# The two hands of Web2forDev: a conference summary

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### Introduction

It is not often when summing up at a conference that you find yourself with a summary which becomes a useful mnemonic for day-to-day work in the field. Yet this was the case at the Web2forDev conference in 2007. A complicated conference was summarised by two hands.[1] The left hand represents the tools needed in Web 2.0. The right hand represents the issues we need to address in our approach to how we use them.

In every training event since, I still find myself using the two hands to explain Web 2.0 to the development sector (see Box 1).

### Left hand of Web2forDev: five key Web 2.0 tools

At the Web2forDev conference, Pete Cranston of Oxfam provided a useful story from a previous conference about the need to know five key tools to understand Web 2.0.[2]

- **Blogging**: blogs and video blogs are used to publish our own content in words, speech or images. A **blog** (short for **Web log**) is a website, usually maintained by an individual.

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[1] This article is based on the comments and observations of the conference participants, which were brought together during the final plenary session. For more information about the conference, see the overview, p.8 and also Barth and Rambaldi, p.95 (this issue).
[2] Pete Cranston explains the five tools at http://blip.tv/file/406897/

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### Box 1: The two hands of Web2forDev

The topic of Web 2.0 for Development is like the fingers of two hands. Each finger represents one component of development work. When working with Web 2.0 tools, we need to consider the interaction between each finger of each hand.

First, we find ourselves with a left hand full of Web 2.0 tools:
- Blogging
- Wikis and social networks
- Tagging and social bookmarking
- Feeds
- Mash-ups

However, these tools are no use for development if we do not use our right hand of approaches. These approaches were provided by a number of conference participants:
- People
- Access
- Participation
- Content
- Impact

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It contains regular commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as photos or videos. To 'blog' means to maintain or add content to a blog.

- **Wikis and social networks**: these tools are used to jointly develop and exchange ideas. A **wiki** is a page or collection of web pages designed to enable anyone who accesses it to contribute or modify content. Wikis are often used to create collaborative websites and to power community

# Web2~for~Dev

The 'two hands' image, created by Jon Corbett during the Web2forDev conference for the final plenary session.

websites. **Social networking tools** focus on building online communities of people who share interests and/or activities.

• **Tagging**: we also use tags and bookmarks to order our thoughts. A **tag** is a keyword or term assigned to a piece of information. Tags are chosen informally and personally. Tags help describe an item and allow it to be found again by browsing or searching using that keyword. A collection of online user-generated tags is often referred to as a 'folksonomy'.[3]

• **Feeds**: **RSS (Really Simple Syndication)** feeds are used to spread the word to other websites and across the Internet. RSS feeds allow you to see when websites add new content. RSS feeds aggregate links to new content e.g. headlines and articles in one place, as soon as they are published, without you having to search for them manually on the Internet.

• **Mash-ups**: mash-ups help to bring a view of the web together for ourselves and others. A mash-up is a web application that combines data from more than one source into a single integrated tool, e.g. using text, photos, videos and audio files.[4]

During the conference, we heard from Prince Deh in Ghana and Ednah Karamagi in Uganda – about how blogging and video blogging (**vlogging**) could play their role in communicating development issues (see Deh and also Karamagi and Nakirya, this issue). Working together through **wikis** and **social networking platforms** was presented by Development Seeds in their description of the systems they had built for development agencies. Oxfam showed how they reach northern audiences through the **social networking platforms** MySpace and Facebook.[5] **Tagging** was described by Euforic in the way they had built an entire website around the **social bookmarking** tool Delicious.[6] Ethan Zuckerman explained how **RSS feeds** were used to bring together different perspectives from around the world into one website, to produce Global Voices (see also Zuckerman, this issue).

## Right hand of Web2forDev: five key approaches

However, these Web 2.0 tools are no use for development if we do not use our right hand of approaches:

• **People**: we need to look at the people we use the tools with and for, considering their needs. Are the tools appropriate?

• **Access**: it is important to remember issues of access, connectivity and language. Who does and does not have access to the tools? Who can or cannot read or listen to the information you want to share using these tools?

• **Participation**: we need to support participation and consider motivations. How do we facilitate participation? Who can or cannot participate, and why?

