

## How eGovernance could help revitalize an NGO specialised in biodiversity conservation

*With the example of IBCN*

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), Networks, eCommerce, eGovernment and Internet based virtual communities, all together interlinked in turmoil of change, deeply transformed the World and our societies. Moving from eGovernment to eGovernance, States partially and progressively horizontalize their structures that promise to give the Citizens a more participative power in public decisions.

The relays of Civil Society, practically Non Governmental Organisations (NGO), traditionally pushed governments and politicians to enhance communication with the citizens and to better their 'efficiency'. However, because of the move to eGovernance, the need for these relays decreases. On one hand in effect, States are becoming more and more directly accountable to the citizens, notably thanks to better ICT based communication channels. On the other hand, States are also becoming more and more powerful in gathering directly accurate and real time data on the citizens, the social, economical and natural environments and, thus becoming able to exert better control.

The reciprocal is not true and this will lead eventually to citizens losing more and more control over their own lives, a trade-off often seen between privacy and self-determination on one hand and safety on the other. This converging tendency will affect the whole Civil Society that traditionally offered and controlled these relays; not only political parties and special interest groups but to a much wider extend Non Governmental Organisations.

As a consequence of this evolution, an increased and irrepressible need for a better e-Governance of NGOs appears foreseeable as their need to face this challenge will finally grow.

But in order to evaluate, define, design and implement an NGO's eGovernance strategy, it is important to have a very clear vision of the position and the needs of these organisations. In effect, the temptation to apply eCommerce strategies to NGOs, as well as to governments, is high. It is not the scope of this discussion to develop this point, but let it be clear; a private for profit organisation has very different (though still honourable) objectives than State or pure Civil Society organisations. It is true that a vast majority of NGOs need money to accomplish their tasks, pay their employees and providers, but it also true that normally they make no profit for the immediate and material benefit of their members. eCommerce strategies apply and benefit organisations that rely entirely on their customers to make money. State and NGO do not. State raises taxes, invest money in the long term, notably in infrastructures. NGO rely on donations, services and members' fees.

NGOs play a very important role in the Society as they supplement or complement States role in many aspects. Therefore in short, it might be advisable to apply to NGOs some of the eCommerce solutions and most of the eGovernance solutions for the development of their own eGouvernance.

Good practices show that Electronic Governance (<sup>1</sup>) development should follow coarsely this schema:

- Have a Vision/ Define a mission
- Translate mission into a project using the ICT (Information and Communication Technology) and in particular the Internet as a TOOL to achieve the vision/mission
- Define the (human) relations with the Civil Society
- Choose/ create the applications
- Implement the solution
- Check that the solution effectively fulfils the vision

Let's look into this in more details:

## Vision

This is really the foundation of everything. If you do not know what you want effectively, how can you decide where to go and what to do?

The IBCN apparently has existential or even may be vital problems. In an organisation, usually problems reflect inadequacies between the present (self-)assigned mission(s) and the needs of the public (or the targets of the organisation). They may also reflect inefficiencies in the management of the organisation. In order to find a way to solve these problems, one should act on both causes. As I am not in a position to audit the management of IBCN (I have not even yet been looking at their web site, but I shall do a research), I shall restrict myself in making suggestions about how IBCN should refresh their vision and redefine their missions.

I am not an expert in what are the typical missions of biodiversity conservation; I think therefore that Masters in Biology Conservation are much better qualified persons than me to (re-)define good visions and missions with the IBCN.

## ICT project

The value that IBCN could bring to the market of biodiversity conservation is **KNOWLEDGE**. See Figure 1 - Knowledge building. This is the key factor and this is the link between its Vision and missions. By bringing valuable knowledge to the 'market', IBCN could raise funds to achieve its mission more effectively and more efficiently. Knowledge is a service IBCN could bring to the governments (who reciprocally would provide funds) with the 'horizontal' help of volunteers and of other associations federated and coordinated through a common platform managed by IBCN and based on the Internet. (See Figure 2 - the role of a federator and coordinator in horizontality)

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<sup>1</sup> eGov for short in this instance though usually eGov stands for 'eGovernment' which relates to the automation of government's administrative procedures using IT

