion of a sustainable information society. Participation is a significant factor for reaching a stable information society whether with geographical borders or virtual life. The cultures of all societies are different because they define the frameworks of negotiation and communication atmosphere between individuals – with different capabilities, ideals and values – and societies. Therefore, social participation demands multicultural approaches.

2. Formal recognition of cultural, lingual and identity diversity facilitates developing of the communicational capabilities for removing social deprivations in the information society. Communicational capabilities are the key factors of cohesion that depend on motivation, competency and access. The approaches based on respect to cultural diversity and develop the above-mentioned factors in a balanced way, can decrease the poverty and social deprivations a great deal in the information society.

3. The respect to cultural, lingual and identity diversity may lead to an effective and democratic participation in the information society. To guarantee such full participation of citizens with different cultures, and to specify the form and structure of the information society in one's country or in the world, the formal recognition of diversity is necessary.

4. If the information society is regarded as a threat for cultural, lingual or identity diversity, then a serious resistance is expected to be shaped against it.

Therefore the World Summit for the Information Society must define the cultural, lingual, ethnic and identity diversity as key capital and factor in developing an information society and not as an obstacle, and certain mechanisms are to be drafted, planned and implemented to guarantee such diversity.

Privacy in the Information Society

The right to privacy of individuals has been recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It seems that the digital technologies are challenging this right. The quality of personal and private date that can be stored, commented or analyzed is mostly without limitation. There is a need at the international level for extend the minimum standards to control, keep and use of personal information. Today, by using means such as electronic monitoring and surveillance, one can enter easily the privacy of the individuals. In the information society, each of the individuals, have an electronic identity that con-

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tains the personal information of their life. The individuals living in an information society are vulnerable against any abuse of their personal information (such as illegal sale of this information by the governmental or private centers of bodies or by other actors). Thus one of the fundamental structures that contribute to the information society is that the right to access and free dissemination of information can be balanced and compromised with the right to privacy in one way or another. Of course definition of privacy is so difficult, but from the legal point of view, the right to privacy includes all the information belonging to oneself, to his or her family, and all issues of their personal life such as mental or physical conditions.

The main issue for civil society organizations is to design standards for privacy and try to create local consensus for their domestic societies. Meanwhile, civil society organizations should hold certain training courses for citizens to teach them about the techniques of keeping and protecting personal and private information.

The Security of Networks and Information Systems

Use of systems and information networks in an information society has important privileges and facilitates the implementation of activities. However one significant issue that individuals, states, agencies and individual users should pay serious attention concerning these networks is the security.

With the increasing growth of links through networks and information systems in various societies, now the information systems and networks are vulnerable more than ever. This should be regarded as a major challenge in the information society. Therefore, it is needed that the World Summit for the Information Society attempts to identify a series of guidelines and mechanisms for their implementation.

The information society causes a changing security environment and this demands a culture of security, in which the concentration is based on security in developing information systems and networks. Individuals in the information society are increasingly depended on secure information systems and networks and their related service. Only those approaches that guarantee interests of all stakeholders in the information society can be able to provide an effective and efficient security.

To provide such security in the information society, each stakeholder and participant

should be considered an important actor. Participants should be aware of the security risks or any related measure or preventive steps. They should assume responsibility and should take the necessary measures to promote the security of information systems and networks.

One challenge in this regard is that developing countries that are receivers of such information systems are vulnerable to those who are designers of such systems since they have the potential to enter into their systems (hacking). Designers of such information systems know well the vulnerability of their own systems. Therefore, the following guidelines are suggested for the security of the information systems and networks:

1. Promotion of a culture of security among all stakeholders and participants of the information society as a means to protect their information systems and networks.

2. Increasing the awareness about the risks and dangers that can damage the information systems and networks, also about the available policies, measures, procedures for prevention from such threats and dangers.

3. Promotion of cooperation and information sharing among all stakeholders in developing and implementing security policies and measures and procedures.

4. Promotion of an attitude towards the security of networks as an important vision among all stakeholders and participants.

Democratization of media ownership

A major precondition of a free access to information in the information society is that this society should be a free and democratic society. It is necessary to pay due attention to the democratization of ownership of media, information networks and systems.

At the present time, despite many positive changes, still certain governments and great multinational companies (mostly western companies) are the exclusive owners of distribution media and information and communication technologies, and therefore, they are the real owners of information flow. In such conditions, these are states and companies that can affect on the flow of information, ideas and news all over the world. Equality, justice and democracy and realization of other human values in the information society can create a balance of media power in domestic and international levels. It is just in this framework, we can be hopeful that the communication system of the world is meeting the needs of all peoples in the information society. ■

Weblogs:

New Horizon of Civil Changes in Iran

By Omid Memarian
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Summary: *The Internet in Iran is growing rapidly, especially among the youth and the phenomenon of writing web logs are expanding. It has even created social networks among young people.*

The phenomenon of "Internet in Iran" has been surprisingly growing in an unprecedented way in recent years. While, during the past year and a half, there were 100,000 internet users, this figure reached to more than 2 million in winter 2003. The developments such as operating system of Windows XP with an installed UNICODE used for writing and reading Farsi texts, caused those who have a limited familiarity with English language and a little computer-internet know-how to become active in networks. The quick growth of ISPs contributed a great deal to this trend. It is a fact that in a society that more than 60 percent of the population is young people, internet finds is users mostly among the youth.

Although the growth of internet and use of information networks have been highly considered among the university students and professors and they are known as efficient means for extensive exchange of knowledge from one part, and among the business people for promoting commerce, it is to be noted that social developments caused by internet in Iran has overshadowed these two aspects of scientific use and e-commerce in a way that one can explicitly claim that the social impact of "internet" has been highly   regarded in comparison with its economic and even scientific functions.
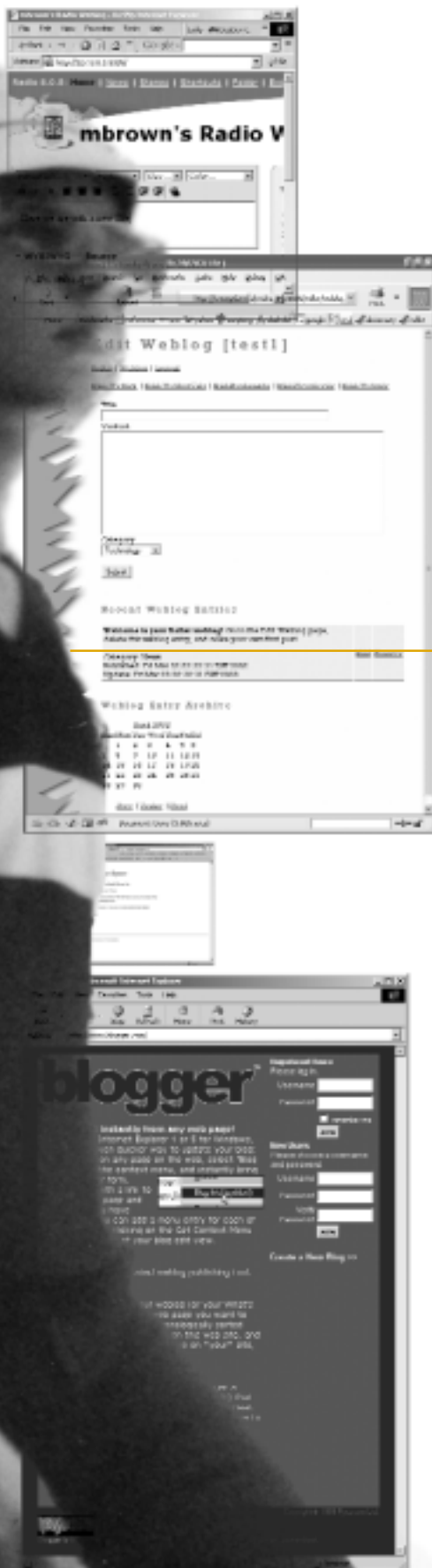
> **Following a series of limitations concerning freedom of press in Iran, the idea of creation of news websites that can distribute news, analyze the political or social issues was considered as a model of information dissemination.**

Following a series of limitations concerning freedom of press in Iran, the idea of creation of news websites that can distribute news, analyze the political or social issues was considered as a model of information dissemination. It was then that the number of these websites gradually increased. It is worth mentioning that some of these websites have more than 20,000 hits in a day. The increase in number of ISPs in different cities has contributed to the internet connectivity among the civil society organizations in Iran.

Due to the fact that Iran is a great country and the human and financial resources are concentrated in the capital, the cities and people-oriented organizations had many limitations in the way of access to information and other facilities and resources as well.

However during the past months, with expansion of internet in provinces, there has been a growing trend of connectivity among the civil society organizations. If in the past, a civil society organization was obliged to come to Tehran to meet its information and resource needs, now they can obtain what they need through internet connections, especially training manuals, exchange of experience, coordination of activities with the other non-governmental organizations, dissemination of information, etc. This will lead to their empowerment to the best sense of the word, and increase their capacity. They can take advantage of the existing opportunities and get access to the available resources not only in Iran but also at international level. As a result, networking is now on the agenda of many organizations. In Tehran, there are about two hundred youth non-governmental organizations and five hundred more youth NGOs at other provinces of Iran. Brining into account unofficial figures, then we can reach to the figure of 2000 organizations. About 80 Youth NGOs have websites in internet, mostly in Farsi. However, there is a growing trend of creating websites and using internet and networking communications. This has created a good opportunity for resource and empowerment centers to open training resources in internet so that NGOs can benefit, or to raise discussion on important issues of civil society, or even to advocate for a single topic.

For instance, the Foundation of Art and Science (a non-governmental organization) is now seriously working on the remote training project. This institute by itself has taught 70000 people in the country how to use internet. The Farsi Unicode System is one of the projects of this non-governmental organization. The mentioned system has dramatically increased Iranian's access to Internet. This institute is also making efforts to launch Afghanistan Pashto Unicode System and hopes to accomplish it by the mid 2003. By establishing technology development centers in different regions of the country, this institute has founded an internet web connecting about 1500 schools. This figure is said to be increasing by the help of other sections. Such institute established and funded by the help of non-governmental financial sources, benevolent people and especially Iranians living oversea who are seriously following up the notion of growth through development of information technology.

Internet is not only an empowerment and capacity-building means for civil society organizations. Among the age group of 16-25, the use of chat rooms and certain services are common. In certain cases, such communications has led into the friendship networks of social groups. This phenomenon is a kind of starting point for creation of a "virtual civil society", something that is not depended on the real social groups or non-governmental organizations, etc, and is prevalent not only among the young and adolescent people but among the writers, journalists and authorities as well. One of the forms of these networking is "web logs".

In Iran, there are 5500 personal active web logs. Web log is a space that certain servers offer their subscribers free of charge. They are based on certain templates and automatic management of contents, so that subscribers can use the space easily to write their "logs", daily notes and other related materials and to publish it in internet. Such free-of-charge service has been welcomed by many people. Most important is that Iranians can type in Farsi language, and therefore, there is no more an obstacle of language for putting contents online. In this web logs, there are certain website that are with real names and others with pseudo names. Certain people write about ordinary issues of their daily life, and others write about literary or political subjects. Among some of them, you can find even sex guide web logs.

