

Using ICT for Peace

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Abstract

The last few decades witnessed a remarkable development in the field of Information and Communication Technology. It has made possible to have a greater access to huge information through the use of different electronic gadgets. This provides a notable prospect in the process of peace building and peace keeping. The importance of ICT in peace building has achieved increased recognition. It has also been considered as a key to a promising new era in which significant policy could be made on the basis of real discussion based on real facts. It is, undoubtedly accepted that ICT can be a huge aid in the effort to inculcate lasting peace by co-operative people to better communicate with each other.

This analytical paper aims to discuss the role of ICT in the process of peacebuilding. It illustrates the huge potential of ICT to conflict resolution by responding effectively to disputes that are created both at the virtual world as well as at the real world. It informs us about some key ICT resources that could be used in the peace process. Thus, the paper is aimed at raising awareness about the possible roles of ICT in peacemaking.

Keywords: ICT, peace, peacebuilding,

Preface

“Peace is Possible for life at all stages and it is up to man to choose his destiny or to suffer from the horrors of war. Today mankind is at the crossroad where he has to choose with courage, determination and imagination.” The above said statement by Federico Mayor clearly depicts that now it’s a high time for the humanity as it has been passing through a crisis. Violence has become an incidence of daily occurrence in every part of the world, Which is a very serious matter of concern. The inhuman acts of violence against women and children, the brutal killings of innocents, terrorism, and injustice have become a bitter truth of our day to day life. It is time to sensitizing human beings to respect life, cultural identity, and the cherished values of love and respect for every living in stark poverty, daily fighting for survival, living hand to mouth.

What is Peace?

Peace is a concept of societal friendship and harmony in the absence of hostility and violence. In a social sense, peace is commonly used to mean a lack of conflict and freedom from fear of violence between individuals or heterogeneous groups.

Using ICT for Peace

There is no denying the fact that technology has a critical role to play in shaping the future strategies for peace. But to be successful in the effort we need to develop a better understanding of the potential contributions of ICT for peace-building. Now-a-days, disputes of various levels and degrees are being resolved with the help of a variety of technologies including, but not limited to social networking sites and SMS. There are a number of groups and organizations all around the world, who are leveraging ICT to promote peace-building in regions of conflict and tension by educating and empowering individuals. According to Weekes (2011), “ICT is a huge enabler and source of empowerment, allowing individuals to take some, albeit limited, control of their own destiny within the chaotic framework of a crisis, natural disaster or post-conflict situations”.

Today, the World Wide Web (WWW) has turned a world divided by walls into a world linked by networks. Naturally, more and more individuals gain to the Internet and mobile technologies even in the relatively remote areas of the world. That is why events or incidents that would have been unnoticed a couple of decades ago, come instantly under the purview of international opinions and discussions. Moreover, the latest communication technologies such as the Internet together with its various social networking sites can support non-violent, democratic movements, promote education, capacity building, intercultural dialogue and the establishment of a global civil society (Sabadello, 2011). Indeed, the abundance and exuberance of various media resources that provide instant and massive availability of desired and required information in times of conflicts and crises could be regarded as a positive as a positive evolution.

Now, let us take a look at how ICT could contribute in the process of establishing peace. In general, information and communication technologies can be used in peacebuilding efforts in six different ways. They are discussed below-

1. ***TO Provide Necessary Information*** – ICT can strengthen the ties between individuals and communities by improving their ability to share, learn and interact with one another. Greater sharing of information and opinions means a better ability to understand situations and act accordingly.
2. ***TO Help People Process Information*** – With the help of web-portals, data visualization tools, virtual dispute resolution tools, and online command centers individuals can frame arguments by processing information to resolve conflicts peacefully. Besides, there are tools that help individuals to take active part in online debates, negotiations, and mediations for a peaceful solution to any issue.
3. ***TO Improve Decision Making*** – ICT can help to improve decision making skills, as well as the ability to see the critical information and environment in which decision are made. Virtual games and simulations that increase awareness and understanding of a conflicting situation can be used to improve decision making skills.
4. ***To Reduce Deficit of Resources*** – Better communication through mobile phones and other handheld devices can greatly increase the efficiency of markets, which in turn would reduce scarcity of resources like food, water and money that are provided to the militia members during the process of demilitarization, demobilization and reintegration (DDR).
5. ***To Support Relationships among people*** – ICT can be a tremendous support material to those trying to maintain old relationships or form new relationship. Through the mediums of social networking sites, online collaboration tools, and telecentres like-minded people can connect and collaborate on issues and causes of common interest during conflicts with a view to improving the peace process.
6. ***To Help People Understand Each Other*** – Advanced ICT, especially the Internet can make distant situations more understandable and people of distant lands seem more like us. Indeed, increased understanding among people of different cultures, languages, and concerns can go a long way toward reducing conflict and increasing the prospects of peaceful habitation.

One thing is clear that the peace building processes with the help of ICT could be greatly strengthened if organizations, peoples and regions are connected using effective peacebuilding networks and active and open resources. And there are several concrete ways in which ICT can be used for peace: as a tool by international organizations, as a weapon in nonviolent struggle, and as a pillar for building and maintaining peaceful societies (Sabadello, 2010). The underlying assumption is that the creative and sensitive use of modern means of ICT can encourage holistic peacebuilding practices that could be one of the key factors for establishing a peaceful and harmonious global society.

