

GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2010

Focus on ICTs and environmental sustainability



ASSOCIATION FOR PROGRESSIVE COMMUNICATIONS (APC)
AND HUMANIST INSTITUTE FOR COOPERATION WITH DEVELOPING COUNTRIES (HIVOS)

Global Information Society Watch

2010



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Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (Hivos)
Swedish International Cooperation Agency (Sida)
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

Global Information Society Watch

Published by APC and Hivos

2010

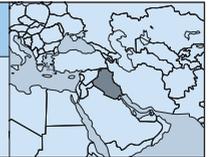
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ISBN 92-95049-96-9
APC-201011-CIPP-R-EN-PDF-0087

APC and Hivos would like to thank the Swedish International Cooperation Agency (Sida) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) for their support for Global Information Society Watch 2010. SDC is contributing to building participation in Latin America and the Caribbean and Sida in Africa.



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Introduction

Iraq is facing the full force of climate change. This includes severe drought and water shortages over the past years, which have produced negative consequences in the forms of devastating dust storms, a loss of water to lakes and reservoirs, and the disappearance of the Iraqi marshes. In the complete absence of any climate change policy – never mind information and communications technologies (ICTs) and climate change policy – as a result of the country’s instability, and intermittent international aid, there is an urgent call for the Iraqi government to set this issue as a priority agenda for the next parliament after the recent March 2010 elections. This should ideally also result in an “ICTs and climate change” strategic plan, with the collaborative help of local multi-stakeholders and international community aid, which addresses the current deteriorating Iraqi climate change indicators. Iraq should also adopt global best practices, mitigation measures and solutions. This cannot be done by the Iraqi government or local stakeholders alone. The government needs to consult international strategic partners (World Bank, UN agencies, etc.) to develop short- and long-term strategies.

Policy and legislative context

Unfortunately, Iraq currently has neither a climate change policy nor an ICT policy. Instead, the last governmental cabinet (2005-2010) was marked by a sectarian environment, a high level of bias and corruption, and a lack of vision. As a result, government programmes and projects have had very little impact.

The ministries that should be responsible for ICTs and climate change are:

- The Ministry of ICT,¹ which was supposed to draft a National ICT Policy for approval by the Iraqi Parliament.² This has not been done.
- The Ministry of Environment³ and Ministry of Water Resources,⁴ which were collaboratively supposed to have addressed the severe climate change challenges faced by Iraq in the form of a nationwide strategic policy. However, there is no climate-change related legislation, and the issue has not been on the ministries’ agendas.

The last Iraqi parliament, which ended its duties in March 2010, formed a Health and Environment Committee that

should address climate change issues in conjunction with relevant sectors. However, it has never put the climate change issue on its agenda.⁵

The challenge of awareness and priorities

Since 1980, Iraq has suffered cumulative deteriorating circumstances due to three major wars, international sanctions, post-2003 civil violence and very poor governmental performance. These have affected the overall humanitarian situation, as well as challenges such as climate change. When accompanied by the post-2003 poor progress in the implementation of government programmes, as well as widespread corruption, the status regarding ICTs and climate change can be summarised as follows:

- “Sustainability” is a missing term in Iraq specifically and in the Arab region generally.
- An ignorance amongst policy makers when it comes to climate change challenges. For initiatives to be effective in the Iraqi culture, they need top-down policies where the government should have the upper hand. However, the government is not aware of this, and the ignorance of policy makers persists.
- An incompetence amongst governmental leaders who should advise and address ICTs and climate change needs and set action steps for going forward.
- An absence of Iraqi officials at international climate change knowledge sharing and other events. This is due to ignorance and a failure to cope with the processes of entering the global arena again.
- An increase in “uncertainty”, “desperation” and “lack of hope” amongst Iraqi citizens. This is clearly seen in the scepticism that any governmental programme will succeed, due to rampant corruption and other deficiencies.
- A huge public awareness gap. Without raising the awareness of Iraqi citizens, they will not understand or appreciate the seriousness of climate change.
- Huge ICT skills shortages and a lack of capacity-building programmes. Needless to say, ICT knowledge should come first for those who must deal with ICTs and climate change issues.
- Most academic institutions have no ICTs and climate change and greening ICT course offerings. This is due to a lack of Iraqi academic staff specialised in this area,

1 www.moc.gov.iq

2 www.parliament.iq

3 www.moen.gov.iq

4 www.mowr.gov.iq/english

5 www.parliament.iq/Iraqi_Council_of_Representatives.php?name=articles_ajsdyawqwqjdjasdba46s7a98das6dasda7das4da6sd8asdsawewqew465e4qwe44wq6e4qw8eqwe4qw6eqwe4sadkj&file=listalltopics&op=newindex&catid=16

as well as a lack of international academic collaboration and funding.