The other months in late September 2002, one of the "web loggers" passed away in an accident in mountains. The following day, this news was published in different web logs. After only two days, the web log of the lost person – that previously had 30 hits in a day, was visited by more than 3000 users. They all would like to know what this
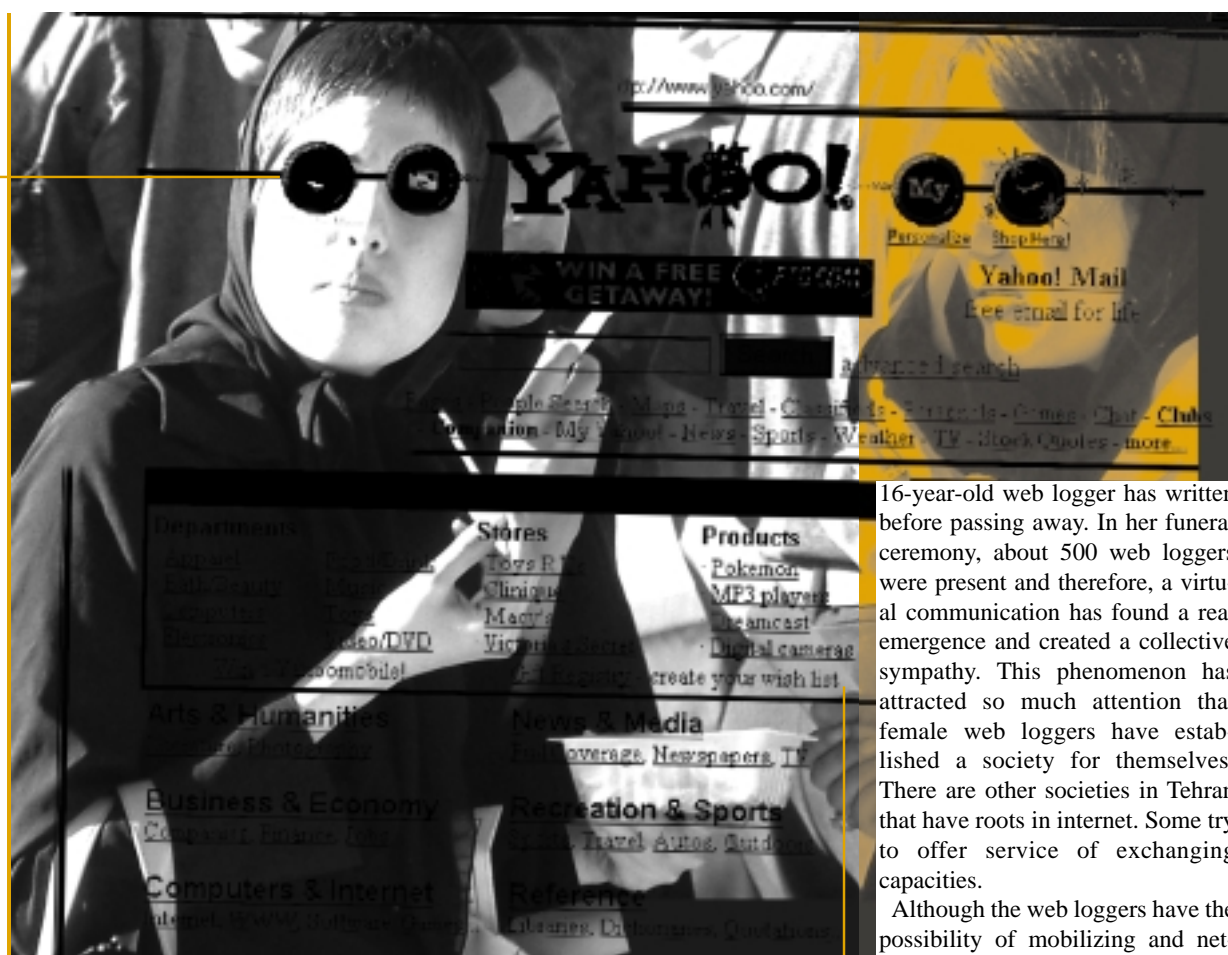
Although the web loggers have the possibility of mobilizing and networking in Iran, It seems that still internet can be more operational in unprivileged parts of the country.

16-year-old web logger has written before passing away. In her funeral ceremony, about 500 web loggers were present and therefore, a virtual communication has found a real emergence and created a collective sympathy. This phenomenon has attracted so much attention that female web loggers have established a society for themselves. There are other societies in Tehran that have roots in internet. Some try to offer service of exchanging capacities.

Although the web loggers have the possibility of mobilizing and networking in Iran, It seems that still internet can be more operational in unprivileged parts of the country. For instance, in a remote village in Sistan and Baluchestan, where it is hard to find water for agriculture, a charity institute has established an office with an online service that local people can come and enjoy the drawing facilities for carpet designing. They can demonstrate their art of carpet designing online. They have been able to enter a bigger world never imagined before. ◼

Empowering youth in the Information Society

Dr Boyan Radoykov
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Paris, June 2003

The emergence of the information society is a turning point in human history. This evolution is causing deep transformations in which gathering knowledge has not only become the principal driving power of social changes but also holds the promise that many of the problems confronting societies could be properly addressed.

The efforts to ensure digital inclusion, currently observed at different rates in the world, arouse hopes for improved educational schemes. Recent developments demonstrate, however, glaring disparities of access to information and knowledge sources.

In this perspective, among the main challenges national and international institutions have to address is the bridging successfully the existing digital divide, which accentuates the contrasts in development, often excluding entire groups - even countries -from the benefits of the emerging information society. Thus, disadvantaged groups and large illiterate populations do not have access to essential educational tools, which they very much need and which could certainly improve their present conditions.

UNESCO's core missions - to promote "the free exchange of ideas and knowledge" and to "maintain, increase and diffuse knowledge" -have never been more relevant as information and communication technologies (ICTs) open up new prospects for progress in the creation and exchange of knowledge, in the placement of education at the heart of the agendas for development, and in the promotion of creativity and intercultural dialogue.

In the process of improving educational opportunities thanks to the increased use of, and access to, ICTs, there are several parameters, which will have to be taken into account. The growth of information networks and ICT applications will not in it lay the foundations of truly efficient and solid knowledge modules and reliable formal and non- formal education schemes. While replicating information will become fast and relatively cheap, cons1mcting and disseminating knowledge, taking into account its complex cognitive elements, is a far more laborious and costly process. Knowledge societies, capable of applying existing information to the generation of new knowledge, are built up through long-tern institutional and social mediations. They inevitably induce the need for a clear vision of specific social goals to be attained, particularly in order to enhance equitable access to formal and non-formal education and require some clear-cut choices to be made by national decision-makers in this regard.

If the potential of ITCs and scientific and technological progress is to be harnessed fully for the development of education, the information society has to be shaped in a way enabling its evolution towards knowledge societies.

Guided by the United Nations Millennium Declaration, the international community should be able, during the forthcoming World Summit on the Information Society (Geneva, December 2003), to focus constructively on the following objectives:

- Agreeing on common principles for the consolidation of knowledge societies;
- Promoting the use of ICTs for capacity building, empowerment, governance and social participation;
- Strengthening capacities for scientific research, information sharing and cultural creativity, Performances and exchanges;
-Enhancing learning opportunities through access to

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diversified contents and delivery systems.

Access to education is a basic human right and it should be secured by all means. Free, compulsory and universal primary education is among the most clearly defined of educational rights which governments and international organizations have a duty and responsibility to make a reality. Advancing the right to education should therefore be a central concern in the information society and strong emphasis should be placed on harnessing the potential of ITCs for ensuring a really inclusive education process.

Using ICTs for better education also implies the formation of networks of educational specialists, an increase of exchanges and co-operation in the fields of education, science and culture as well as the application of new methods of content development and access to education and scientific information such as the modalities of distance learning e.g. virtual universities, virtual laboratories and research groups etc.

ICTs offer the potential to expand the present scope of teaching and learning, breaking through traditional constraints of space and time as well as boundaries of existing educational sys-

tems. Progress towards learning societies is based on the need to acquire new knowledge throughout one's life. ICTs offer more and more varied opportunities for learning outside formal education systems. But as educational demand increases and supply diversifies, increased disparities can be observed with respect to access, affordability and quality. After decades during which education was acknowledged as a public good that promotes equity through free basic schooling and fosters social cohesion, the accelerating privatization of educational goods and services, partly driven by the potential and impact of ICTs, poses an entirely new challenge both for the international community and for national authorities.

ICTs are innovative and experimental tools which make it possible to modernise education. Their potential should be fully recognized as new delivery mechanisms for system-wide expansion of educational provision, especially through distance education and open learning opportunities, including non-formal education. The Education For All (EFA) objectives set out by the international community in Dakar, Senegal, in April 2000, encourage an

increased use of ITCs with a view to reaching out to the excluded, to improving the quality of available content, to enhancing and considerably upgrading teacher's skills, and to establishing and strengthening reliable education management systems.

There is a need in this context for a dialogue between all stakeholders in education -governmental, non-governmental (in particular teachers' associations), private sector and intergovernmental organizations - so as to foster better public understanding of educational issues influenced by ICTs. Platforms for Dialogue and action involving both the public- and the private-sector provide of educational goods and services should be given particular attention.

There is also a need to address ethical and legal issues concerning the use of ICTs in education: e.g. ownership of knowledge; legal frameworks of use of contents and educational materials; the impact of education on cultural diversity, etc. Some principles and actions may be proposed and promoted with respect to the above:

Principles

- ICTs must contribute to enhancing the quality of

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teaching and learning, the sharing of knowledge and information.

- ICTs have the potential to introduce in the educational process more flexible responses to societal needs.

- The potential of ICTs to lower the cost of education and to improve internal and external efficiencies of education systems must   be grasped.

-The Information Society must seize the opportunities of ICTs as innovative and experimental tools to renew education.

- ICTs should be seen both as curriculum per se and as pedagogical tools capable of enhancing the effectiveness of educational services.

- Widespread dialogue among all stakeholders and consensus building at national and international levels can yield strategies and policies for expanding access to education and learning, progressing towards EFA targets nationally, and renewing formal and non formal education systems.

Actions

- Disseminating knowledge and best practices related to the use of ICTs in education and learning processes and to their impact on education systems (e.g. through online clearing houses and multimedia resource center).

- Demonstrating the impact of ICT-based alternative delivery systems through pilot projects, notably for achieving EFA targets.

- furthering teacher training in the use of ICTs in education as well as new forms of networking of teacher institutions and teachers.

- Promoting the use by governments of ICT-based delivery systems in fom1al and non-fomal education, using different mixes of - new and traditional media and appropriate methodologies. Disseminating results of research on ICT- facilitated dynamics of the teaching/learning process and their impact on content and teacher-learner interaction, in particular as regards distance education and teacher training and development.

- Fostering international debate and reflection in flavor of developing internationally compatible descriptors and standards for distance and e-learning courseware, and for e-learning institutions.

