



**SOS CHILDREN'S
VILLAGES**
INTERNATIONAL

DAY OF GENERAL DISCUSSION “DIGITAL MEDIA AND CHILDREN’S RIGHTS”

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Submission by SOS Children’s Villages International

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SOS Children’s Villages International is the umbrella organisation of more than 130 affiliated national SOS Children’s Village associations worldwide. SOS Children’s Villages is a non-governmental and non-denominational child-focused organisation that provides direct services in the areas of care, education and health for children at risk of losing parental care, and those who have lost parental care. The organisation also builds the capacity of the children’s caregivers, their families and communities to provide adequate care.

SOS Children’s Villages advocates for the rights of children without parental care and those at risk of losing parental care. Founded in 1949, its operations are guided by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The reach of digital media over the last few years has become wider and more important than anyone could have ever imagined. Globalization and innovations in technology have led to an increased use of Information & Communications Technologies (ICTs) in all sectors.¹

There is a growing trend in the integration of technology within the different programmes. Not only because of the quick integration and development digital media are having in developing countries, but also due to the great opportunity it offers to improve overall performance in our work and consequently impact on the beneficiaries.

SOS Children's Villages International recognises the importance of ICTs and digital media in children's development and acknowledges the beneficial potentials of integrating technology to reach its programme goals. Over the past three years, SOS Children's Villages International has made significant developments in the integration of technology within its programmes and has implemented more than 50 ICT for development (ICT4D) projects worldwide within the areas of health, education and emergencies. Such projects have been developed in close cooperation between the ICT and programme functions, ensuring alignment on shared programmatic and strategic goals.

SOS Children's Villages International understands that ICT4D is not about equipping a programme with ICT infrastructure; it is about empowerment and efficiency. ICT supports SOS Children's Villages programme interventions through capacity building (e.g. e-learning modules), direct essential services (e.g. job searching using the internet), and advocacy (e.g. advocacy activities and awareness-raising campaign on children's rights via SMS). ICT also supports programmes increase its efficiency, such as data collection and monitoring through the use of mobile devices.

Children's equal and safe access to digital media and ICT

SOS Children's Villages International works to reach out to the most marginalized, promote social inclusion and address inequalities of access to and use of digital technologies.

From training on ICT skills to improve employability, connecting with social networks, moving from pen-and-paper to computerized patient databases and accounting software, improving medication adherence through SMS reminders, having cost-reducing and on-time virtual conferences worldwide--to accessing content and open-source courses for distance learning - ICT4D reduces the north-south technological divide ensuring equal access to communications technologies.

To bridge the digital divide and ensure access to technology for children in developing countries, strengthened cooperation between the government, the private sector and civil society is crucial.

Shape the Future initiative and its "Gold Partners"

Microsoft's *Shape the Future* initiative helps governments in developing countries build Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) with the support of NGOs. It creates meaningful and effective solutions to their educational, economic, and social challenges by making technology access a right for all and not a privilege for some. SOS Children's Villages was chosen to be part of this strategic alliance alongside 5 other "Gold Partners". The organisation plays a facilitator role working with the community to identify their needs and supporting both governments and the private sector to efficiently design the technological intervention. Escalation of this kind of project and further negotiations between governments and the private sector can also contribute to bringing prices down and reducing the overall costs of providing access to ICT.

¹ World Bank, "ICT and Education - Key Issues", available at <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTEDUCATION/0,,contentMDK:20533883-menuPK:617610-pagePK:148956-piPK:216618-theSitePK:282386-isCURL:Y,00.html>

Shared resources maximize the impact of ICT investment. Libraries, Telecenters and cybercafés provide more comprehensive access to ICT and therefore ensure that most people have access to this right. As such, development and promotion of ICT use in public services should be encouraged.

Accenture Community E-Center

Together with Accenture, SOS Children's Villages International conducted research and consulted different stakeholders to identify areas where through ICT4D it could have the biggest impact. The establishment of a community-based computer lab, the Community E-Center, was identified as one of the top priority solutions. Through this programme, SOS Children's Villages International works to realise the goal of elimination of the digital divide at a bigger scale.