- A complete lack of accurate indicators and datasets. Without these figures, it will be hard to gauge where Iraq stands and to develop the necessary action plans.
- Low internet penetration. Internet access availability is still very poor for Iraqis. The penetration rate is about 1% according to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), as of September 2008.⁶ There is a complete dominance of one state institution, the State Company for Internet Services (SCIS),⁷ which is the internet service provider (ISP). However, it has slow ADSL connections, no broadband plans, and outdated telecommunications infrastructure. Only rich people use VSAT (very small aperture terminal) satellite internet service, often sharing subscriptions because it is not affordable, and is also dependent on diesel electricity generators. Internet availability is critical to get ICT and climate change learning platforms off the ground, including information awareness projects.

The World Bank, the main contracted consultant advisor to the Iraqi government, has no thematic works on climate change issues in their strategic work for Iraq.⁸ However, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) recently started to advocate around the issue, as part of UNDP efforts to achieve the Iraqi Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (especially MDG 1, eradicating extreme poverty, and MDG 7, ensuring environmental sustainability). The UNDP started working with Iraqi authorities, including the Prime Minister's Advisory Office and the respective ministries for the environment, water resources and the marshlands.⁹ Its main focus is water management, and it aims to support the introduction of related policies and strategies. It has launched advocacy campaigns in some local Iraqi governorate authorities.¹⁰

There are some local Iraqi NGO and civil society initiatives that address climate change as a core issue in their missions. However, most of these lack real expertise of how their missions can be technically and operationally adopted locally. Most of them are in desperate need of international funding, expertise and guidance for real nationwide collaborative works. They face many serious challenges: security barriers, corruption, the bureaucracy of international agencies when it comes to partnership models, a lack of civil society work culture and total ignorance on both the public and government sides.

The only seemingly viable local activist NGO is Together Echo.¹¹ TogetherEcho's mission is environmental and human rights protection. In 2005 it started establishing environmental libraries in schools, running awareness campaigns, issuing publications and posters, seeding trees, and conducting local environmental conferences and outreach initiatives. However, due to security issues it moved to the safest area of Iraq, the Kurdistan region. It also faces funding difficulties: its website has not been updated since 2008 and its programmes have gone silent. TogetherEcho offers a good starting point on how to deal with ICTs and climate change and greening ICT issues.

In early 2010, a diverse group of Iraqi activists and NGOs launched a nationwide initiative: the Iraqi Initiative for Environmental Sustainability. The group consists of academics, ex-pat Iraqis, international aid and donor agency representatives, and various local NGOs. The initiative's major objective is to develop Iraqi social awareness of how to face responsibly the risks threatening the environment. What is new in this initiative is that it has international advisory council members who may help the initiative to set up effective programmes and projects that tackle Iraqi climate change issues. It is hoped that this initiative will play a pioneering role in addressing ICTs and climate change issues via the knowledge transferred by its international advisory council members.

There is a marked absence of the private sector in ICT community-based knowledge that focuses on humanitarian themes, such as climate change. True public-private partnerships do not exist at the national level. A lack of governmental intervention, policies, patronage and trust sustains the mono-vision of the private sector as a stand-alone sector working for its own financial interests without caring for the community's environmental challenges. Despite the repeated government line that public-private partnerships are essential, it has not really played a strategic role in encouraging these partnerships. Due to high corruption levels, government leaders attract the business community for illegitimate short-term profits only.

After 2003, based on the idea of transforming Iraq into a modern state, a ministry called the Ministry of Civil Society Organisations was formed in order to encourage the flourishing of civil society NGOs. This ministry completely failed to achieve its mandate. Later it was changed to a small "directorate" or department within the Council of Ministers Secretariat.¹² Again, this department has no solid collaborative and patronage vision with local NGOs, and has actually stopped registering local NGOs for a year now. Despite the huge Iraqi oil revenues (more than USD 300 billion during 2006-2009), neither the ministry nor the directorate has ever funded or supported a single local NGO programme.