In summary, ICTs offer the potential to expand the scope of teaching and learning, breaking through traditional constraints of space and time as well as boundaries of current education systems. The observed privatization of educational services, partly driven by the potential and impact of ICTs, poses an entirely new challenge for the international community. In this context the different stakeholders have to define the best way for taking advantage of ICTs in order to improve the quality of teaching learning, sharing knowledge and information, introducing a higher degree of flexibility in respect societal needs, lowering the cost of formal and non formal education and improving the efficiency of the existing education systems.
* * *

For an Information Society to be open and inclusive, high priority should be accorded to address needs of those disadvantaged and marginalised groups that are usually excluded. Improving expanding access to the benefits of the information society for young people is therefore a crucial issue. National and international authorities should adopt principles and encourage actions that actively young people in participating

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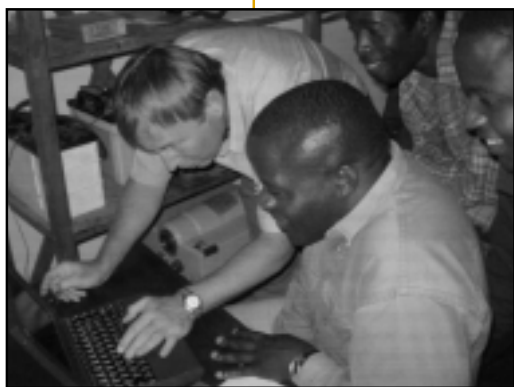
The INFOYOUTH network (www.infovouth.org), created in 1991, is example of its efforts to leverage new technologies as a catalyst and platform for addressing young people, particularly those in developing countries.

in the process of both "producing" and "consuming" information strategy should be aimed at helping young people to benefit from ICTs for network strengthening information sharing, creating knowledge resources and developing skills necessary for work in new digital environment. It should also set the stage for the creation of national and regional information and communication networks, and provide for appropriate technologies and training disadvantaged young people, specialized NGOs and youth leaders particularly in post-conflict zones.

Various concrete actions should be designed, promoted and implemented in this act. For instance, it is important to stress efforts targeting a) consensus building around shared values and ethical pr that should underlie the information society; b) strengthening capacity building for ICT use by people e.g. through multimedia community centers; c) promotion of the development of appropriate information and communication tools to support decision making and to encourage international dialogue; d) encouragement of the formulation of policies for enhancing the role of young people information society; e) furtherance of the access of young people to information and knowledge as a prerequisite for their competent social decisions, behavior and participation, and finally; f) improvement of training of the younger generation in ICT literacy and technical skills in order to enable it to enter the infom1ation society empowered.

UNESCO has long recognised the power of information as a vehicle for positive social transformation and development. The INFOYOUTH network (www.infovouth.org), created in 1991, is example of its efforts to leverage new technologies as a catalyst and platform for addressing young people, particularly those in developing countries.

The main objectives of the INFOYOUTH network are to provide an overview of youth policies programs throughout the world and to develop a reliable network for information sharing and exchange of experiences thereby creating an effective toolkit for accessing, selecting and disseminating relevant information at the international, national and local levels. Societal and attitudinal transformations are difficult to implement and require sustained long- tern efforts. By providing mechanisms to j its participation INFOYOUTH enables today's youth to become an active participant in socially key partner in developing truly sustainable strategies for development.

Some recommendations for enhancing youth empowerment through ICTs

By embracing young people as equal partners and supporting their efforts through various actions at the policy and project levels greater s1rides can be made towards harvesting the full potential of ICTs and youth in addressing key development challenges. Following are some recommendations suggested for furthering this process:

1) Promote global access to multilingual information and knowledge sources for young people including opportunities for quality education in formal and non-formal settings, training in ICTs skills and information on issues having a practical impact on their every day lives;

2) Promote affordable access to the global information net-

work, especially in disadvantaged areas, and expand the information infrastructure to create more opportunities for development at the local/community level through distance learning, community multimedia centers, and related opportunities;

3) Encourage equitable expansion of the information society by promoting ethical principles, building capacity to generate knowledge and content at the local level and in local languages, increasing public domain content and quality open-source software and involving young people in the process of developing guidelines for the emerging knowledge society;

4) Provide opportunities for cultivating the creativity of youth, open life-long learning opportunities for young people, and promote their access to careers dealing with ICTs;

5) implement special programmes such as fellowships and competitions that would improve the meaningful access of young people to ICTs, support youth efforts to foste sustainable development and a culture of peace, and enabling disabled and handicapped youth to participate more actively in society;

6) Improve co-ordination of efforts among all actors (policy makers, international community, civil society and private sector) in addressing youth- and information-related issues and enhancing the participation of youth in the formulation of policies that impact their future. ■

The World Summit on the Information Society

The World Summit on the Information Society will be held in two phases. The first phase of WSIS will take place in Geneva hosted by the Government of Switzerland from 10 to 12 December 2003. The second phase will take place in Tunis hosted by the Government of Tunisia, from 16 to 18 November 2005.

Background

Resolution 73 of the International Telecommunication Union (Minneapolis, 1998) resolved to instruct the ITU Secretary-General to place the question of the holding of a World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) on the agenda of the United Nations Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC now the United Nations System Chief Executive Board - CEB) and to report to the ITU governing body, the Council, on the results of that consultation. In his report to the 1999 session of the Council on that consultation, the Secretary- General indicated that the ACC had reacted positively and that a majority of other organizations and agencies had expressed interest in being associated with the preparation and holding of the Summit. It was decided that the Summit would be held under the high patronage of the UN Secretary-General, with ITU taking the lead role in preparations.

In 2001, the ITU Council decided to hold a Summit in two phases with the first phase to be held from 10 to 12 December 2003, in Geneva, Switzerland and the second from 16 to 18 November 2005 in Tunis, Tunisia.

The UN General Assembly Resolution 56/183 endorsed the framework for the Summit adopted by the ITU Council. The Resolution also endorses the leading role of the Union in the Summit and its preparation, in cooperation with other interested organizations and partners.

The UN General Assembly Resolution 56/183 further recommended that preparations for the Summit take place through an open-ended intergovernmental Preparatory Committee that would define the agenda of the Summit, decide on the modalities of the participation of other stakeholders in the Summit, and finalize both the draft declaration and the draft plan of action. It invited the ITU to assume the leading managerial role in the Executive Secretariat of the Summit and invited Governments to participate actively in the preparatory process of the Summit and to be represented in the Summit at the highest possible level.

In Resolution 56/183 the General Assembly also encouraged contributions from all relevant UN bodies and other intergovernmental organizations, including international and regional institutions, non-governmental organizations, civil society and the private sector to actively participate in the intergovernmental preparatory process of the Summit and the Summit itself.

The Challenge

The global information society is evolving at breakneck speed. The accelerating convergence between telecommunications, broadcasting multimedia and information and communication technologies (ICTs) is driving new products and services, as well as ways of conducting business and commerce. At the same time, commercial, social and professional opportunities are exploding as new markets open to competition and foreign investment and participation. The modern world is undergoing a fundamental transformation as the industrial society that marked the 20th century rapidly gives way to the information society of the 21st century. This dynamic process promises a fundamental change in all aspects of our lives, including knowledge dissemination, social interaction, economic and business practices, political engagement, media, education, health, leisure and entertainment. We are indeed in the midst of a revolution, perhaps the greatest that humanity has ever experienced. To benefit the world community, the successful and continued growth of this new dynamic

requires global discussion.

The Opportunity

Better understanding of this revolution and its impact on the international community. It aims to bring together Heads of State, Executive Heads of United Nations agencies, industry leaders, non-governmental organizations, media representatives and civil society in a single high-level event. The roles of the various partners (Member States, UN specialized agencies, private sector and civil society) in ensuring smooth coordination of the practical establishment of the information society around the globe will also be at the heart of the Summit and its preparation.

Outcome

The anticipated outcome of the Summit is to develop and foster a clear statement of political will and a concrete plan of action for achieving the goals of the Information Society, while fully reflecting all the different interests at stake. The scope and nature of this ambitious project will require partnerships with public and private entities, and such partnerships will be actively sought in the coming months.

High Level Summit Organizing Committee (HLSOC)

A High-Level Summit Organizing Committee (HLSOC) has been established under the patronage of Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General and Chairman of the United Nations System Chief Executive Board for Coordination (CEB formally ACC).
Its purpose is to coordinate the efforts of the international United Nations family in the preparation, organization and holding of WSIS. All the members of the HLSOC have engaged to provide specific information about their work that will help develop the Summit themes. The HLSOC reports directly to the CEB and oversees the work of the Executive Secretariat

Composition

The HLSOC is composed of a Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General and Executive Heads of the following UN specialized agencies: FAO, IAEA, ICAO, ILO, IMO, ITU, UNCTAD, UNDP, UNEP, UNESCO, UNHCR, UNIDO, UPU, WHO, WIPO, WMO. It comprises also the Director General of WTO, the Executive Director of UNITAR, the Executive Secretaries of the UN Regional Economic Commissions and the President of the World Bank. The Secretary-General of the I n t e r n a t i o n a l Telecommunication Union serves as Chairman of the HLSOC.

Executive Secretariat
Who will Participate?

Governments

All governments have a stake in the Information Society, whatever their level of national income or their infrastructure facilities. Governments are key for bringing the benefits of the Information Society to everyone through the development of national and global policies and frameworks to meet the challenges of the Information Society. In their pursuit of the public interest, governments can raise awareness, facilitate access to information for the public, and they also can lay the foundations for all citizens to benefit from Information and Communication Technologies in terms of improved quality of life, social services and economic growth

Private Sector

The private sector will play an active role, in conjunction with governments and civil society, by offering an economically viable model to achieve the development objectives on the world agenda. The contribution of the private sector is instrumental in creating the material conditions for universal access to information and value-added ICT services. Its involvement in the Summit will promote economic growth and new partnerships, technology transfer, increase awareness of new technologies, and motivate the creation of local content development and skilled employment opportunities.
The private sector input to the Summit is being facilitated by the Coordinating Committee of Business Interlocutors (CCBI), chaired by the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC). For more information about the mobilization, contributions and participation of the global business community, please click here.

Civil Society

Civil society is playing an active role in identifying the social and cultural consequences of current trends and in drawing attention to the need to introduce democratic accountability on the strategic options taken at all levels. Its diversity and, often, hands-on approach to issues, make civil society a key player in the renewed international partnership called for by the UN Secretary-General.

United Nations Family

The Summit offers a unique

opportunity for the global community to reflect, discuss and give shape to our common destiny in an era when countries and peoples are interconnected as never before. The UN family of organizations serves as a catalyst for change by bringing together state governments, as well as the private sector, international institutions and civil society in pursuit of common goals. The United Nations system and its specialized agencies will be deeply involved in the organization and holding of the Summit, with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) taking a lead role.

How to Contribute?

The key opportunity to contribute and be part of the World Summit is to actively participate in the preparatory process of the World Summit. This can be done is the following suggested ways:
- Build a constructive network
- Stimulate multi-actor cooperation
- Submit substantive inputs
- Organize meetings
- Organize training sessions
- Formulate operational proposals
- Provide funding and support

When and Where?

