

## **THE INTERNET PROJECT: AN OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT IN KENYA**

A PRESENTATION MADE TO SCIENTISTS WORKING FOR KENYA AGRICULTURAL  
RESEARCH INSTITUTE (KARI), KATUMANI CENTRE, MACHAKOS

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### **1.1. The History of the Project**

The Internet Project was initiated by Professor Wesley Shrum of Louisiana State University, USA who wrote the first proposal in 1999. The National Science Foundation, USA, later funded the proposal.

### **1.2. The Focus of the Project:**

The focus of the Internet Project is *scientific communication among scientists*. More specifically, the project attempts to examine how the new technology – Internet – has impacted on the way scientists communicate with each other. First, through a survey of scientists, the project attempts to find out how the new communication technology (the Internet) has impacted on scientists' collaborations. This entails finding out what kind of collaborations are emerging over time as scientists increasingly adopt the new communication technology. Two, the project also attempts to establish whom scientists collaborate with using the new communication technology. In particular, the research project attempts to establish whether adoption of the new communication technology increases/reduces collaboration with local or external scientists. Third, the research project examines accessibility to the Internet among local scientists. The interest here is to establish the extent to which local scientists can/cannot access the Internet and to understand the factors that determine accessibility. In summary, the research project attempts to find out how scientists are making use of the new communication technology and how the same technology is changing their lifestyles.

### **1.3. The Scope of the Project:**

The Internet Project initially covered three countries viz. Ghana, India and Kenya. Within these countries, the project has selected purposively institutions that host scientists engaged in research within selected fields that include agriculture and other related sciences. In Kenya, the Internet Project has three specific sites that include:

- Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI) – Katumani center
- Jomo Kenyatta University College of Agriculture and Technology (JKUAT)
- University of Nairobi

From the two universities, a few departments dealing with agriculture and other related sciences are included.

Starting this year, South Africa has been included as the fourth country to be covered by the project.

### **1.3 Methodological Design of the Internet Project**

The Internet Project has a longitudinal research design. As defined by Schutt (1996:581), a longitudinal research design is a study in which data are collected in two or more points in time. Practically, this means that the project will study the same sample (of scientists) over and over again. Accordingly, the study will

collect data through interviews with scientists from the selected sites in several waves. Since this is a five-year project, data will be collected in about three waves.

Data collection will be done through several techniques. First, through a survey of scientists from the selected sites, a standardized questionnaire will be administered. In each country, research assistants will be recruited and trained to interview the scientists. In all, these scientists will be interviewed three times during the project period. As expected, the survey will generate quantitative data for the project.

Two, through in depth interviews, a few scientists (also from the selected sites) will be interviewed by the country coordinators to obtain qualitative data.

Third, with the permission from scientists, the study will collect data from electronic servers centrally placed in the selected sites on their communication with the outside world. *As will clearly be demonstrated, the study's interest is to capture the quantity and direction of their communication – not the contents of their messages.* This technique will therefore attempt to capture the density of communication through the Internet among the scientists.

#### **1.4 The Management of the Project**

The overall coordinator of the Internet Project is Professor Wesley Shrum from Louisiana State University. He is always available to answer any questions about the project at [shrum@lsu.edu](mailto:shrum@lsu.edu). He wrote the proposal which won funding from the National Science Foundation (NSF). Accordingly, he is the overall manager of the project. Since he is the one who is answerable to the NSF, he makes all financial decisions to ensure that the project money are spent as spelt out in the proposal and as expected by the NSF. In addition, he coordinates all the project activities in the four countries to ensure that tasks are executed on time.

In each of the four countries (Ghana, India, Kenya and South Africa), there are *country coordinators* for the project. The country coordinators are in charge of the project activities in their respective countries. They are engaged in the following tasks:

- Coordinate all project activities in their country
- Liaise with the overall coordinator to ensure that all project activities are done on time
- Attend annual project meetings for coordinators to (i) plan for the project's remaining activities and (ii) discuss how to analyze the project's data
- Recruit and train research assistants
- Supervise research assistants
- Collect project data from scientists through in depth interviewing
- Analyze project data
- Write academic papers based on the project data

The coordinators are therefore the project managers in their countries who ensure that project activities are done on time. Further, to ensure smooth running of the entire project, they consistently update the overall coordinator on the progress of project activities on a daily basis. Indeed, the project team has a common website that may be accessed by anyone on the Internet (<http://worldsci.net>). We also utilize a free forum through the Yahoo website where they share their experiences. For example, through the forum, the team may discuss a draft of a questionnaire before it is finalized. Each of the coordinator would be expected to make a contribution. This is how the coordinators share information, views, and experiences on a daily basis.

#### **1.5 The Progress of the Project Activities at Katumani**

Katumani is one of the Project's selected research sites. In 2001, Katumani was confirmed as a research site and consequently, survey data were collected through wave 1 of the interviews.

In 2002, to facilitate collection of electronic data from scientists, *the Internet Project invested about Ksh. 250,000 to enhance connectivity of the scientists to the Internet.* This money was used to purchase the required materials for electronic connectivity for the center. The project's budget included money to improve scientists' connectivity to the Internet. The interest of the study in this case is to establish how an improvement in connectivity to the Internet affects (transforms) the lifestyles of scientists. Currently, work is still in progress to improve connectivity. Only after connectivity work is completed can the project start collecting electronic data from the scientists.

In early 2003, the Project plans to collect qualitative data from scientists through in depth interviews. Later in the year, we intend to collect wave two of the survey data. For the project to succeed, we need the goodwill and support of the scientists.

### **1.6. The Status of the Internet Project in Kenya**

In Kenya, the Internet Project has achieved the following:

- Selected the required research sites
- Recruited and trained research assistants
- Collected wave 1 of the survey data from scientists
- Coded and organized survey data collected during wave 1
- Purchased the first bunch of connectivity equipment for the two selected sites viz. JKUAT and Katumani
- Conducted a survey on use of mobile phones in Kenya
- Coded survey data on the mobile phone survey
- Collected substantive data on users of the Internet through cyber cafes in Nairobi