• **Content**: it is important to consider issues of content (style, media and type). What information is being shared? With whom? For what purposes?

• **Impact**: lastly – and most importantly – none of this is worth while without measuring impact. Are these tools contributing to a positive change of progress and innovation? How do we measure impact?

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[3] For a definition of 'folksonomy' see glossary, p.121 (this issue).
[4] The descriptions for these Web 2.0 tools are adapted from entries in Wikipedia, a free online encyclopaedia that anyone can edit. See: http://en.wikipedia.org

[5] See: www.myspace.com and www.facebook.com
[6] See: http://delicious.com

Throughout the conference participants emphasised how important it is not just to promote the tools but to start with the people involved – and to decide which tools are relevant and necessary. We heard repeatedly how certain tools were better matched than others to different groups of people. One of the most successful tools – considered by some as 'Web 2.0 before Web 2.0' – is DGroups, with over 100,000 registered users. This was not because it was the latest software and most sophisticated tool – but because it matched its users' needs.[7]

## Matching the left and right hands: tools in action at Web2forDev

The final session drew out some lessons learnt from participants at the conference. Participants had been encouraged to write their thoughts and observations on the conference democracy walls.[8] Using these and other comments made in the final workshop, their comments were then summarised and matched against the components of the two hands model.

### Why use Web 2.0 for development?

One participant observed that while a lot of Web 2.0 tools were thought to be for entertainment, they can also be used for business. Ethan Zuckerman (this issue) made the point that because many Web 2.0 tools are in mass use they are difficult to ban. Because so many Internet users want to use these tools for uncontroversial, mainstream social purposes, authorities are reluctant to block access to them. For example, Ethan Zuckerman (this issue) spoke about how the popular photo-sharing website Flickr allows anyone to put captions on their photos to share with others – but this also means that Internet users can use these captions to post politically sensitive texts online, which some governments might otherwise block people's Internet access to.[9] Anriette Esterhuysen (this issue) talked about the trade-offs and benefits of using Web 2.0 for entertainment. From a development perspective, those with sufficient access to them can use the tools to facilitate livelihood benefits. But equally, 'fun' draws users in and provides an interest factor.

A snapshot of participants' comments on one of the Democracy Walls at the Web2forDev conference.



Photo: P. Pirani, Euforic

### Blogs

For many at the conference, blogs allow you to reach as many people as possible with your ideas and use them to highlight unread material (see also Kreutz, this issue). Because bloggers like to link between each others' websites, and because authors tag their comments and blog entries, blogs create useful networks between related websites. Video blogging, or vlogging, seemed particularly useful to civil society organisations because of its immediate visual appeal (see Deh this issue).

### Wikis

The conference wiki provided a way to structure our thoughts in preparing the conference, to provide an annotated schedule during the conference and to form a report after the conference (see also Barth and Rambaldi, this issue). The introductory session the day before the conference showed many how to use this useful tool for the first time. Perhaps the wiki was not used as much as expected by participants to add content, but it certainly became an important reference point. One participant commented that they found the wiki to be 'exciting, immediate, and empowering – everyone has a say'.

### Tags

Participants' observations on tagging materials on the web were more limited than on other tools and approaches. This still seemed to be an area where few of the participants were working. However, the interesting thing was to see how

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[7] DGroups is an online platform offering tools and services for groups and communities interested in international development. See: www.dgroups.org
[8] A democracy wall is a structured open space where people can post their ideas and opinions in a free, focused and concise manner. See *PLA* 58 'Democracy walls' Tips for Trainers (Rambaldi, 2008). Read free online: http://tinyurl.com/c8gkn3
[9] Flickr is a free to use image and video hosting website and online community platform, where users can upload, view and share images and video clips. See www.flickr.com. Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flickr

Internet users use tagging in different ways. For example, Christian Kreutz explained how tagging is used to create non-hierarchical folksonomies. These folksonomies, or collections of popular tagging keywords, emerge as commonly-used words are used over and over again as people 'tag' material they upload to the Internet, and start to use popular keywords used by others to describe similar content.