The Summit is being held under the high patronage of Kofi Annan, UN Secretary-General, with the International Telecommunication Union taking the lead role, in cooperation with other interested UN agencies, and will occur in two phases:

Geneva 2003: First Phase

The first phase of the World Summit will take place in Geneva hosted by the Government of Switzerland from 10 to 12 December 2003. It will address the broad range of themes concerning the Information Society and adopt a Declaration of Principles and plan of action, addressing the whole range of issues related to the Information Society.

Tunis 2005: Second Phase

The second phase of the World Summit will take place in Tunis hosted by the Government of Tunisia, from 16 to 18 November 2005. Development themes will be a key focus in this phase, and it will assess progress that has been made and adopt any further plan of action to be taken. ■
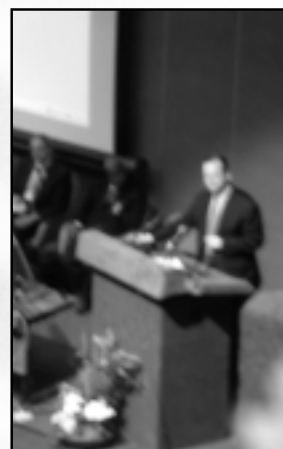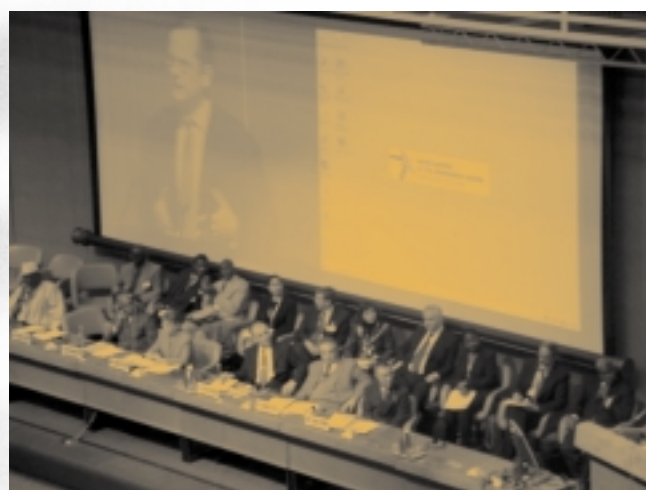
Today, through the advances made in information and communications technology, we witness a global community tightly connected by means of the Internet. The developed world, however, has witnessed a much stronger development in this field than developing nations, making it much easier for developed nations to make use of such connections for improving standard of living for their citizens. The Science and Arts Foundation, or SAF, a non-governmental organization, was found in March of 1999 by Professor Abbas Edalat at London's Imperial College with the aim to eliminate the gap in ICT between developed and developing nations. With the help of the foundation's executive director in Iran, Dr. Yahya Tabesh, Director of Sharif Universities Computer Center, SAF set out to bring unprecedented change in Iran's educational system through the introduction and development of ICT training. The chief project undertaken by SAF, with the cooperation of Tehran's Sharif University of Technology, is entitled SchoolNet. The aim of the SchoolNet program is to connect Iranian schools and cultural centers to each other and, more importantly, to the global system of the Internet. It is through these connections that the SchoolNet program strives to enhance education and, in affect, empower youth. To date, through the SchoolNet program, SAF has provided computer centers, Internet connection and ICT training to over 50,000 students and educators in over 100 educational facilities.

History: When the SchoolNet program first began, its main objective was to provide the hardware, software and training necessary to connect bright Iranian youth from economically disadvantaged backgrounds to the advantages of the Internet. The first successful attempt that SAF made in order achieve this goal was through the creation of the first School Information Center (SIC) in the capital city of Tehran

THE SCIENCE AND ARTS FOUNDATION:
EMPOWERING YOUTH

By Melody Mohebbi
www.saf.ir
www.schoolnet.ir

in September of 1999 at Sharif University of Technology. Through this partnership, SAF was able to provide Internet access to numerous schools in the southern region of Tehran. Upon witnessing this success, SAF created four more SICs in the cities of Kashan, Rasht, Babol and Ahvaz. The majority of these centers were located in universities, serving as a leading example of the value of partnerships between NGOs and institutions of higher learning. After recognizing its success in the above mentioned five cities, SAF began a campaign that continues until today to bring ICT equipment, training and Internet access to every child in Iran.

Components of SchoolNet: In order to optimize the benefits of ICT for the students that SAF has reached, the SchoolNet program has facilitated the creation of various digital programs. These programs aim to provide various creative methods that will serve as beneficial educational tools for both students and educators. While providing computer centers and Internet access to schools and educational and cultural institutes remains SchoolNet's top priority, these programs have seen unprecedented success in Iran's educational history.

E-clubs are various online educational societies that provide information, competitions and training on various topics. Thus far, SchoolNet has several e-clubs running in the fields of robotics, biotechnology, mathematics and Persian literature. Each club is facilitated by experts within that field and provides students with a strong background in that subject.

The most extensive project currently being planned by SAF through the SchoolNet program is the virtual school program. By creating a virtual school, and in affect virtual classrooms, SAF hopes to be able to provide uniform online classes on various topics to students throughout Iran. Currently, SAF is in the process of writing various pilot programs for this project.

SchoolNet Conferences: In order to encourage communication and cooperation between schools, SAF sponsors SchoolNet Conferences, which address the innovative use of IT in educational settings, every year. These conferences are geared toward teachers, students, school administrators and local education officials. Teachers, students and schools usually take the lead in planning conference content and workshops, with technical and financial support from SAF.

IEARN: iEARN, or the International Education and Resource Network, is a global network that encourages students to use the Internet and other sources of information techno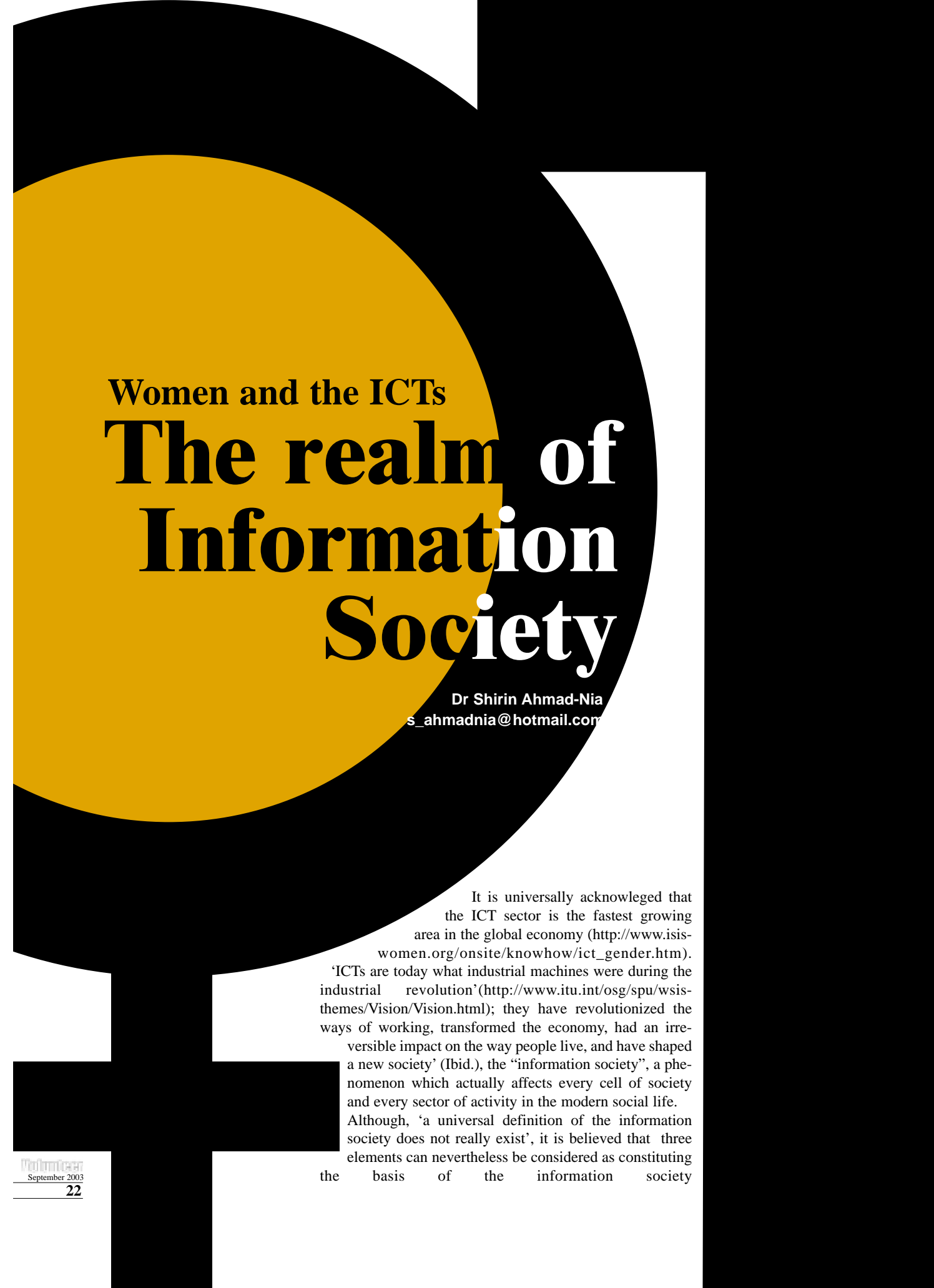logies for collaborative educational projects. The aim of these projects is not only to aid in bringing students and teachers basic educational needs but also to create connections between youth that will have a positive impact on the world. Iran's collaboration with this non-profit network made its first official appearance at the 8th Annual iEARN conference held in Cape Town, South Africa with the participation of 7 teacher supported by the Science and Arts Foundation (SAF). Following this new and challenging experience, Iranian educators and administrators began a campaign to bring ICT, particularly though iEARN projects, into their classrooms. The following year, SAF supported a delegation of 72 participants at the 9th Annual iEARN conference held in Moscow, Russia. Reports and analysis regarding the Iranian delegation's presentations and presence at the conference was astounding, particularly when the head of Russia's division of iEARN specifically sought out the Iranian team to congratulate them for their participation. The delegation returned to Iran with renewed vigor to continue their efforts in bringing Iranian classrooms closer to the global community. Finally, in July 2003, SAF supported a delegation of 52 members to attend the 10th annual iEARN conference held in Hyogo, Japan. It was at this conference that Edwin Gragert of the iEARN staff hailed the Iranian delegation as one of the most enthusiastic delegations in attendance.

Employment Generation for Youth: Many of the youth trained through SAF's SchoolNet program and ICT sites, have gone on to start small ICT businesses and to gain employment in the ICT field as web designers, software and hardware engineers and trainers. Also, SAF's staff is comprised of a majority of young people, with nearly 60% recruited from schools supported by SAF. Programs implemented by SAF seek specifically to encourage job creation for youth and women in the ICT field. ■

By creating a virtual school, and in affect virtual classrooms, SAF hopes to be able to provide uniform online classes on various topics to students throughout Iran.

