Technology for Transparency and Accountability

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**technology for transparency
network** *a project of rising voices*
tracking civic engagement technology worldwide

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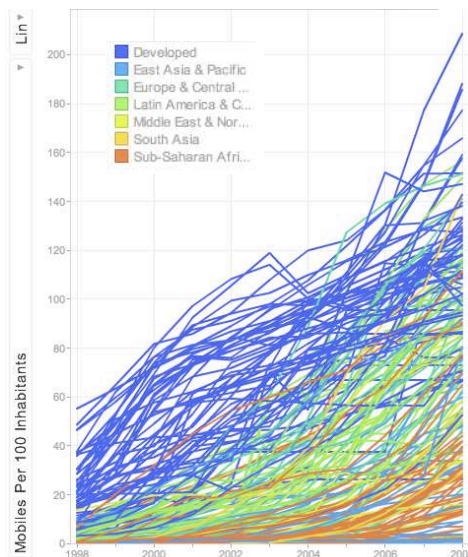## Technology for Transparency Network

February-May 2010
8 researchers
37 projects mapped in 25 countries

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The Technology for Transparency Network is a research project that documents and maps organizations around the world that use online and mobile technology to promote transparency and accountability. During the first phase, which lasted from February to May 2010, eight researchers interviewed and mapped 37 organizations in 25 countries throughout Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, Central and Eastern Europe and Asia. During the second phase, which began in July and will end this September, 12 researchers will document over 30 more projects, expanding our area of focus to include the Middle East and North Africa, francophone sub-Saharan Africa, and the former Soviet Union.

Why T4TN?

The rise in mobile phone and Internet penetration rates accompanied by rise in citizen use of tech to promote transparency & accountability. Lots of hype, but little research.
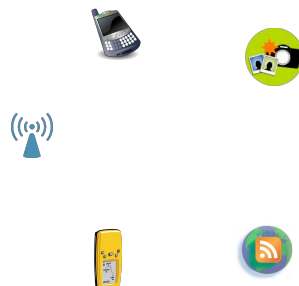

Mobile phone and Internet use is growing more quickly in the developing world than anywhere else. As more people begin connecting online, organizations are beginning to harness the power of digital tools. Mobile phones and websites are being used to collect reports of everything from corruption to potholes, to monitor elections and budgets, to shed light on local governments and more.
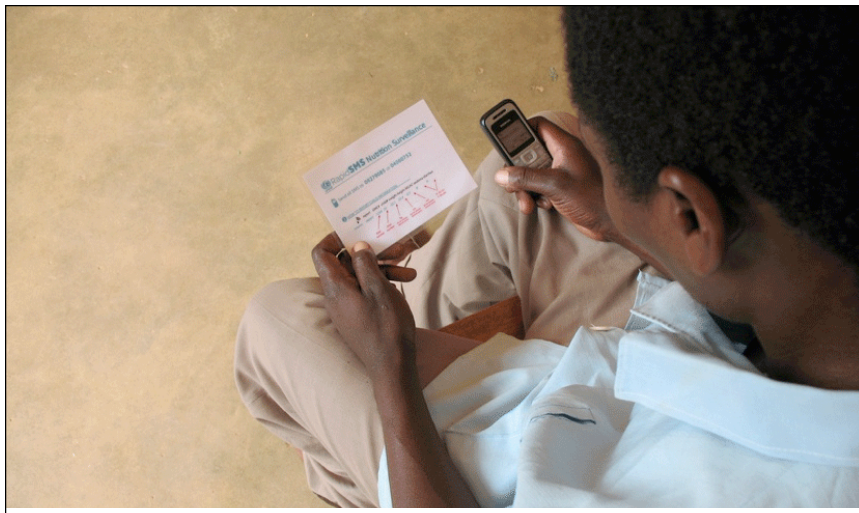
These initiatives are still relatively new, however, and there's no good centralized source of information on how people are making use of new technologies. By mapping dozens of projects around the world, the Technology for Transparency Network is attempting to identify which technological tools and tactics hold the most promise for citizens who are working to make governments and private sector actors more accountable.