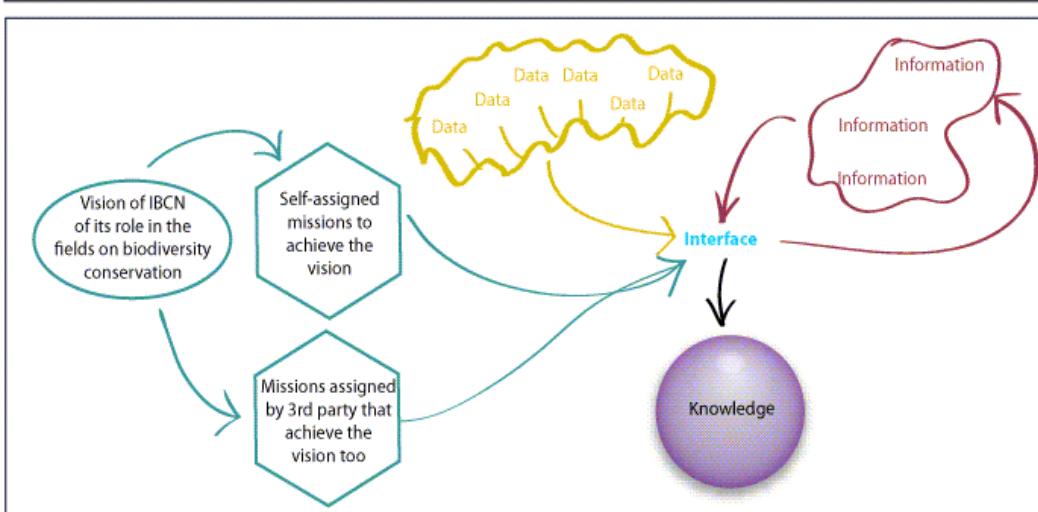


Figure 1 - Knowledge building

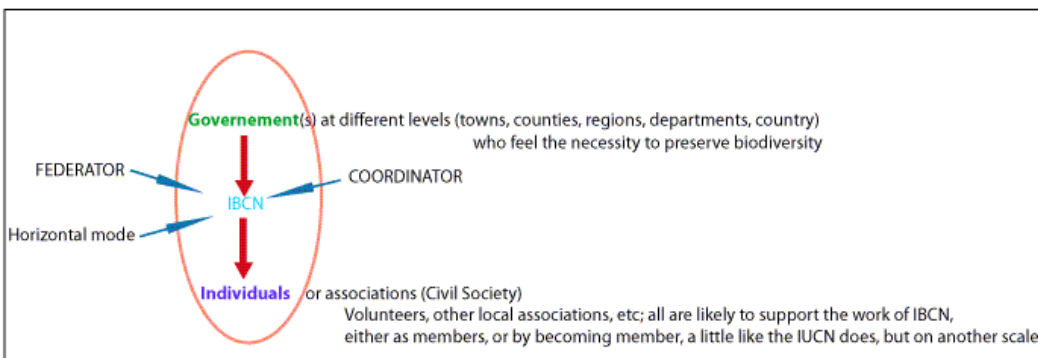


Figure 2 - the role of a federator and coordinator in horizontality

**Information:**

In an eGov system, Information is the formal information eventually held by the IT system and the informal information used by the people involved with the system.

**Technology**

Mainly focuses on ICT but can also cover other information-handling technologies such as paper or mobile telephones. The front end to users is a web portal.

**Processes**

The activities undertaken by the relevant stakeholders for whom the eGov system operates, both information-related processes and broader business processes.

**Objectives and values**

(Derived of course from mission and vision) Often the most important dimension since the objectives component covers issues of self-interest and organizational politics, and can even be seen to incorporate formal organizational strategies; the values component covers culture: what stakeholders feel are the right and wrong ways to do things.

**Staffing and skills**

Covers the number of staff involved with the eGov system, and the competencies of those staff and other users, BUT NOT ONLY. In effect, Experts, like Masters in conservation biology, are essential

elements of the staff as scientific advisers. In order for such a platform to function, the management must ensure trust and reliability of the knowledge built.

### **Management systems and structures**

The overall management systems required to organize operation and use of the eGov system, plus the way in which stakeholder agencies/groups are structured, both formally and informally.

### **Other resources**

Principally, the time and money required to implement and operate the eGov system.

### **Outside world**

It encompasses the political, economic, socio-cultural, technological and legal factors that impinge on the relevant eGov stakeholders.

The list above is inspired by Heeks (2006)

... well, that is the start of my reflections.

I still have to write about 'Relations with the civil society', Funding, Possible solutions. The tracks could be:

### **Funding**

Inspired from this web site: <http://www.conservation.org/Pages/default.aspx>

A similar approach (if it is feasible, but IT competencies exist in India and a further 'Indian touch' with the competencies found in Bollywood might help) would allow even contributors from the developed countries that have never heard of IBCN today

Inspired from the 'ecological services<sup>2</sup>' theory<sup>3</sup> (see Kareiva<sup>4</sup> and Marvier<sup>5</sup>)

### **Possible solutions**

Find solutions in the web2.0 application domain like for example a Wiki front-end on IBCN web site en promote horizontal participation (the application software exists in open source) Wiki is a very good example of an horizontal structure in need of a federator and a coordinator.

Vevey, 10<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2008/ 3

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.biodiversitypartners.org/pubs/Ag/07.shtml>

<sup>3</sup> See: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biodiversity\\_hotspot](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biodiversity_hotspot)

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.nature.org/tncscience/scientists/misc/kareiva.html>

<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.scu.edu/cas/biology/staffandfaculty/Michelle-Marvier.cfm>