Women and the ICTs
The realm of Information Society

Dr Shirin Ahmad-Nia
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It is universally acknowleged that the ICT sector is the fastest growing area in the global economy (http://www.isis-women.org/onsite/knowhow/ict_gender.htm). 'ICTs are today what industrial machines were during the industrial revolution'(http://www.itu.int/osg/spu/wsis-themes/Vision/Vision.html); they have revolutionized the ways of working, transformed the economy, had an irreversible impact on the way people live, and have shaped a new society' (Ibid.), the "information society", a phenomenon which actually affects every cell of society and every sector of activity in the modern social life. Although, 'a universal definition of the information society does not really exist', it is believed that three elements can nevertheless be considered as constituting the basis of the information society

With regard to gender issues, some believe that 'ICT can be a tool to promote gender equality and enhance the economic, political and social empowerment of women as recognised by Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as well as other UN documents.

(http://www.itu.int/osg/spu/wsis-themes/Vision/Vision.html), namely:
* Information and knowledge;
* Proliferation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT);
* Access to and use of ICTs. http://www.itu.int/osg/spu/wsis-themes/Vision/Vision.html
Information and knowledge are known to be "a vehicle of power and wealth" and of great importance for the human society. With ICTs, knowledge is now free to circulate seamlessly, irrespective of distance, and one is able to transmit a great amount of information in an extraordinarily short time (Ibid.).

As to the Information and communication technologies, we read, "they are seen by the international community as being, inter alia (http://www.itu.int/osg/spu/wsis-themes/Vision/Vision.html):
* a bridge between developed and developing countries [DOI and DOT Force];
* a tool for economic and social development [Buenos Aires 1994, Seoul Declaration, ADF 2002];
* an engine for growth [The Missing Link Report, 1984];
* the central pillar for the construction of a global knowledge-based economy and society [Florianopolis 2000];
* an opportunity for countries to free themselves from the tyranny of geography [ESCAP 2000].

As for the third element, i.e. access to and use of ICTs, it is emphasized that, 'ICTs also demand a re-organization of the traditional social, economic and political structures, to become more flexible, participatory and decentralized [G-7 Brussels 1995](Ibid.).

Many development proponents argue that information technology is gender-neutral and that men and women should benefit equitably from its application.

Thinking of 'the entire world's population' which is supposed to be benefitting from the advantages of ICTs, the question to be raised is how women as representatives of half of the world's population are actually affected by the information revolution and where do they really stand in the realm of the information society.

ICTs: Are they gender neutral?!

It is emphasized that 'in all countries the process of building Information Society focuses on the development of technical infrastructure and is considered as gender   neutral (http://www.unece.org/press/pr2002/02opal8e.htm). With regard to gender issues, some believe that 'ICT can be a tool to promote gender equality and enhance the economic, political and social empowerment of women as recognised by Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action as well as other UN documents (http://www.unece.org/press/pr2002/02opal8e.htm). At the same time, however, it is also believed that, 'ICT may perpetuate existing gender-based inequalities in opportunities and resources and create new forms of inequality between women and men (Ibid.). Towards 'building a gender sensitive information society' during the Pan-European Preparatory ministerial conference for the World Summit on the Information Society, it was emphasized that : gender equality refers to all ICT areas:
- users
- producers and
- decision makers

How women as potential ICTs consumers, users, producers or decision makers are actually experiencing the ICTs-related gender equality? A look at the relevant literature may shed more light on the issue.

According to the respective evidence: 'while information and communication technologies became pervasive during the 1980s, the use of such technologies by women's organisations became noticeable only   after   1995 (http://www.isiswomen.org/onsite/knowhow/ict_gender.htm). Moreover, 'as in most world regions, the spread and growth of ICT usage has been uneven across Asia and the Pacific. Women and men in different countries in the region have not benefited equally. Women in particular have to contend with ideological, systemic, and institutional barriers to accessing ICTs (Ibid.).

"The absence of women's voices and perspectives in the information society indicates that 'new' information and communication technologies (ICTs) reflect many of the gender patterns (in relation to power, values and exclusion) that have been evident for decades in the 'old' media. Indeed, these patterns cannot be divorced from gender relations in society as a whole. For women, achieving some control in the communication and in ICT filelds is vital to ensure that the resources and benefits of the information and communication society are distributed equally between men and women " (http://www.wacc.org.uk). Nancy Hafkin writes: "over the past five years multilateral, bilateral and nongovernmental organizations and private foundations have provided substantial amounts of funding for projects promoting the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in developing countries. Experience with development projects in other areas would indicate that women do not benefit equitably from such projects unless special efforts are made to identify their situation and needs and take effective action to incorporate their participation (Virtual Seminar Series on Gender and ICTs, July 2002). Many development proponents argue that information technology is gender-neutral and that men and women should benefit equitably from its application. However the research results (based on six case studies of multidonor ICT projects in Asia, Africa and Latin America) she reported supported the hypotesis that women do not benefit equitably from development projects unless special efforts are made to identify their situation and needs and effective action is taken to incorporate their participation. (UN/INSTRAW Virtual Seminar Series on Gender and ICTs, July 2002).

Women and the Digital Divide

The term 'digital divide' refers to the gap between those people with computer skills and those without. While the 'digital divide' may also refer to the fact that women generally have lower levels of computer literacy, it is also due to lack of education, poverty and lack of access to the technology that there are fewer of the world's women using computers. Once women have that training and access, however, they

are using computers to educate themselves, network with others, create business opportunities for themselves and other women and share their knowledge (http://www.worldcivilsociety.org/report). Ms Susan Teltscher of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development indicated that there are often significant barriers to women accessing the advantages of ITC, such as poverty, lower levels of education, lack of a second language, inaccessibility of computers, and the 'digital divide' : the often male-dominated nature of the ICT world ((http://www.worldcivilsociety.org/report.

Ms Gillian Marcelle , an active leader in developing and implementing gender justice strategies in the ICT sector argues that ICT policy can benefit tremendously from an informed and gender-aware decision making process; however, gender equality at the decision-making level of the ICT sector is still at unacceptable levels. (http://www.worldbank.org/gender/digitaldivide).
Ms. Rosa Delgado of Internet Society/DevSIG(ISOC) concluded that the majority of women in developing nations are excluded from significant job and higher educational opportunities through their lack of computer literacy and often a basic lack of education(http://www.worldcivilsociety.org/report).
In his article 'Global Digital divide still very much in existence' Michael Pastore refers to the ILO's World Employment Report (2001) and concludes that " ICT provides an "enabling potential" to improve women's lives. But the report does also find that 'a digital gender gap is apparent within countries, as women often find themselves occupying lower-level ICT jobs while men rise to higher paying, more responsible positions' (http://cyber-atlas.internet.com/big_picture/geographics/article).
Although ICT has the potencial to provide jobs for women and improve their lives, the above mentioned report notes that 'women generally continue to earn lower incomes, suffer higher unemployment and are often concerned in less skilled jobs' It is also emphasized that 'the most strikng digital gender divide relates to Internet use, with women in the minority of users in both developed and developing countries'. This fact is reflected in some statis-

tics which reveal that, for example, only 38 % of Internet users in Latin America are women, while in the Europian Union the figure is 25 %, in Russia 19 %, in Japan 18 % and in the Middle East 4 percent (Ibid). Worldwide, most Internet users remain male, college-educated, and earn higher-than average incomes, the report found. Only where Internet access is well developed, for example in Scandinavia and the US, has the gender gap in use of the Internet closed (Ibid).
During the Pan-European Preparatory ministerial conference for the World Summit on the Information Society (Bucharesht, 2002), it was underlined that 'Gender specific barriers in access to ICT include:
- High access costs and technology choice
- Limited access to learn new skills (lack of information and encouragement to apply for ICT training)
- Insufficient networks and perception of ICT as a 'male' sector
Differences among women in access to ICT as determined by
- geographical factor (urban-rural areas),
- family status (single mothers) and
- age (difficult access for women over 40-45 years old)
were also highlighted. It was agreed that limited data on women's position as ICT users, producers and decision makers does not allow for more comprehensive evaluation of the gender digital divide.
As to divide between women in rural and urban areas Gallagher and Mayer (2001) wrote "without this access, women in rural areas cannot share in the education, income-generation, health and other benefits that can come through the use of ICTs, such as those that women in urban areas are beginning to use'(http://www.worldbank.org/gender/digitaldivide).
As mentioned before, the lack of data does not allow to provide precise information on gender digital divide. However, the evidence strongly suggests that women have less resources to buy new equipment
- less time to aquire new skills and knowledge, and certainly
- less impact on the framework and rules of the games of the emerging Information Society, where ICT is rapidly reshaping the spheres of work and commerce, learning and governance.
They also lack self-confidence and encouragement to actively seek and pursue ICT-related opportunities.
(http://www.unece.org/press/pr2002/02opal8e.htm)

It was agreed that limited data on women's position as ICT users, producers and decision makers does not allow for more comprehensive evaluation of the gender digital divide.

Interview

Dr Tabesh:

The importance of 'network effect' is the same as Big Bang

An interview by Omid Memarian

Dr Yahya Tabesh, member of the scientific board of the Sharif University and member of the Supreme Council of Iran s Informatics. He has been seriously following up the issue of communication technology in Sharif University and also in his personal capacity, and has implemented a series of projects by now. In his interview, Dr Tabesh explained his concerns. He believes that the digital knowledge of people will not enhance by increasing the number of personal computers. Instead, there should be a rethinking of existing systems to increase the effectiveness and efficiency. When I entered his office, I could feel the atmosphere of the Information Society and IT, and in a way, a sense of networking. Dr Tabesh was online and expressing his views regarding a topic with one of his students. When he finished the work, the interview started.

What you read here, is an interview with this 53-year old great man - who has PhD in mathematics - about the features of the Information Society and networking.
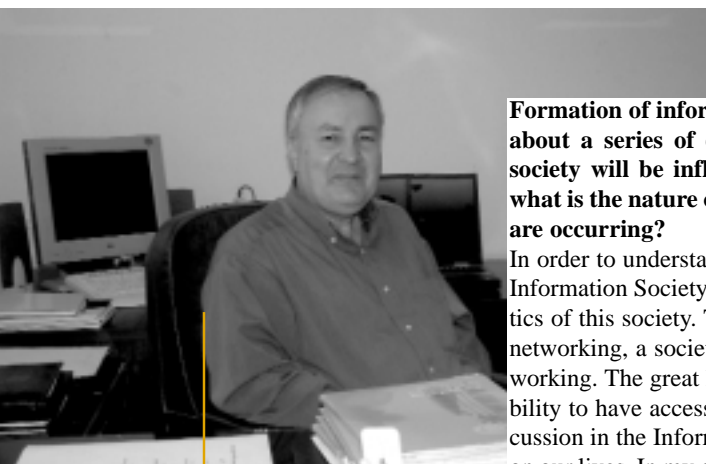
Today, network effect is widely regarded as one of major indices in measuring societies situation.

Formation of information society in the world has brought about a series of discussions. Many people ask how our society will be influenced by this phenomenon? Basically what is the nature of this development and the changes that are occurring?

