

# 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



## Global Information Society Watch 2010

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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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# BENIN

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## Introduction

The world has become a global village. It is now obvious that physical borders no longer exist. Information and communications technologies (ICTs) have the advantage of gathering people around the same objectives and goals despite their different activities all over the planet. These activities have a direct impact on the environment. Global warming of about 2°C, the ravages of climate change, and environmental degradation generally are problems which endanger the future of our planet. The release of greenhouse gases (GHGs) must be reduced because they weaken the development policies of Western as well as Southern countries. At the same time, the pollution of the environment must be halted for the sake of future generations.

## Political and legislative context

The Republic of Benin has set up strategies to mitigate climate change. The atmospheric pollution caused by the gases released by engine exhaust pipes has forced its hand, resulting in an integrated strategy in partnership with the United Nations (UN). Benin signed the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)<sup>1</sup> on 13 June 1992 and ratified it on 30 June 1994. The country also signed the Kyoto Protocol, ratifying it on 25 February 2002.

At the national level, Benin's Initial National Communication to the UNFCCC was officially released on 29 February 2000, and enabled the country to put in place a national policy on climate change called the National Action Programme for Adaptation to Climate Change.<sup>2</sup>

While national policy on climate change does not specifically mention ICT strategies to control the problems related to climate change, several programmes and projects have been initiated, some of which use ICTs.

At the local level, the country's laws on decentralisation, specifically Article No 97-029 of 15 January 1999 related to the administration of municipalities, gives town councils the lead in protecting and safeguarding the environment. These laws, together with others, grant departmental and municipal structures the opportunity to impact directly on programmes related to the fight against climate change.

However, this does not include electronic waste (e-waste), which appears to have been forgotten, despite Benin signing the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their

Disposal. The take-up of new technologies has increased the quantity of e-waste in the country (recycled computers, refrigerators, freezers, TV sets, etc.) which now lies scattered on our streets and plays an important part in the environmental damage noted these last decades in Benin.

## Challenges in implementing ICTs for environmental causes

At the institutional level, the efforts made by the Ministry of Environment and Protection of Nature are considerable. Benin's Initial National Communication on climate change enabled, amongst other things, the sharing of knowledge on climate change, and the exchange of information between all the stakeholders (government, academic institutions, private institutions, NGOs, research consultancies, etc.). It also helped to identify suitable technologies for the prevention of climate change in Benin. The National Action Programme for Adaptation to Climate Change is a process by which the levels of vulnerability of different groups is assessed, in order to determine priority needs. Another climate change programme, TRAIN,<sup>3</sup> intends to raise awareness amongst ministries and NGOs on the content of the UNFCCC, and to share information related to the negative effects of climate change in Benin.

After the signing of the UNFCCC in 1992, many projects were initiated. Among these were the GLOBE Project<sup>4</sup> (Global Learning and Observations to Benefit the Environment), created following the UN Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The GLOBE Project, started in 1996, brought together about 75 schools nationwide. The goal of the project was to raise the awareness of students and others about environmental issues at a global level, and to improve scientific understanding of the planet through networking and knowledge sharing. The Scientific and Technical Environmental Information System (SIST),<sup>5</sup> set up by Benin in partnership with the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has similar objectives. This project intends to emphasise the organisation of scientific and technical research and the use of ICTs.

On the one hand, these projects and programmes are not generally known to the public. This is a problem that needs a solution, and it is also important that everyone becomes aware of the harmful effects of climate change. On the other hand, using ICTs to combat climate change also

1 [unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/convfr.pdf](http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/convfr.pdf)

2 Ministère de l'Environnement et de la Protection de la Nature, PNUD (2007) *Programme d'Action National d'Adaptation aux changements climatiques du Bénin (PANA-BENIN)*.

3 Djibril, I. (n.d.) *Initiatives du Bénin en matière d'éducation, de Formation et de sensibilisation du public sur les Changements Climatiques*.

