

Research Project Competition for young researchers

Strategies for the Development of the Information Society among Low-Income Sectors in Latin America and the Caribbean

The Regional Dialogue on the Information Society – DIRSI in Spanish– is a network composed of academic researchers from various disciplines in LAC countries who study the challenges posed by the development of the Information Society and public policy and regulation problems and solutions. The focus of the members of the network is on the generation of knowledge that will facilitate reflection, and the design of policies that will promote the inclusion of all sectors of society in the benefits of the Information Society. At present, DIRSI is financially supported by Canada's IDRC, within the PanAmericas initiative.

One of the main objectives of DIRSI is to promote research among young academics interested in the regulatory challenges posed by the development of the Information Society and knowledge among the poor and marginalised in countries in the region. For that purpose, DIRSI is holding this research grants competition geared to young researchers (under 35 years of age) for the execution of projects within the following broad topics included on the DIRSI research agenda.

1. **Analysis of demand. What is and how to measure digital poverty?**

ICT expansion projects, which usually focus on supply, tend to overlook the necessary conditions for the success of ICTs on the side of users or consumers. The questions that can be addressed under this topic can be: What are those conditions, particularly among the poor and marginalised? What is the necessary level of competence? How much are they willing to pay for the technologies that enable information and communication? What are the actual gaps to bridge in LAC countries? What joint policies can be designed and tested? What initiatives are under way to measure digital poverty? What is the assessment of those efforts? What innovative indicators can be created?

2. **Analysis of supply. New ownership and network management models.**

In the region, new network and service management models are being tested that are opposed to the long-established vertically integrated dominant-operator model reaching the last mile. In this line of work, it is important to know about the new tools for digital inclusion, such as alternative technological platforms (digital TV, powerlines, Wi-Fi) and alternative forms of provision, both in terms of content and applications. An interesting approach is the development of games and entertainment applications that can act as engagement strategies to show the poorest the value of accessing ICTs – incorporating the notion of distance learning – facilitating the capacity to use ICTs through the promotion of local cultures. The analysis of possible regulatory barriers to the use of alternative technologies and new applications is also relevant to this topic.

3. **The challenge of universal service**

In the Information Society, the notion of universal telecommunications service and access acquires a different content to the traditional content of a low-income household – a telephone. In this context, it is important to address the following questions: What are the existing models and what limitations do they present given the new information and communication needs and the new demands that they imply? What are the incentives that regulation can offer operators for the development of networks in remote and marginalised areas or inhabited mainly by poor people? How can SMEs contribute to the development of last-mile alternatives and how can these strategies question existing regulatory frameworks?

4. **Regulatory tools for promoting access, participation and empowerment of the Poor**

This line of work encompasses regulatory challenges and alternative solutions for promoting access, participation and empowerment of the poor in the Information Society, laying stress on the tools available to the regulator of the sector. An important aspect is the identification of best practices for the participation of the marginalised, as well as for the resolution of conflicts and controversies involving service users. Within this perspective there is the need to develop effective mechanisms to ensure the regulator's accountability to society, exploring what the best practices are at the international level.

The proposals can address any of these topics, from any disciplinary perspective and contemplating a pro-poor approach within the framework of a market economy. Innovative proposals that discuss these topics introducing a gender perspective, or contemplating environmental problems or those associated with the use of natural resources in the challenges of the development of the Information Society, within the framework of the questions raised, will be especially welcome. Priority will be given to those proposals which, from any methodological perspective, involve significant empirical work.

The proposals will be evaluated on their academic quality and relevance to public-policy making by a jury made up of three DIRSI members. The development of the research will be supervised by DIRSI members. Three **US \$5,000** (American-dollars) grants will be awarded. The recipients of the grants will also receive additional funds to finance their participation in an international conference to present the results of the work.

Formal Aspects

The proposals must not exceed 10 pages, with single spaces, and the font must be Arial size 12. Typically, the order of a research proposal will be the following:

1. Title of the proposal, researcher's name and membership
2. Summary
3. Rationale
4. Objectives

5. Methodology
6. Budget
7. Schedule
8. Bibliography

The proposals are to be submitted only via E-mail to the following address: fjutierr@gmail.com. The deadline is Monday 30th April 2006, before 17 hours, Chilean standard time (GMT – 4). The E-mail submissions are to be accompanied by the file with the proposal, the applicant's curriculum vitae, and two letters of support from senior researchers in the region. For further information, please visit www.dirsi.net

Schedule

The schedule for the competition is the following:

Activity	Deadline
Submission of proposals	30 th April 2006, 17 hours (GMT – 4).
Evaluation period	1 st -15 th May 2006.
Announcement of winners	16 th May 2006.
Start of research	By 1 st June 2006.
Presentation of partial report	30 th September 2006.
Presentation of final report	15 th December 2006.