

TITLE: LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN IN THE INFORMATION AGE: A GATEWAY TO THE FUTURE. AN IDB STRATEGIC STATEMENT. FINAL VERSION

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Page No.	Parra. No.	Text
13	3.3	<p>A quick review of these trends shows that the countries of the region are deploying systems with objectives that can be grouped in the following general categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make governments more efficient, accountable and transparent; • Increase the participation of citizens and citizen organizations in the processes of democratic regimes; • Provide better communications among citizens, watch agents and public and private organizations for enhanced monitoring and surveillance of the environment.
14	3.5	<p>More agencies, citizens and communities are figuring out new ways to take advantage of this media to increase exposure and communication information for all purposes. For example, governments have gone on line making information more accessible to citizens in a broad scope of fields and legal and regulatory regimes.</p>
22	3.24	<p>A side effect of IT is the use of information networks to link public institutions with the public. By creating a new source of information for the average citizen, public institutions have become suddenly more willing to simplify access to regulations, forms and procedures for dealing with governments. This increased presence of the public into the heart of public administration has made politicians and civil servants aware of their responsibilities to the voting public. By adopting information disclosure laws, many countries are exposing to the public, through IT networks, information that reveals the quality and nature of public decision making. This evolution has not been spontaneous, the role of the civil society organizations (i.e. NGOs) has rallied political power to elect candidates that have promised to reform and to enact these more transparent and accountable policies.</p>
23	3.25	<p>Full disclosure and freedom of opinion and opposition to public governance have indeed made governments more accountable, efficient and transparent, thus strengthening the key elements of a modern democracy, information and forums for public opinion.</p>
24	3.26	<p>As explained above, the presence of civil society organizations and the increased connectivity between themselves and with the public have accelerated the process of feedback to governments in matters of public interest. Abuses and actions that infringe upon human and</p>

		individual rights of all citizens have been made more public and internationally known, acting as a regulating valve on states with authoritarian tendencies. As seen in China and the Balkan countries, civil society organizations have used IT networks to broadcast news under censored regimes reaching the international community with alternative information regarding abuses and law and order activities by governments.
24	3.27	This permanent on-line consultation with the electorate could help increase the accountability of elected officials and improve the functioning of representative democratic processes.
25	3.30	In matters related to the environment and indigenous peoples, it has been observed that civil society organizations have rapidly taken advantage of this medium to bring to the public the latest information regarding public actions that infringe on the environment and native peoples.
25	3.31	Another application of IT is found in satellite surveillance for natural resources such as forest, floods and maritime resources. The combination of these data gathering sources with IT networks bring up-to-date information to researchers and to institutions monitoring weather and natural resource utilization. Land resource maps, an important tool gaining popularity, can be constructed promptly and at accessible cost. Geographic systems also promise a great future not only in natural resource inventories but also in human settlements and social and economic data.
29	4.4	<i>Second</i> , the Bank can use its “convoking power” to organize both national and regional discussions on key issues in the transition to an information economy.
29	4.4	<i>Third</i> , the Bank can play a supporting role in the design of the institutional and regulatory framework for the telecommunications sector.
29	4.4	<i>Fourth</i> , (...) the Bank will need to intervene strategically and use its financial support to ensure that information access is extended as quickly as possible to poor, remote and marginalized populations.
30	4.7	Because of the far-reaching implications of the information age technologies revolution for all aspects of political, social and economic development, it is essential that countries undertake a broad internal exploration of the information age technologies issue in order to identify their particular information needs and to mobilize a broad consensus on the route to be followed. The process of restructuring markets, obtaining political and social consensus will take time and will consequently impact on the rate of diffusion of new technologies and applications (...) As part of the process in obtaining a national consensus, a number of governments have set up task forces to examine the economic, social, policy, and technological implications and requirements of information infrastructures.

35	4.37	<p><i>Financing Access to Information Networks by the Poor and Remote Citizens.</i> In addition to working at the level of the principal arteries and nodes of the information system, the Bank also has a role to play in developing the local capillaries, which will substantially broaden access to information networks in the region. Although some have argued that modern telecommunications networks are “inappropriate” for developing countries, rapidly-falling costs of equipment and the considerable potential benefits of network access suggest that we should reject this proposition.</p>
40	4.48	<p>A concrete example of shared use technology are the “community information centers” that are beginning to appear in the developing world. (...) Multiple users (business, government, NGOs and individuals) with multiple usage requirements (communication, training and education, individual and organizational productivity, electronic commerce and entertainment) would all be served at the community centers. The concept is based on the “neighborhood telephone” concept where someone in the village has a telephone and for a fee others are able to use it.</p>
38	4.54	<p>The Bank has already received proposals to finance community information centers, from private entrepreneurs, government agencies and non-profit organizations. Often, the proposals involve financing single purpose information centers (health clinics, agricultural extension stations) rather than the multipurpose “information utilities” described above. From a strategic perspective, the Bank should avoid funding single-purpose information centers, and should instead encourage sponsors to explore the possibilities of selling services to multiple clients as a route to economic sustainability.</p>
46	4.84	<p><i>Civil Society and Empowering of the poor and disadvantaged.</i> Here is an area in which many developments are taking place in the region. Activists for the environment, the poor, women, the elderly and indigenous populations are using this technology very efficiently to create virtual networks to inform and consult the public. Some of the specific interventions are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Information Centers; • Local networks and rural coverage; • Voter’s information for better transparency in elections; • Networks for social capital development and peer solidarity; • Civil defense and disaster preparedness networks; • Local content development targeted at the poor; • Virtual networks; • Projects and programs to develop appropriate content for the areas outlined above.