4 [www.reseauafricanet.org/anais/APPLICATIONS/FICHE90.HTML](http://www.reseauafricanet.org/anais/APPLICATIONS/FICHE90.HTML)

5 [www.sist-sciencesdev.net/IMG/pdf/sist\\_benin.pdf](http://www.sist-sciencesdev.net/IMG/pdf/sist_benin.pdf)

raises important structural problems. Infrastructural realities remain and tend to lessen the potential use of ICTs in helping with environmental issues. It becomes crystal clear that we are far from the end of our problems. The lack of solutions that can help the country reach the level of development that is so dear to policy makers is disheartening, and the country is a long way off from becoming the promised “Digital Headquarters of Africa”.

While Law No. 2002-002 of 31 January 2002 relates to the basic principles of the telecommunications regime in Benin, many other laws have yet to be voted in to improve the legislative and regulatory framework for the telecommunications sector. Many of the prevailing laws are obsolete, putting Benin in the position of a country under construction, and in the process of reorganisation and reorientation. The priorities of Benin in terms of ICT development are based on two main foundations: e-government and e-business.

The electrical network is faulty (untimely power failures, high electricity bills, difficult access to the power grid, etc.). Moreover, the limited availability of computers and the human resources to train students and teachers, as well as internet connection problems, make it difficult to access information. All these factors have failed ICT programmes in schools, and are likely to have the same impact on using ICTs to mitigate climate change, or in sharing environmental information.

Besides the interventions mentioned above, it seems that the fight against climate change is not being conducted in synergy. People think that climate change is only the business of the Ministry of Environment and Protection of Nature. If we have a closer look at the impact of the use of ICTs on the environment, as well as the potential of ICTs to mitigate climate change, we can say that the Ministry of Communication and Promotion of New Technologies should play a major role together with the Ministry of Environment. And why not the Ministry of Health? Authorities at different levels should avoid intellectual confusion, a kind of traffic jam that creates conflicts of interest between the central administration and the municipal authorities. New laws voted in should enable real freedom in the management of projects to achieve the best results.

On the side of the environmental impact of ICTs, there is very little public knowledge about e-waste. The actual users of the equipment do not understand how they are polluters because they do not or cannot discard their old equipment properly. On the side of climate change, ICTs should be used for information dissemination: TV stations, commercial and community radio broadcasters and the internet should be used to reach and educate the public.

## New trends

The political and administrative authorities of Benin are aware that things are not perfect and that there are things left to be done. Given this, Benin is getting ready to launch its Second National Communication on climate change. The new document is almost ready and will certainly correct

mistakes noticed during the assessment of the first document, while launching new perspectives on the fight against climate change. Some 83,000 tonnes<sup>6</sup> of GHGs are released into the air by motorcycle taxis commonly known as *Zemidjan*. But owing to the efforts from different actors, measures to control GHGs released by engines have reduced air pollution by 12%<sup>7</sup> in Benin.

To fight against atmospheric pollution and to conform to international standards, the Ministry of Environment has been equipped with up-to-date technical tools. This includes a laboratory that helps to scientifically measure the rate of emissions released by two-wheeled and four-wheeled vehicle engines. These tests help create rules that drivers can follow in order to reduce the quantity of emissions released by their vehicle engines.

## Action steps

The immediate action to be taken is to improve the legislative and regulatory framework so that ICTs are given specific consideration, in terms of both their ability to be used as tools to mitigate climate change, and their potential harmful environmental effects.

It is also necessary to build the capacities of students and parents, as well as ICT users generally, so that they have access to information related to the impact of ICTs on the environment.

Finally, it is critical for the state to facilitate access to the internet, and to stabilise electricity supply, so that the potential of using ICTs to fight climate change can be maximised. ■

6 [chabigodfroy.blogspot.com/2008/10/bnin-la-pollution-un-pige-lurbanisation.html](http://chabigodfroy.blogspot.com/2008/10/bnin-la-pollution-un-pige-lurbanisation.html)

7 Ibid.

**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](http://www.GISWatch.org)