In order to understand how our society will be affected by the Information Society, first of all,, we should list the characteristics of this society. The Information Society can be defined as networking, a society in which we have the possibility of networking. The great happening is that everybody has the possibility to have access to this network. The most prominent discussion in the Information Society is the effects of networking on our lives. In my opinion, network effects on the life of today human beings are just like an explosion or the same as "big bang". One feature could be the vast relationship between every person all over the world. In its simple form, they can connect each other by chatting or sending emails or they can share their information resources. All walks of the life, such as economy, culture, social issues, etc will be affected in this way and can be evaluated by its indicators. Now we should analyze and find out how we can benefit this network effect and in what way this factor could cause changes in all aspects of our life.

The World Bank makes an annual research entitled "Development of Information Technologies" in which a series of factors are defined as "Network Readiness Index" or NRI. They measure different societies by using this index. They have analyzed and ranked eighty-two countries in 2002-2003. Finland got the first position while U.S.A was the second for the first time. The next ten countries are all Europeans. Middle East and African countries are not on the list. They say that there is not any access to the information about these countries. Today, network effect is widely regarded as one of major indices in measuring societies situation. Our society is also measured on the basis of this index and not according to our natural resources or ...

What is our position in this worldwide network? How can we be influential and at least have a presence in it? Is there any precise assessment of our situation?

I think the first and important step is just to see what is exactly happening and then to go through the existing options to shape projects and plan of actions. For any kind of action we should consider some basics and roots and then try to find out what sort of structure has to be built up. Therefore, the most important fact is that how we can establish the "backbone". In this way, there are two major points: First the access to bandwidth and the second point is the training. These two indices help us to feel and to understand the network effect. But to be present, we should create data storages. These are essential as a backbone for entering the new world, and based on this backbone, IT may develop and serve all aspects of life.

It should be noted that basically we are obliged to enter the Information Society since it has created a new approach in human civilization that *we will be isolated and lose our culture and society if we leave it and if we join it, our culture will flourish*. We should start our efforts as soon as possible to benefit the existing opportunities. It means that main development in the world is the transition from the "industrial age" to the "information society". By empowering our youth, we can use the capabilities of the transition period towards such great development of the country. If we don't welcome this new and immense wave, it will sweep us away and we might become customers of information goods, just like the industrial era that we could not enter the production cycle for about two hundred years and remained a customer.

What are the major differences between the industrial era and the Information Age?

In the industrial era, every individual was supposed to be in a desirable place and time to have a participatory role. For example if someone wanted to work in Ford factory, he or she should live near the factory. But the network effect has gone beyond these limitations and everybody in any place in the world can connect. Never mind where you are! In industrial era, there were "place" and "time" limitations but now, by training and having access to the network, we can play a major role, and this is a great opportunity.

Given all these facts, we can establish IT world on the backbone I talked about.

In recent years, did we benefit the communication technology in any way in our country? If so, what have been the effects?

Of course, we have benefited. We have been witnessing an increase of computers' presence in the society. However, there is a delicate point here: IT technologies by themselves are not so important; they are just information highways using hardware. They will be meaningful when they could be harmonized with the systems. We always neglect this important factor. Systems, after being re-engineered, could be ready for IT and network capabilities. Using network capabilities will be meaningless if we don't review systems. For example, Tehran municipality has set up a local network for its administration and implementing its operations through networking, but without any rethinking and re-engineering of the systems. What happened? The old municipality system (Baladieh) was pushed into the connected computers. This action did not ease the work, but created a lot of other problems. Therefore, we should examine what capabilities IT has and how the systems should be re-designed and re-arranged in order to increase the efficiency and effectiveness. Processes are to be shaped in accordance with new structures. Re-engineering is a serious and determining issue. After that, we can invest, and also investment should be done according to the priorities and defined mechanisms.

What kind of factors has hampered the process so far?

> **By empowering our youth, we can use the capabilities of the transition period towards such great development of the country.**

To do that, we need a managerial will. Unless, we will face a sort of a resistance by users who are working in the existing systems and are accustomed to those conditions. Meanwhile, we are not a generation that has been grown up with the new communication technologies. This generation has certain attachments with the existing systems. Therefore, re-engineering and the managerial will are essential at the same time in order to bring IT to in all walks of the life.

Some believe that many of our officials do not have a digital understanding about what is going on in the communication world. Is that an obstacle?

This is also an important factor. Our society managers must get acquainted with these capabilities of the new world. Even they should get a comprehensive knowledge about the Information Society, especially its strategic importance. Also the people as the users of the Information Society must have the knowledge. Also "Change Management" has to be promoted. It is a fact wherever you create a change, the users will resist, since they are accustomed to the previous processes. Any change in structure needs cultural activities and training. A belief should be shaped that the new systems increase the efficiency. The users are required to trust the new system.

In recent years, the government has tried to rule on all the affairs related to ICT development in the country, however some experts, while criticizing the trend, believe that ICT has to be developed in a fluid, uncontrolled process, mostly based on networking promotion.

Up-to-down approaches based on concentration have often failed everywhere in the world. We should not repeat the same experience. Meanwhile, we cannot import IT into the state offices by issuing circulars. There should be an emphasis on self-initiated growth. Internet itself has had an endogenous growth. Nobody is the owner. Anyone who has something to contribute, remains in the net, and others without contribution, will be erased.

If we create conditions that users enter the information network by themselves, they will become active. The up-to-down models are dangerous. For example in our country there is an obligatory process which everyone who wants to implement a project on IT, should have it approved by a number of people, and it is a waste of time. There are numerous examples. They are giving five PCs to each school, without looking into this issue what would be the use of these PCs. Some will be used in the offices, and others will be stocked somewhere in the schools.

In general, issuing circulars and directions to cope with this phenomenon only increases the bureaucracy. No real work. In this situation, you hear about the privatization by the government. A ministry is trying to establish governmental e-commerce! .... All these show that any planning without considering the endogenous development will be useless and even harmful, since we are losing time and opportunities.

We can compare the information revolution with the time when the printing and publishing started. The development made by Gutenberg was fundamental. Before that, the production was limited. But then, anybody was published! Even somebody might have published wrong or nonsense material, but what should be our reaction? Should we break down all the printing and publishing machines? But rules and regulations were codified, and the future route became transparent. The other example is the radio. I remember that during the first Pahlavi, there was a law that anybody who wanted to listen to radio should request for permission from the nearby police station. Now we have radios everywhere. What has remained now: only history that is laughing at us! Web is the same. There should be laws. But this is different with limiting people. If we want to limit the information cycling, then there is no success. The same as those people who requested for permission to listen to radio! Unfortunately the histo-

Any planning without considering the endogenous development will be useless and even harmful, since we are losing time and opportunities.

ry will laugh at us once more if we do that?

Digital gap is another critical topic within the Information Society. Many believe that the gap deprive the poor countries of accessibility to information. What do you think?

There are two points in this question: the first one is that the gap could occur in all levels - among ourselves, or between our country and others. Today this gap is considered also between the people in a community, from one house to another. Our society itself could be divided into people who enjoy digital knowledge and others that do not. Hence we need a public campaign, a movement that must start from schools. It should also spread to other sectors of the society. Because first of all we must be sure that the next generation have this knowledge. In any case, at least in order to prevent the gap to be widened more and more, we should start from somewhere.

What about access to information? Should the government be involved in allocating and distributing means of equal access to information?

It should be systematized like what has been done for book publishing and the press. If we do it by force, there won't be any results. I think our culture will find its logical path for IT development and can organize by itself. Also, technology development also can break the locks. Our society has a rich culture that we could face few problems if it organizes that system by itself. Somehow, first you will observe that certain unwritten laws shape among people that define relations, limitations and borders, and in this way, a natural culture is created before a formal law can monitor the process. This is a self-initiated way. Any

other manipulation based on force will bring about unwanted consequences. It will not be sustained and may fail at any moment.

Wouldn't it better to provide subsidiaries for some groups and individuals to facilitate their access to information?

Providing subsidiaries to ease access to information will not work. In order to use information network capabilities, first of all we should prepare grounds and as I told you before the backbones. After that the government should widely invest on it. Iranians has always been witnessing the government subsidiaries and now they are tried of them. For instance, look at the quality of bread that is produced and I should say is wasted in our country! It is astonishing! Because there are subsidiaries! And real cost are not paid. Equal access to information needs a very complicated effort. We should get it by a delicate method, while we should understand its cost and worth. It should be something that all people feel that they need it and they are obliged to have it for the promotion of their work or their status. Under these circumstances, they are ready to pay for its cost. No need for subsidiaries. Internet is a miracle in itself. It is enough that a person has a project, and only to find his or her answer, he goes after the Internet and finds how useful and significant is the net. Look at the universities and how the Internet has affected on the scientific level of theses since the time when the Internet entered in these academic places. It has also affected the professors. The same is with the e-commerce and the economy. Diversity of the existing options to choose what you need, easy ways of ordering, solution of problems after sale, easy access to producers, etc. are small part of the miracle that is happening. It has also affect the quality of life. Nobody can imagine the volume of activities that are happening in Internet!

What is our position? In this unbelieving world!

We are now at the starting point, and have not been successful in using our capacities. We weak from an economic point of view; our banking systems are not responsive to the e-commerce needs. In other aspects, we are also at the same starting point, and we are not using the Internet as a communication tool, and mostly we are emphasizing on it a news resource.

> **The IS in itself brings the development, but has consequences and side effects. If we use it logically and promptly, then we will encounter less negative consequences.**

However, this can be a good starting point. The next step is to use the existing capacities for scientific progress and learning. There are examples in our country and we have witnessed certain successful attempts. When the facilities and capacities have been used in the right way, we have seen good results.

Internet seems to be a defenseless city. How much is our country adapted to the new security systems and standards?
We should first accept that there are people with various motivations that commit such crimes in Internet. We should think to the solutions. However, this is the technology that can help us. Viruses and Internet worms are dangerous for the networks. There are some actions to cope with such damages, and mostly to prevent such destructive activities. The youth are sensitive to the issue and are working seriously. Some university professors and top students have established a company to offer security services. Such actions increase the security index of network activities. However those responsible for the ICTs in the country should encourage such activities. Training can be useful too. For example, when our society faces certain crisis, people are trained in different levels. The same we need to cope with the viruses and Internet worms.

