The Building Communication Opportunities alliance (BCO) is a partnership of eleven development agencies working on information, communications and development. BCO Alliance partners believe that information and communications are of crucial importance in poverty reduction - in enabling the poor to have their say and to get better access to knowledge and other resources.

New information and communication technologies (ICTs) build on established information and communication resources of the poor and offer new opportunities to increase their value. But our knowledge of what works and what does not is weak. We need to know more about the impact of information, communications and ICTs on development and poverty reduction if people are to gain maximum value from them.

Since March 2004, BCO alliance partners have worked together to support new initiatives on information, communications and development around the world. Now they have pooled resources to undertake a major impact assessment - of their own work and of other information, communication and ICT initiatives around it. The study will look in depth at the impact of ICTs on the lives and livelihoods of the poor.

The study is being carried out by an international team of experts in the field. It will focus in particular on three issues which are crucial to the current ICD debate:

- **mainstreaming** - the incorporation of information, communications and ICTs within mainstream development priorities;
- **voice** - the ability of the poor to express their concerns and make their views heard by decision-makers;
- **poverty impact** - identifiable impact of information, communications and ICTs on the lives and livelihoods of the poor.

The findings of the impact assessment study will be published in August 2007 and shared by BCO with others working in this crucial field of development.
The BCO Alliance believes in the importance of information and communication technologies in reducing poverty, and the potential of new technologies to increase what information and communications can achieve. Since June 2004, the BCO has been working on a project to look at the impact of BCO in achieving the MDGs and PRS (Poverty Reduction Strategy) goals.

The BCO impact assessment questions

Main question

• How do communications for development contribute to poverty reduction through strengthening the voices, capacities, and poverty impact of the poor? Where? When? Why? And what determines the likelihood that they will do so and the risk that they may not?

Subsidiary questions

• How do ICD at grassroots help achieve pro-poor growth and mitigate inequalities, towards the achievement of the MDGs and PRS (Poverty Reduction Strategy) goals? How does ICD improve people’s lives? What are the connections between local, national and global impact?

The study will look at the impact of BCO itself

• What role has BCO had in relation to these potential impacts? Where did it add value? How lasting is this value? What lessons does it offer for scalability, replicability and sustainability?

The BCO impact assessment is being carried out from July 2006 to July 2007 by an experienced team of information, communication and development experts. It has three components:

Component 1: Identifying critical factors

• Final workshop & other outputs
• Interim workshop
• Component 3: Full impact assessment study

Component 2: Individual partner evaluations

• Reports and analysis
• Learning experiences and dissemination of learning

Component 1:

- Desk research (projects, context)
- Thematic studies on three themes
- Assessment at different levels
  - Global
  - Country
  - Agency

The study will also look back at the impact of ICD itself

- Has the impact been local or in a global context?
- What has driven such impact?
- How have impacts been measured?
- What lessons can we learn for the future?

The study will be guided by BCO partners and stakeholders

- BCO partners
- Donors
- Civil society organisations
- Governments
- Academics
- Media

The study will conclude with a review workshop in July 2007 involving BCO partners and other stakeholders.

The BCO impact assessment study is a unique opportunity to do so much more in assisting the work and information and communication professionals in helping to build a database of small-scale initiatives and bringing them into the network; we have to exercise more about what the new studies in ICD are using and how they are increasing at national scales; the findings of this study will be the most important at national scale; our fear is that the new opportunities in information and communications are ignored.

To find out more

BCO partners would welcome the views of other stakeholders on the impact assessment. To find out more about BCO, contact the BCO coordinator, Lauren Fok at info@bcoalliance.org. To find out more about the BCO Impact Assessment Study, contact the study team coordinator, David Souter at david.souter@runbox.com.