Example of Using ICT for Peace

Over the past few decades there have been increasingly innovative and open-source ICT initiatives in the events of crises management and peace-building along with other humanitarian emergencies. For instance:

- Tools like ‘Crowdsourcing’ and ‘crisis Mapping’ have been used on numerous occasions, such as during the post-election violence in Kenya (2008), earthquakes in Haiti (2010), Japan (2011) and New Zealand (2011), floods in India (2008), Columbia (2011) and Indonesia (2013), and various hurricanes in U.S.A.
- Large scale demonstration organized via cell phones and SMS were one of the major factors in forcing the Philippine President Joseph Estrada to resign from his office (2001), thus bringing about change in the country without large-scale violence.
- During the civil war (1993-2005) in Burundi, online discussion groups hosted by **Burundinet** and the **Burundi Youth Council** allowed Burundian people of different backgrounds to discuss the situation, debate the root causes of unrest, and fight out ways to move forward as it was quite difficult for them to meet physically.
- The website **videoletters.net** captures video message from former neighbours and friends and broadcasts them via public access channels throughout the countries of the formerly Yugoslavia, allowing those who lost contact during the military conflicts (1991-1999) to reconnect.
- The official media website of Sri Lanka, **Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRS)** allowed the Sri Lankan people to generate a lot of public debate both within and outside the country, causing a peaceful outcome in Sri Lanka’s post conflict reconciliation.
- During the recent large scale public demonstrations for democracy in the Middle-East, better known as the ‘Arabian Spring’, and the Civil Society Movements in India latest ICT services like SMS, Tweets and other blog posts played a major role in generating public opinions with a view to bringing positive changes in a peaceful, non-violent manner.

Key of ICT Resources for Peace

At present, There are so many software/IT services that are somewhat useful to help people stay connected, up-to-date and informed, that are a pre-requisite in today’s peace-building process. Many of these services are better known as social networking sites that help individuals and organizations to communicate and exchange ideas and viewpoints.

- ❖ **Facebook** - An extremely popular social networking site, where millions of people all over the world share views, opinions and pictures that cause better understanding among people across borders. Besides, there are a number of parallel sub-groups specifically devoted to promote the concept of peacebuilding. Such as –
 - Culture of Peace Campaign: <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=135306216564758>
 - Culture of Peace Press: <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=19792618049606>
- ❖ **Twitter** - A service for individuals and organizations to communicate and stay connected through the exchange of quick, frequent messages, called ‘tweets’ of 140 characters or fewer. There is a sub-group of bloggers (PCDN) for peace and Social Change.
- ❖ **SKYPE** - A wonderful service that allows one to call, chat, conduct a video-conference to any other online device (for free) that also has Skype.
- ❖ **NING** - A platform for users to create, customize, and share their own social network in seconds. By creating a sub-group on this site, one can easily attract more users and share Experiences.
- ❖ **CF Sites** - A simple, free way to create a website within minutes with a custom look and broadcast it live on the Internet for non-profit or good cause.
- ❖ **NETSQUARED** - An online technological site to help non-profit use for learning skills, sharing experiences and developing expertise with the objectives of changing the world.
- ❖ **Share This** - A wonderful tool that allows for democratizing sharing across various social networks. Here the members or visitors can instantly share any page on the network via their own social networks that can help increase communication for better understanding.
- ❖ **ICT for Peacebuilding Blog** - A blog devoted to the open discussion of ICT for Peace issues.
- ❖ **ASANA** - A very good service (that is free for up to 30 members) that provides an online platform for collaborative projects.
- ❖ **GOOGLE Grants** - A unique in kind donation programme awarding free AdWords advertising to select charitable organizations working for community services to help the world in areas like science and technology, education, public health, environment, youth advocacy and the arts.

- ❖ **Ushahidi** – A non-profit software that develops free and open-source software for information collection, visualization, and interactive mapping. It uses the concept of crowdsourcing for social activism and public accountability.
- ❖ **TV Channels** – A number of TV channels, such as peace TV, Aastha, Peace of Mind TV, Veda TV, Peace Channels, and others that broadcast programmes on spiritual awaking, meditation and harmony among people. These channels, popular worldwide among religious minded people help to promote inner peace through knowledge and awareness about spiritual well-being, morality and wisdom, and work as a media for international co-operation and understanding.

In fact, there are many other sites and software services that could be used for creating, transmitting, and disseminating contents and opinions that result in improved understanding among the individuals and organizations through sharing news and views. Thus, these tools and services can play some catalytic role in the peacebuilding process.

Conclusion

Thus, we see that ICT tools and services that help people communicate, understand data, and learn, via computers, the Internet, mobile phones, and more – could be a tremendous help in implementing various peacebuilding practices. For this, collaboration and learning across individuals and organizations through the integration of ICT are necessary. It is true that measuring the real impact of ICT are necessary. It is true that measuring the real impact of ICT in the peacebuilding process is difficult. Being a relatively unexplored area of research, there is hardly any concrete evidences of the effectiveness of ICT in enhancing the peace process. Therefore, the key measure should be whether ICT improves the lives of individuals and communities that are affected by conflict, either directly or indirectly. We must not over-estimate the impact of ICT or negotiating for peace, which is not established with a one-time effort. True peace is built over time, with a variety of process and approaches that move conflict into lasting, peaceful resolutions (Cole & Crawford, 2007).

Now, we need to see in the days to come whether ICT interventions for a successful peacebuilding effort remain a utopian dream, or whether it becomes an attainable reality.

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