Some claim that the Information Society will weaken the face-to-face communications and in general the civil society. What do you think about that?
We should find a solution before it happens. We should think about the vicious and negative consequences of these communication technologies even if they are contributing to our societies. Let's have a look at the condition of the societies during and even before the industrial revolution; what could have been the results: self-alienation, mechanization of the life, etc. But "time" found the solutions. Look at the "Modern Age" by Charlie Chaplin. People were pictured as "screws" and "bolts". However, the societies found their own solutions and new ways of interaction. The same is about the Information Society. The IS in itself brings the development, but has consequences and side effects. If we use it logically and promptly, then we will encounter less negative consequences. Let's back to your question whether it would weaken the face-to-face communications; I believe that the Information Society brings the people closer, they can establish connections faster, and do common work at any part in the world. Human beings can share their hopes, sorrow and happiness; this is an opportunity for all of us. A means for encouraging participation. ■
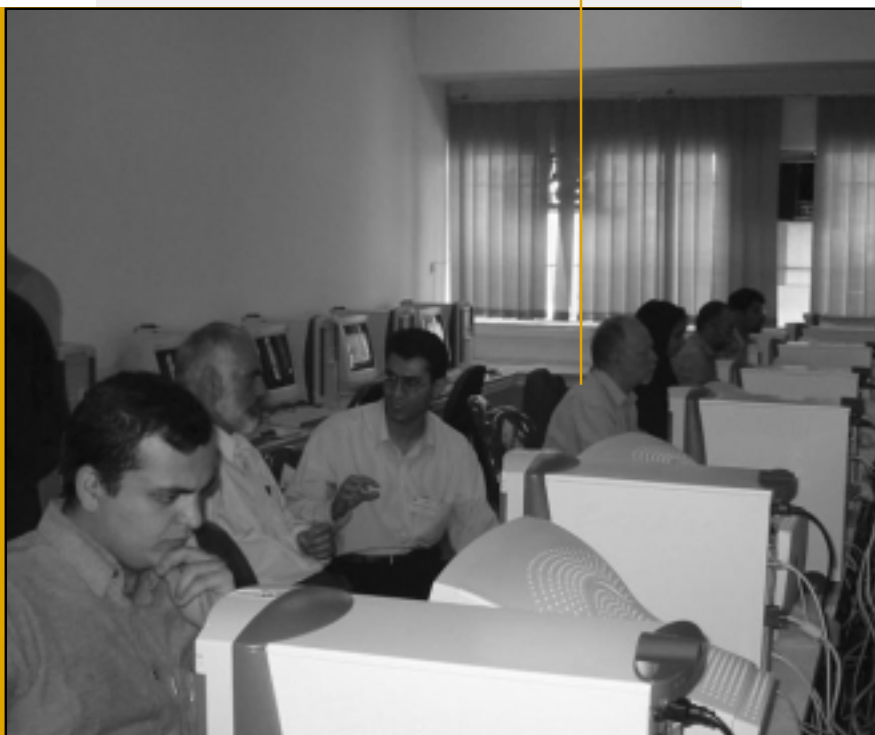
Toward Securing Information Society for all Citizens

By M. Ali Sadoughi

The Information society offer new opportunities for economic and social interaction among citizens, business and public authorities, but at the price of new risks. The explosive growth of the on- line world has given place to a variety of poorly understood vulnerabilities and to a lack of clear legal rules, especially in the international setting. To start with, most of technologies used are not mature enough or have not been developed with security, dependability and trust in mind. In addition, some of problems are emerging now (e.g. fraud of digital contents) or their relevance is exacerbated on-line (e.g. privacy).

Proper and reliable statistics are scare, but some figures would provide an idea of magnitude and evolution of the problem:

- Internet is doubling in size every 10/12 months with an increasing number of home/small office connections.
- Incidents reported are consequently growing (7500 per quarter in 2001)
- Incidents affect large companies (according to an information security magazine survey in sep.2000: 80% of these companies are affected by viruses, Trojans and worms, 58% suffer from abuse of access controls).
- Cyber abuse is a pressing reality for the citizen (40000 privacy abuse cases per year reported in Netherlands).

This situation raises legitimate concerns about the adequacy of the current approaches to develop the information society. The Uprising information society is characterized by the transnational, multi- jurisdictional and unbounded nature of the services, applications and infrastructure that underpin it. The traditional approaches to security, fortress-like and perimeters of defense, is not able to give satisfactory answers. The blooming of the information society needs an appropriate combination of legal, social and technical answers for tackling its vulnerabilities.

Threats in the information society are dynamic: the attacking agent(if deliberate) or the failing component(if accidental), the mechanisms used for attacking and the target assets are always changing. Even the most accurate threat characterization and assessment is only valid for a very restricted period. Consequently, vulnerabilities are not fixed: what is an unbreakable protection today could be a frail factor tomorrow. And all this is occurring at a fast pace, following the development of technologies and the same transformation of the information assets exchanged over public communications networks.

In this context, considering all the new challenges to security (especially of citizens) is necessary. The new challenges that citizens will have to cope with can be classified in three main categories:

1) the management of individual rights in cyberspace(the handling of on-line disputes and security preferences);

2) protection against cyber-abuse(prevention of potential criminal acts on digital contents and transactions)

3) Assurance of secure interactions with the information infrastructure (timely reaction to widespread vulnerabilities and attacks).

The following diagram shows this article approach for dealing with the

The traditional approaches to security, fortress-like and perimeters of defense, is not able to give satisfactory answers.

Individual rights management

E- confidence

Protection against cyber abuse

Privacy | Cyber-crime
Transactions
Contents

Attacks

Information infrastructure security

Vulnerabilities and interdependencies

citizens concerns on cyber security.

E-confidence: The evolution of electronic commerce is challenging the rules providing protection of consumers with regard to commercial communications and contracts concluded on- line. The elements that are nowadays under consideration for the augmenting the consumers' confidence include codes of conduct, trust seals/trust marks and on-line dispute resolution systems. One key problem concerns the applicable law and jurisdiction in cases of consumer disputes, arising from cross- border contacts.

One possible solution consists in providing out – of- court dispute settlement systems. Such systems would be seen as complementary to judicial procedures and allow easier access of consumers and small enterprises to justice for handling disputes related to cross-border trading.

Privacy: Since the emergence and global deployment of large scale IT systems in the late 70s and 80s the issue of privacy has been an area of extreme concern, both politically and socially. Although many states including Islamic republic of Iran have a thorough legal framework for personal data protection, it is clear that there is increasing social anxiety with regard to abuse and misuse of personal data within on-line information systems. For the most part, these concerns are not misplaced: privacy abuses happen and are increasingly reported in the media.

There is concern that the current legislative framework will not withstand emerging threats to privacy posed by current practices in electronic commerce or the evolution of pervasive information and communications technologies. There are a widening gap between the demand for privacy protection and commercial practices exploiting the use of personal data. This is due in part to problems of enforcement of the legislation and in part because current legislation dose not take sufficient account of the huge growth in and capabilities of on- line information systems and services. Personal data no longer resides in a controlled environment of well- defined monolithic databases, but is increasingly dispersed in networks across organizations and frontiers.

Also, legislation can not work in isolation; it requires information management processes and information technology systems capable of accomodating privacy protection principles and handling large scale personal data in a manner that respects those principles.

Cyber crimes: cyber crime is as old as computers. The novelty is the extensive deployment of devices with computing and communication power and their comprehensive use in society for all kind of social and economic activities. Much of computer security procedures and standards had already been developed and applied by large organizations, but mainly for closed systems longed before the internet arrived. At present, the bulk of critical information is flowing over open networks, and the vast majority of the users have no training on security issues.

The prevention of cyber crime has to cope with the fact that everybody is allowed to use the information infrastructure as a public commodity. The problem is also far from being well understood because there is scarce evidence on the real facts, due to a large reluctance to inform public authorities and to share the particulars with other social actors. The reason could be attributed to fears on long judiciary investigations and effects on the public image. A more general problem is the unsatisfactory definition of cyber crime if only based on criminal or civil law concepts; these differ

There are a widening gap between the demand for privacy protection and commercial practices exploiting the use of personal data.

HACKERS
HACKERS

from on national jurisdiction to another, are in part evolution in several countries, and leave considerable" grey areas" in the events of activities spanning several jurisdictions. Albeit the lack of accurate figures on the extent of cyber crime phenomenon, it is reasonable to suggest that urgent measures should be encouraged without waiting for major offences to occur.

Vulnerabilities and interferences: Even though lacking of complete end thoughtful risk assessments, every social and economic sector seems to try to take advantage from the opportunities offered by the cyberspace. A main concern is that the potential for creating advantageous capabilities comes together with the possibility of provoking important risks. If this were only the case of systems and applications used for personal or single business purposes, any failure might only provoke restricted effects. But the fact is that society at large suffers from an overall, global dependence on the information infrastructure.

Therefore, the information society puts the fragility of information and of the information systems at the forefront. On the one hand, the citizen is expected to be online, but the same connectivity provided is vulnerable in various undetermined ways. On the other hand, the citizen is provided with services (e.g. energy supply) that are ultimately vulnerable to information vulnerabilities.

Concluding remarks:

The vulnerabilities of information society cannot be treated on a partial basis, and there is no one- shot solution. security in information society is a continuous process that follows the evolution of the on-line environment with appropriate legal, social and technological measures.

> **Citizens can play a crucial role. The citizen, who is the weakest element, should be empowered for taking care of his/her portion of cybersecurity responsibilities.**

Citizens can play a crucial role. The citizen, who is the weakest element, should be empowered for taking care of his/her portion of cybersecurity responsibilities. The information society progress will be based on their trust and confidence, and the security of the information society will critically rest upon the security contributions of all one – line citizens.

For these reasons, citizens have to be empowered for being an active, trustworthy and trustful part of information society. This empowerment will compromise proper law and norms, suitable and timely information and the right technologies.■
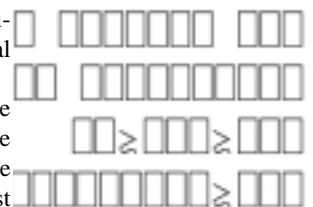
Access to Information in Human Rights:
A Forgotten Concept

By Saeid N. Neshat
(saeidneshat@yahoo.com)

Information is the oxygen of democracy. If people do not know what is happening in their society, if the actions of those who rule them are hidden, then they cannot take a meaningful part in the affairs of that society. [1]

> **Within the human rights instruments, there is always a 'positive' right referring to the issue of "access to information".**

Within the human rights instruments, there is always a 'positive' right referring to the issue of "access to information". Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights refers to the right of people to free of opinion and expression and clarifies that " this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers". In that time when the Declaration was written[2], the Internet did not exist and such flow of information was not even imagined, but as a fundamental human right, the "access to information" has been accepted: "to seek, receive and impart information and ideas" and without clarifying the kind of media, just mentioning: "any media" that in one way includes Internet as a main media of information flow at the Information Age, and then at the end of the paragraph of Article 19 we have the notion of "regardless of frontiers" that refers to the "net" once more, a net that goes beyond the borders.

Twenty-eight years after the UDHR, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights was adopted by the General Assembly [3], and again there is an Article 19 that governs the right to opinion and freedom of speech and especially the issue of access of information. The same spirit in the UDHR can be found here in this Covenant, but somehow with more precise wording and with referring to two kinds of restrictions that may be provided by the law, where respect of the rights or reputations of others are violated or for the protection of national security or of public order or of public health or morals.

In 1993, the World Conference on Human Rights was held in Vienna, and a programme of action was adopted [4], while it seems in that time, the issue of the "free flow of information" and "access to information" was disregarded in the text of the document, while at least people in certain developed countries were starting to send e-mails to each other (and the Internet was

launched in 1980s). It seemed that the participants were regarding the issue as a priority for the UNESCO, an organ of the United Nations that has been serving to the information users and producers better than any other huge human rights bodies of the Center for Human Rights (in that time, the High Commissioner for Human Rights was not existed).