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Top Five Technology Tips

• Collect data

• Navigate and understand data

• Go mobile

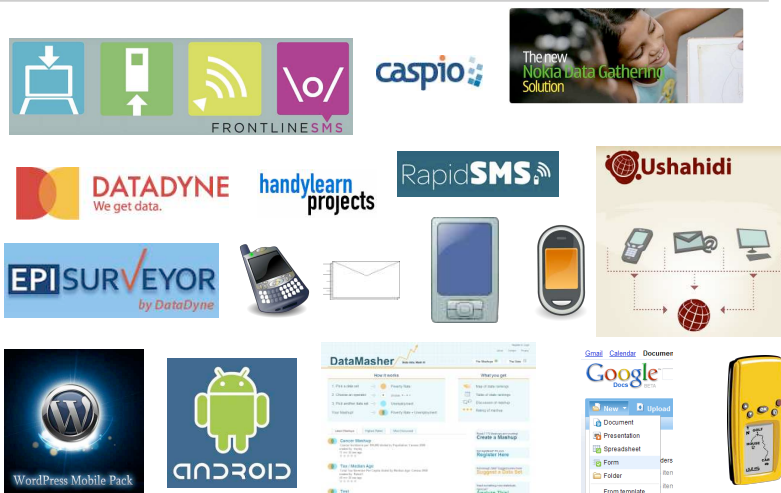• Don't reinvent the wheel

• Be flexible

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Collect data

Online platforms can collect data from open crowdsourcing, trained volunteers or both

In places where governments and corporations can't or aren't willing to share information (or don't maintain it in easily accessible formats), citizens are sometimes the best source of data about government and private sector activities. A number of tools exist to facilitate the collection of this data, either from open crowdsourcing, from a specific group of people such as trained volunteers or workers (this is often called "bounded crowdsourcing"), or from a combination of both. The information gathered from people online or via mobile phones can be used in addition to existing data (for example by supplementing more traditional election monitoring efforts) or to shed new light on processes or power structures (for example by monitoring the results of development projects). Data collection can take place on multiple devices and systems, depending on the desired outcomes and the operating environment. Some services, such as Frontline SMS, operate largely via simple text messages, while others, such as Ushahidi, employ multiple methods, including SMS, Twitter, e-mail and web forms.

(Photo: http://www.flickr.com/photos/evanmwheeler/3852808069/in/pool-1414690@N21/)

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Tools to collect data

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"…There is a huge irregularity of voting at Gwande Karfa ward. In Bokkos LGC. TAKE NOTE…."

"I want to commend the efforts of INEC and for making this election come to pass in the face of every challenge."

"Everywhere is calm voting is on. Movement is restricted for effectiveness of the election process."

Network of Mobile Election Monitors of Nigeria

Trained monitors and citizen volunteers used Frontline SMS to monitor the 2007 elections

The Network of Mobile Election Monitors of Nigeria (NMEM)was established to monitor the country's 2007 presidential elections. Official election monitors are often limited by time and geography, as well as by their official status — their visible presence at polling places may reduce the likelihood of irregularities at that particular place, skewing the results of the observation. NMEM partnered with Frontline SMS to create an election monitoring system that would help citizens engage with the political process while overcoming some of the problems associated with traditional election monitoring efforts. Registered, trained associates in each of Nigeria's states monitored the election while spreading word of their efforts to voters, who were encouraged to send in reports as well. Over 10,000 messages were received and cross-checked for accuracy. The final report echoed the results of international observations but gave Nigerians more agency in the political process. For more information, see NMEM's final report (PDF).