"Connecting futures" in Brazil

The job market requests more qualified and prepared professionals to keep up with the new technologies and innovations. With the support from Klabin, the ICT4D project "Connecting Futures" was formed to offer training to young people from the SOS Children's Village of Rio Bonito and the neighborhood community and to bring new job opportunities to young people interested in the area of information technology.

The twelve graduates accomplished 80 hours of training and received an international certification in "IT Essentials: PC Hardware and Software", a great opportunity to develop skills in communication, combined technological know-how and market knowledge to address the issue of youth employment and empowerment from the perspective of new technologies.

Providing safe access to digital media and ICTs for children and young people is a big challenge. There are tools that filter websites, block applications, control system access, and monitor computer usage to protect children from exposure to inappropriate and offensive digital media content. It remains, however, surprisingly easy for children to remove or circumvent these barriers. Experience shows that children may attempt to—and succeed—at circumventing the ban.

SOS Children's Villages International stresses the importance of education to explain the need for responsible use of the resources available through digital media, to make children aware of effective strategies for acquiring knowledge, decision-making skills, motivation and self-control to behave in a safe, legal and responsible manner when using ICTs.

Families, educators, teachers and social workers should not deny children the opportunity to learn from and enjoy the wide variety of digital media. Instead, they should discuss with them some simple rules for online safety and making sure they understand the importance of such rules. Information-sharing and awareness-raising on ICT potential dangers should be encouraged to mitigate the risks.

An important underpinning to keeping safe is the right to privacy. Children need to learn not only how to protect their own privacy online, but adults must respect this right as well.

There are several regulations out there which promote the protection of children data. As the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) that gives parents control over what information websites can collect from their kids. If you run a website designed for kids or have a website geared to a general audience but collect information from someone you know is under 13, you must comply with COPPA's requirements. Another example is [NetSmartz411](#), an online service by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children that answers parents' or guardians' questions about Internet safety. Parents should be aware of these platforms.

Access to digital media and ICT is not an end in itself. The interest of ICT depends on its intended use: Why and how are we planning to use digital media? Technology can empower children - if it's done right.² For this reason, the purpose should be clearly set out.

Children's empowerment and engagement through digital media and ICT

ICT as an effective and integral educational tool is steadily growing. It is one the key tool to make significant contributions to learning and achievement.

Digital media and ICTs are fundamental to the way children communicate, learn and integrate into society. SOS Children's Villages International facilitates engagement and encourages learning through the creation of E-Learning centers, with access to online resources, support to teachers and care givers in applying innovative teaching methods.

Open Space Literacy in Kenya

Together with Plan International and NetHope, SOS Children's Villages Kenya has joined forces with the Government of Kenya to increase the quality of education in 300 schools across Kenya. Access to digital and non-digital learning content is provided and networks for more than 2,700 teachers is created in facilitative and inclusive teaching methods, classroom leadership and use of ICTs. It also engages more than 33,000 parents and community members in school management and advocacy for a quality education.

It is not enough to expose teachers and students to new technologies. What is crucial for ICT4D projects is to develop a multi-dimensional approach which allows the combination of technology, traditional and experimental learning and educators training.

ICT4D project in SOS Children's Villages Morocco

SOS Children's Villages Morocco in partnership with Dell set up an ICT4D project which allows the combination of technology, learning software, educators training and continuous technical and pedagogic support to have a positive impact in learning outcomes. Educators and teachers not only benefit from new equipment but are also trained to use it the best way to develop themselves. Children use computers and specific software to learn by playing, not only through regular subjects as math or French, but also other educational aspects as concentration and memory. This way ICT has a significant impact on student achievements, especially in terms of knowledge comprehension and practical skills. It gives them the best chances to succeed at school, in their studies and in their professional life.