All during the years before and after the adoption of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), there have been certain sporadic endeavors (that can be seen in certain other human rights documents) to clarify the meaning of "access to information".[5] UNESCO at the helm of such endeavors (since information was a main priority area for this organization), created a declaration of principles in 1978 that was the result of collective efforts of a series of countries and experts to ease the free flow of information. This comprehensive document entitled Declaration on Fundamental Principles concerning the Contribution to the Mass Media to Strengthening Peace and International Understanding, to the Promotion of Human Rights and to Countering Racialism, Apartheid and Incitement to War[6] is of great importance and it should be reviewed, since it seems that those who have prepared the draft text, have tried to be precise while addressing the issues in a general way. The Declaration addresses Mass Media, however the concepts thereof are of vital importance for the wider Information Society.

The introductory paragraphs refer to some important UN documents (in one way shows how the people were determined to insist that they were developing the existing collection of human rights documents), and certain key words – that seem so unique – can be found like: role of youth (by recalling the Declaration on the Promotion among Young of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual Respect and Understanding between Peoples), new international economic order, definition of "freedom of information", peace-promoting information, war-provoking information, diffusion of false or distorted reports, fundamental contribution of mass media to peace, and more important than others: "establishment of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order" (a kind of direct reference to ICTs in that time when there was no Internet! a prediction!).

One of the major parts of introductory para-

graphs in the Declaration on Fundamental Principles concerning the Contribution to the Mass Media is the part that it defines the freedom of information as "a fundamental human right and the touchstone of all the freedoms to which the United Nations is consecrated" - while recalling resolution 59(I) of the General Assembly of the United Nations, adopted in 1946 - and continues... "Freedom of information requires as an indispensable element the willingness and capacity to employ its privileges without abuse. It requires a basic discipline the moral obligation to seek the facts without prejudice and to spread knowledge without malicious intent." The main topics in the text of the Declaration are as follows:

1- The exercise of freedom of opinion, expression and information, recognized as an integral part of human rights and fundamental freedoms

2- Guaranteeing the access by the public to information by the diversity of the sources and means of information

3- Role of mass media in strengthening of peace and international understanding

4- Role of mass media in educating young people in a spirit of peace, justice, freedom, mutual respect and understanding, to promote human rights

5- Respecting freedom of opinion, expression and information

6- Establishment of a new equilibrium and greater reciprocity

by the community of nations. These Principles acknowledge the enduring applicability of the Siracusa Principles on the Limitation and Derogation Provisions in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Paris Minimum Standards of Human Rights Norms In a State of Emergency.

The whole text has been divided in four main sections; it starts with general principles and defines the freedom of opinion, expression and information, legitimate National Security Interest, States of Emergency, and prohibition of discrimination. Then it establishes norms for restrictions on freedom of expression (protection of opinion, expression that may threaten national security, protected expression, mere publicity of activities that may threaten national security, use of a minority or other language, unlawful interference with expression by third parties), and the third section defines the restrictions on freedom of information and in this section, it defines the general rule on access to information, narrow designation of security exemption, public interest in disclosure, the right to independent review of denial of information, general rule on disclosure of secret information, information obtained through public service, information in the public domain, protection of journalists' sources and access to restricted area. The last section determines rule of law and other matters such as remedies, right to trial by an independent tribunal, prior censorship, disproportionate punishments, and relation of these principles to other standards.

A review of this significant document shows that we should work hard on the issue of "access to information", however the existing definition of terms in the human rights instruments, used notions and concepts, all in all, can serve as a basis for an in-depth study of "access to information" in a human rights context within the wider framework of communication rights – a step to codify a draft convention on the access to information in the Information Society. ■

in the flow of information

7- Wide dissemination of information

8- Professional training

9- Creation of conditions for a free flow and wider and more balanced dissemination of information, of conditions for the protection, in the exercise of their functions, of journalists and other agents of the mass media

10- Guaranteeing of freedom of information.

Another important document that was the result of endeavors by non-governmental organizations (where are the governments?) is the Johannesburg Principles on National Security, Freedom of Expression and Access to Information, Freedom of Expression and Access to Information[7]. As mentioned in its introduction, the principles mentioned in the text of the document, were adopted on 1 October 1995 by a group of experts in international law, national security, and human rights convened by ARTICLE 19, the International Centre Against Censorship – a non-governmental organization based in London - in collaboration with the Centre for Applied Legal Studies of the University of the Witwatersrand, in Johannesburg. The Principles are based on international and regional law and standards relating to the protection of human rights, evolving state practice (as reflected, inter alia, in judgments of national courts), and the general principles of law recognized

Footnotes:

(1) The Public's Right to Know: Principles on Freedom of Information Legislation. Article 19: International Centre Against Censorship.

(2) Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in 1948 (General Assembly resolution 217A (III), U.N. Document A/810 at 71 (1948)).

(3) International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, G.A. res. 2200A (XXI), 21 U.N. GAOR Supp. (No. 16) at 52, U.N. Doc. A/6316 (1966), 999 U.N.T.S. 171, entered into force Mar. 23, 1976.

(4) As it has been mentioned in the related page of the World Conference on Human Rights within the website of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the conference was marked by an unprecedented degree of participation by government delegates and the international human rights community. Some 7,000 participants, including academics, treaty bodies, national institutions and representatives of more than 800 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) two thirds of them at the grass-roots level gathered in Vienna to review and profit from their shared experiences. and the issue of access to information was somehow ignored. See the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, as adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights on 25 June 1993, in the website of High Commissioner for Human Rights: http://www.unhchr.ch

(5) Here, we can also study the Convention on the International Right of Correction that entered into force in August 1942 (435 U.N.T.S. 191) that in its preamble - starts with these words: The Contracting States, desiring to implement the right of their peoples to be fully and reliably informed, desiring to improve understanding between their peoples through the free flow of information and opinion... In this Convention, that determines the responsibilities of correspondents and information agencies.

(6) Declaration on Fundamental Principles concerning the Contribution to the Mass Media to Strengthening Peace and International Understanding, to the Promotion of Human Rights and to Countering Racialism, Apartheid and Incitement to War, was adopted by the UNESCO General Conference at its twentieth session, Paris, 22 November 1978, UNESCO's Standard-Setting Instruments, IV.C. (1994).

(7) United Nations Document: E/CN.4/1996/39.

Volunteer Actors

Iran Civil Society Organizations Training and Research Center (ICTRC)

Introduction

In the recent decades, the international community has been witnessing a growth of civil society organizations, and with Iran's developments during the 1990s, the grounds have been prepared for the growth and promotion of civil society organizations. This development has been caused by a new geography of power and a change in paradigm of development, in which, the main actors of development are civil society organizations. Although, these organizations are playing a major role in various social contexts, and there are numerous challenges and obstacles on their way, among them we can refer to a lack of literature, legal grounds, and organic relations with government, private sector and international organizations, etc.

In this regard, to build capacity for the civil society organizations and to empower them, also enabling the social environment, some activists of Iranian civil society have established an institution entitled "Iran Civil Society Organizations Training and Research Center". The center started its activities since May 2003.
The main objectives of Iran Civil Society

Organizations Training and Research Center are as follow:

• To increase the operational capacity of civil society organizations through promotion of their access to information, resources, and technical knowledge;

• To provide human resources and management capacity-building to promote their efficient and effective functioning and implementation of their programs and activities;

• To exchange experiences among the civil society organizations in Iran and other countries;

• To empower civil society organizations through various methods such as holding training courses, meetings and seminars as well as offering legal consultancy.

Activities

The main activities planned as a part of our program are:

1-Creation of an information base for civil society organization in Internet;

2-Creation of a databank and a specialized library;

3-Creation of a website for the Center (http://www.irancsos.net)

4-Holding short and long-term training courses and workshops;

5-Conducting research projects and studies;

6-Offering legal consultancy;

7-Holding meetings between civil society organizations in Iran and also among such organizations at regional and international level, as well as organizing meetings between representatives of the government, private sector and civil society;

8-Publishing of books, articles and papers in newspapers, and also publication of bi-weekly newsletter;

9-Offering organizational trainings to increase the level of good governance within the organizations;

10-Advocacy for an increase in literature of civil society organizations;

11-Planning activities of the center on an annual basis.

Steering Committee

The Center has a steering committee, composed of representatives of the non-governmental organizations in Iran and university professors who have the duty of making strategic policies, facilitating the implementation of projects, monitoring the activities, evaluating the on-going projects and mobilizing more resources for the center.

Financial Resources

The Center is financed through domestic and international resources and by using various methods such as offering advisory services, holding training sessions, publishing and receiving gifts, donations, and membership dues, etc.

Civil Society
Regional Forum on the
Information
Society
for the Middle East and
West Asia

26-28 Aug
2003

Kish Island

Organizer:
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In cooperation with:
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Supreme Council of
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-Tejarat Bank
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UNESCO
-Iran Informatic Com-
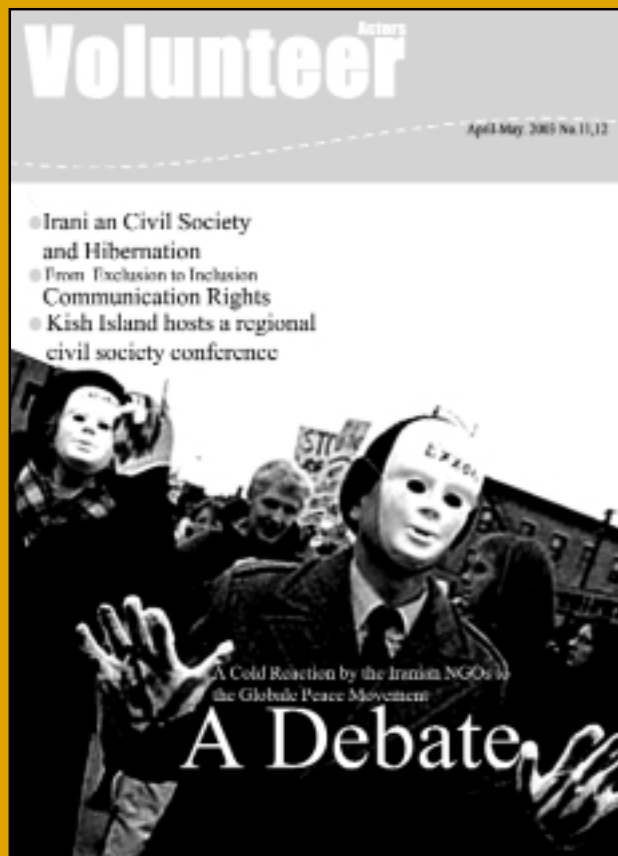panies Association
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Forum Website: http:
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ICTRC Website: http:
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اجلاس منطقه ای
جامعه اطلاعاتی و
سازمان‌های جامعه مدنی
غرب آسیا و خاورمیانه
۴ تا ۶ شهریور ۱۳۸۲ جزیره کیش

مرکز مطالعات و آموزش
سازمان های جامعه مدنی ایران
برگزار می کند
با همکاری
سازمان منطقه آزاد کیش
دبیرخانه شورای عالی اطلاع رسانی
سازمان ملی یونسکو
انجمن شرکت های انفورماتیک ایران

Volunteer Actors — April-May 2003 No.11,12

Irani an Civil Society and Hibernation
From Exclusion to Inclusion Communication Rights
Kish Island hosts a regional civil society conference

A Cold Rejection by the Iranian NGOs to the Globale Peace Movement

A Debate

Volunteer

Iran on the Path toward Democracy

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