"Untitled" by Helen Olney on Flickr (CC-BY)

Navigate and understand data

Data isn't useful unless citizens can navigate, visualize and understand it
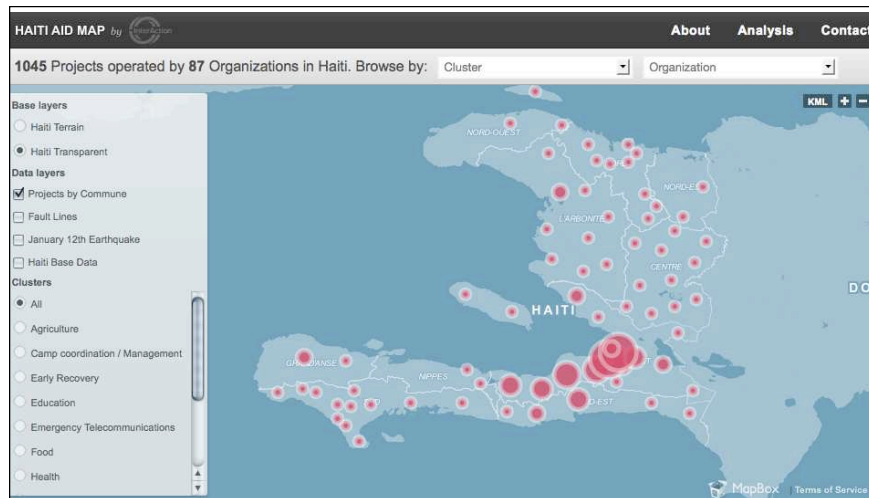
Many governments and companies that put their data online do so by scanning hard copies of giant documents and publishing them as hard-to-analyze PDFs. In other cases, the data that exists is too much and too complicated for the average citizen to understand. A multitude of tools exist to help put data online in easy to use, easy to navigate ways so that citizens can see what facts and figures are most important. Citizens who have access to and understand the facts of a situation are better able to hold governments and private sector organizations accountable.

(Photo: http://www.flickr.com/photos/8076756@N07/4414631980)

Tools to navigate and understand data

Haiti Aid Map

Users can sort information by organization, aid cluster or sector, and location

The Haiti Aid Map provides detailed information on the current humanitarian and aid efforts in Haiti. Visitors to the site can sort through the information by aid organization, by aid cluster or sector, and by location. The map takes over a billion dollars worth of aid activity and makes it easy to see who is doing what where.
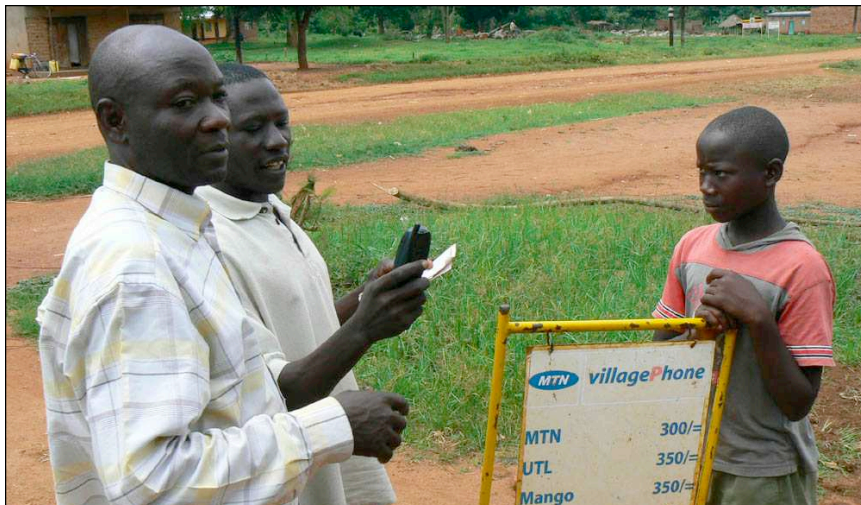
Photo via Ken Banks, kiwanja.net (CC-BY)

Go mobile	Worldwide, mobile phone use exceeds Internet use by a factor of three

Worldwide, three times as many people have access to mobile phones as to the Internet (PDF). In developing countries — whose populations make up 64 percent of the world's mobile phone users — the ratio grows as high as five to one. Tools that operate exclusively on the Internet ignore a huge group of potential users, but luckily, tons of mobile platforms and applications exist that help organizations reach this group. Even the simplest text-and-talk-only phone can let citizens report problems and obtain information.