ICT can have a direct impact in reducing poverty in developing countries. ICT4D projects stimulate economic development and improve the well-being of vulnerable and marginalized groups by fostering equitable access to modern information and communications technologies. ICT4D helps to empower people. It directly supports beneficiaries by improving their chances on the job market, or helping families and communities to run their micro business more efficiently.

² The Guardian, "Technology can empower children in developing countries - if it's done right", 2013, available at http://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/technology-empower-children-developing-countries?CMP=tw_t_gu

Empowering young girls and women through ICT in Mauritius

SOS Children's Villages Mauritius has joined an innovative ICT4D project to empower young girls and women through ICT and English literacy. The project targets young girls and women aged 16 years and over, from the local community and who are having low or no income due to unemployment. Participants learn to communicate in English and, at the same time, learn to use computers and conduct basic tasks like writing a document, compiling data on a spreadsheet, surfing the internet and writing an email. In this creative combination, ICT reinforces the English literacy courses. By raising the English skills of young girls and women, the project enables them to develop their knowledge and potential, to improve their communication abilities and participate effectively in society. Participants increase their employability. It also facilitates inter-generation learning and contributes to bridging the digital divide by using ICT as a tool to make learning more interesting, interactive and flexible.

SMS Quicklearns to enhance women's parenting skills in Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka, SOS Children's Village in collaboration with MobilTrain has started empowering women at grass-roots through mobile technology. After attending a 2-days training on child rights, child care, child protection, health and hygiene but also on financial management, mothers participating in SOS Children's Villages Family Strengthening Programmes receive SMS text messages with relevant information, to-dos, questions for introspection, behaviour modification, etc. Mothers note down the daily messages and have a group discussion on the messages on a weekly basis. Positive behaviour changes have been noticed: better understanding of the emotional needs of the children, improved communication and relationship with their children and motivation to learn.

Digital media & ICTs a major asset to the work of SOS Children's Villages International

Organizations using advanced ICT are in a better position to deliver sophisticated services to beneficiaries. They can respond faster as well as more efficiently to demands. Integration of ICTs in the monitoring of programme can bring considerable benefits and improvements. It enhances interconnectivity of systems to ensure optimized, functional simple and integrated processes.

ICT is a success factor to reach SOS Children's Villages International's vision and implement its strategy, facilitating and maximizing the impact of its programmes.

ANNEX

Recommendations

→ Development and implementation of international standards on child safety

ICTs security should be addressed through the adoption of international standards on child safety and protection with regard to new technologies. International law should contain clear prevention and protection policies, strategies and guidelines protecting children from the inappropriate and harmful use of digital media & ICTs. Those provisions should determine the precise scope for the use of ICTs and identify mechanisms for protection of children rights.

→ Promote the right to protection of children privacy

Develop guidelines and regulations to address online data collection practices. Children and parents should be aware of online data collection practices in order to be educated on the extent to which their privacy may be compromised while accessing the Internet and digital media.

→ Promotion of awareness-raising initiatives and activities

Awareness-raising effort is necessary to sensitize children on the consequences that improper use of ICTs may have. Learning about digital media threat should be integral part of the wider educational strategy. Workshops, awareness raising and information campaigns should be organized with the participation of children and families, education and social care staff, private companies, civil society organizations, governments and state institutions.³ It also means developing child-friendly material to ensure that the child has access to information which will allow him or her to understand the risks.

→ Strengthening cooperation between governments, IGOs and NGOs, local communities and the private sector

Interested parties must seek to create more synergy at regional and national level in order to maximize the impact of efforts and achieve greater efficiency. Governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), intergovernmental organization (IGOs) need to forge collaborative, high-impact partnerships, both in the public and private sectors.

The exchange of experiences, good practices and case studies should be encouraged to foster innovation, accelerate progress and contribute to the development of a more sustainable use of technologies.

³ See for example, the Safer Internet Day (SID) initiative, information available at <http://www.saferinternet.org/safer-internet-day>