6 www.internetworldstats.com/middle.htm

7 www.scis.gov.iq

8 web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/MENAEXT/IRAQEXTN/0,,menuPK:313111~pagePK:141159~piPK:141110~theSitePK:313105,00.html

9 www.iq.undp.org/UploadedFiles/Sections/62e51eab-bd5a-402f-a442-396e5bbbf91.pdf

10 www.iq.undp.org/UploadedFiles/HomePage/24307e13-1c12-49e6-a976-fde1f61bddc3.pdf

11 togetherecho.org

12 www.ngoao.gov.iq

New trends

Iraq recently held a new round of elections for the next four-year period. Some of the elected winners raised the environment as an issue in their election campaigns. It is widely hoped that the new government will be a true partnership between disparate bodies that takes care of the country's big challenges, among them climate change. Accordingly, new ICTs and climate change and greening ICT policies and legislation are expected. Also anticipated are true public-private partnerships with the business community, locally and internationally, as well as government and civil society engagements.

The government's increased collaboration with the international aid community, namely the UN bodies, is vital to address the country's catastrophic problems. On 11 May 2010, the UN and Iraqi government signed an historic agreement¹³ to boost development and restore services and economic growth. This is the first United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) for Iraq for the period 2011-2014, and establishes a new strategic partnership between the funds, programmes and agencies of the UN, and the Iraqi government. The UNDAF reflects the priorities of the Five-Year National Development Plan that considers effective human capital as a main pillar for building a new Iraq. One of the UNDAF priorities in this agreement is environmental management¹⁴ with the following sub-items:

- Promotion of sustainable development
- Control of the environmental situation
- Environmental capacity development
- Environmental awareness and regional and international cooperation.

UN agencies have good expertise in using ICT tools for climate change mitigation and greening. The good relationship between the Iraqi government and the UN opens positive horizons for a win-win situation regarding using ICTs for Iraqi climate change mitigation.

Action steps

An urgent call for the next Iraqi government to take serious action on the issue of ICTs and climate change and greening ICTs is necessary. This should be done via:

- Adopting ICT and climate change legislation to enforce top-down policies and strategic actions.
- Establishing indicators to evaluate and assess Iraq's current status regarding climate change, and to plot the way forward.
- Setting up a strategic entity that incubates business, civil society and academic communities effectively.
- Modifying school (primary, intermediate and secondary) curricula to include "climate change", "ICTs" and "greening" topics.
- Harmonising with global best practices.
- Building Iraqi research and technical capacity through engaging with Iraqi academics and researchers in global research and development (R&D)-related contexts. For example, the EU has well-established collaborative relationships and research on ICTs and climate change and greening ICTs in their Seventh Framework Programme (FP7).¹⁵
- Establishing nationwide media and awareness campaigns to alert and educate the public.
- Providing internet access widely by promoting competition amongst ISPs. ■

13 www.uniraq.org/newsroom/getarticle.asp?ArticleID=1324

14 www.iauiraq.org/reports/UNDAF_May%2017_english.pdf

15 cordis.europa.eu/fp7/environment/home_en.html

GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2010 investigates the impact that information and communications technologies (ICTs) have on the environment – both good and bad.

Written from a civil society perspective, **GISWatch 2010** covers some 50 countries and six regions, with the key issues of ICTs and environmental sustainability, including climate change response and electronic waste (e-waste), explored in seven expert thematic reports. It also contains an institutional overview and a consideration of green indicators, as well as a mapping section offering a comparative analysis of “green” media spheres on the web.

While supporting the positive role that technology can play in sustaining the environment, many of these reports challenge the perception that ICTs will automatically be a panacea for critical issues such as climate change – and argue that for technology to really benefit everyone, consumption and production patterns have to change. In order to build a sustainable future, it cannot be “business as usual”.

GISWatch 2010 is a rallying cry to electronics producers and consumers, policy makers and development organisations to pay urgent attention to the sustainability of the environment. It spells out the impact that the production, consumption and disposal of computers, mobile phones and other technology are having on the earth’s natural resources, on political conflict and social rights, and the massive global carbon footprint produced.

GISWatch 2010 is the fourth in a series of yearly reports critically covering the state of the information society from the perspectives of civil society organisations across the world.

GISWatch is a joint initiative of the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) and the Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (Hivos).

GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH
2010 Report
www.GISWatch.org