(Photo: http://www.flickr.com/photos/47778386@N00/3170261536)

Mobile tools

Budget Tracking Tool
IT Promoting Transparency

DEVOLVED FUNDS SEARCH

Select Constituency

Select a constituency from the drop down lists to view constituency details including amounts of monies budgeted in various funds for projects in the constituency

Province [Central] District [Kiambu] Constituency [Kikuyu] (View Constituency Details)

Learn more about CDF
Click Here to download CDF Act

Population :	194300
Size :	
Province :	Central
District :	Kiambu
Constituency Overview:	

its located to the west of Nairobi city having its population among the ones with the highest literacy levels in the contry

Funds Type	Amount
CDF	Ksh. 88,406,177.00
LATF	Ksh. 0.00
Womens Fund	Ksh. 0.00
Youth Fund	Ksh. 0.00
ESP	Ksh. 6,069.60 (000,000)
Total	**Ksh. 88,412,246.60**

Kenya: Budget Tracking Tool

Citizens can access the database with a simple SMS query

Kenya has only 4 million Internet users, but over 19 million mobile phone users (source: World Bank). The Budget Tracking Tool lets citizens find information about the money that has been allocated for development projects in their region using a simple text message. The site gets between 4000 and 4500 SMS queries per month, and citizens have used the information they've obtained to expose corruption at local and national levels of government.

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"Sulky hay rake in retirement...2" by Alan Vernon on Flickr (CC-BY)

Don't reinvent the wheel

If citizens are already using Facebook and YouTube, try to reach them there

In order to use technology effectively, you need to meet people where they are. If people are already using a Facebook group to protest a particular government action, it may not be worth it to build a new platform with the same features and spend time trying to draw people over. Though Facebook, YouTube and Twitter weren't build with transparency and accountability efforts in mind, they can be effective tools, and they come with built-in audiences. When building a program based on existing tools it's important to keep in mind the fact that tools available in one area or language may be inaccessible in another. For example, Orkut is one of the most popular websites in Brazil and India and may reach more users than Facebook in those countries.

(Photo: http://www.flickr.com/photos/32541690@N02/4514402489)

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Existing social media and web 2.0 tools

Photographié par Jacko

Samedi 30 juin 2007, Paris, Orly

Tracking the Tunisian Presidential Plane

Google Earth, YouTube, and photos exposed misuse of the presidential plane

In 2007, the number of trips the Tunisian presidential plane was taking attracted attention from bloggers who wondered why, when the president was in Tunisia, his plane was in Paris. One blogger browsed photos on aviation enthusiast websites and found photos of the presidential plane in a number of European capitals. He tracked the plane around Europe and discovered that the president's wife was using the plane to support her shopping trips — a clear misuse of state funds. He used Google Earth to map the plane's trips, photos to back up the map, and YouTube and Vimeo to publish a video of what was happening.

Be flexible | A combination of digital and traditional tools may be the best way to reach your audience

When working with digital tools, be careful not to "fall in love with your creation." You can spend time and money creating the best digital platform in the world, but if your target audience is more used to radios than to computers, the impact will be small. Some of the most successful projects are combining digital and traditional tools to reach people no matter what level of technology they prefer. These organizations recognize that the best tool to promote transparency and accountability is the one citizens will use. Radio, print, television, call centers and public meetings may not be as flashy or exciting as digital platforms, but in some situations, they may have a greater chance of success.

(Photo: http://www.flickr.com/photos/95286689@N00/189407007)

Be flexible by using traditional tools

Freedom Fone | Voice-only system gets around literacy issues

Freedom Fone is an almost entirely voice-based system. Organizations can download the software for free and purchase the necessary hardware for under 100 Euro/126 USD. End users don't need a computer and don't have to use SMS — they simply call in. Freedom Fone points out that "delivering information through the audio platform overcomes barriers associated with literacy and language and enables users to move past the 160 character limitation of an SMS." Organizations can use the system to disseminate information, conduct polls, or collect citizen reports that can then be tagged and processed using Freedom Fone's software.

Guatemala Visible | A combination of online and offline tools helped reach a wider audience

Guatemala Visible tracks the selection processes for judges, the General Prosecutor, the Accountant General, the Public Defender and the national Ombudsman in Guatemala, shedding light on process that has previously been conducted behind a wall of secrecy. In addition to making information available online, the project used printed posters, ads on bus stops, local language community radio broadcasts and television to raise awareness.

Technology and the New Frontiers Subject Areas

- Collect data

- Navigate and understand data

- Go mobile

- Don't reinvent the wheel

- Be flexible

- Budgets, expenditures and procurement

- Climate change

- Donor aid

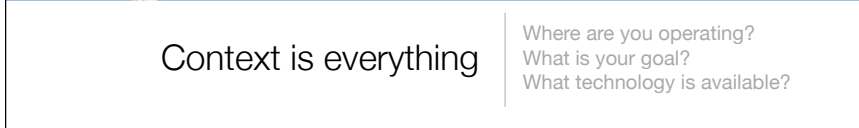- Financial sector reform

- Natural resource government

How to best use a technological tool depends on the desired outcome, the location, the language, and the technological environment, among other factors. For example, governments and NGOs may openly publish their budgets, making visualization and data navigation more important than crowdsourcing for projects that focus on budgets and donor aid. But if the goal is to compare what has been promised with what is being delivered, crowdsourcing reports of what's happening on the ground may be the most effective way to promote accountability. In some contexts, the best way to put easy-to-understand information in the hands of citizens may mean developing an iPhone app with flashy graphics and the ability to share information with Facebook. In others, it will involve simple SMS queries and a radio program.

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USHAHIDI SETUP
takes some tech skills, training, but really not much work:
setup a server, run the installer, poke around.

ALLOCATION OF TIME
in an Ushahidi deployment

ALL THE OTHER STUFF
you need to do to make the project successful:
outreach, branding, translation, annotation, tverification, documentation, integration with other systems, SMS debugging, taxonomy development ...

Photo via Ken Banks, kiwanja.net

Technology is only part of the solution

"If there's no need then you'll have a tool that will be wowed, wowed and then go dead."

Even if you choose the right technological tool for a particular context, however, online and mobile technologies are not a magic bullet. Ushahidi's founders stress that it's a platform, not a methodology. Implementing it — or any technological tool — successfully requires a support team that is intimately familiar with the context in which it will be used and capable of handling outreach, training, information verification and a multitude of other tasks. It's easy to get swept up in the newness of the tech, but technology alone won't solve anything. Philip Thigo of the Budget Tracking Tool in Kenya points out that if the community you're attempting to serve doesn't see the value of your tool or can't interact with it in a way that's easy for them, then the amazing, high-tech platform you've built will be "wowed, wowed and then go dead."

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Context is everything

Where are you operating?
What is your goal?
What technology is available?

In a diverse world, it is important to start by looking at the tools available to the people you want to engage. The most advanced technology might fail if people are not familiar with it, if they cannot afford it, or if they can't adapt it for their purposes. This means being willing to give up on complex technologies if what the community needs is SMS and radio-based efforts. It means building simple, text-only websites if bandwidth is limited. Overall, it means paying close attention to the context of a project and implementing technology only where it really fits.

Learn more

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itpc://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org/podcast

http://groups.google.com/group/transparencynetwork