Another emphasised the opportunities for sharing. 'Tags have a social dimension, organising information better for other searchers who use those keywords.' Taxonomy is normally derived to serve a broader community and has developed to assist classification, avoid ambiguity of items and provide a structured method of retrieval.[10] Tagging allows the author to organise their articles, structure them in a blog, and allows their content to be featured on other websites by any online community that actively seeks content tagged with particular keywords, or tags. Tagging is often used for navigation whilst keywords and taxonomy have emerged for retrieving information.

Participants were encouraged to tag all items related to the conference which they uploaded onto the Internet as 'Web2forDev'.[11] This led to a vast repository of ideas and opinions around the meeting (see also Barth and Rambaldi, this issue). The only issue with this was the need for guidelines to decide the best way the tag could be used.

### Feeds
RSS feeds help to filter the sheer volume of content available online. They aggregate links to new content in one place e.g. headlines and articles, as soon as they are published, without you having to search for them manually on the Internet. Many participants felt there was a need to move to RSS feeds to unlock valuable new content from websites. They also felt that many organisations were resisting using RSS feeds to share new content – and that this was due to a misunderstanding of what – and how – feeds share information. Feeds are a form of marketing and advertise your content to others, because by gathering together links to new content and 'feeding' them to other interested Internet users, this helps bring new audiences to your website. They do not just give content away.

### Mash-ups
Using Web 2.0 tools, 'mash-ups' allow users to combine, restructure and reuse different types of information – and from different sources – that are already available online, such combining maps with text, photos, and/or videos.[12] We saw intriguing examples ranging from websites to maps. One participant made an interesting observation. 'In my mind [these] are all facets of the same phenomenon: that information and presentation are being separated and then restructured in ways that allow for novel forms of reuse.' The key point for the future is how individuals 'mash-up' their own view of content without the need for in-depth technical knowledge. An example of this is a user's personal website start-page. iGoogle is an example we often use on our training courses.[13] For an example of the combined input from blogs, wikis and tagged documents through the use of feeds, see the page opposite.

### People
The people-centred approach was emphasised by comments from two participants in the final wrapping up session.

*It's not about the tools – it's about the people who are connected by these tools.*

Again and again we heard, 'It's all about people'. We should not get lost in the hype over the new technologies. Without the people to generate the content, both the content itself and means of sharing this content/knowledge is meaningless. Web 2.0 tools and information communication technologies (ICTs) in general, are simply sets of tools that when combined with the right approaches can facilitate benefits to both lives and livelihoods.

### Access
However, you still need access to the tools to use them – no matter how useful they are. Access was illustrated in different ways. Time and again, we heard about variable Internet connectivity across Africa and unreliable power supplies – and how both are affected by business and politics. We heard about other key constraints such as language, with so few Web 2.0 tools available in languages other than English. Even where access was possible, people were looking for the key skills of how to encourage participation and build capacity
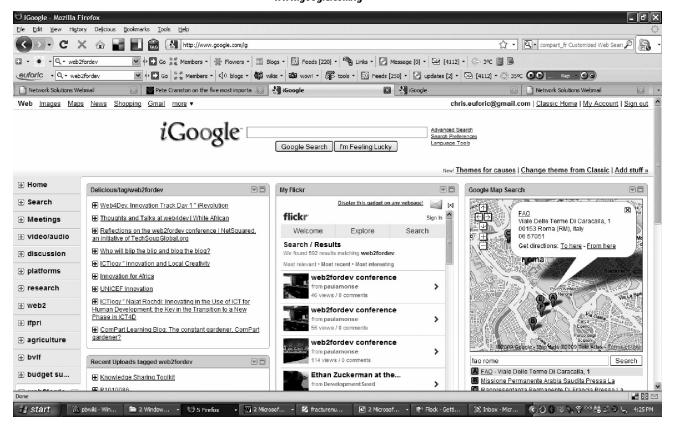
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[10] Taxonomy is the practice and science of classification. A taxonomy is a particular classification arranged in a hierarchical structure. Adapted from source: Wikipedia.
[11] For example, conference participants were encouraged to tag any comments they had written about the conference when writing posts on blogs such as http://blog.web2fordev.net and www.crisscrossed.net. See also Tagging, p.117 (this issue).

[12] For more information on mash-ups, see glossary, p.122 (this issue).
[13] iGoogle is a personalised web start-page. Similiar platforms include Pageflakes or Netvibes. See: www.google.co.uk/ig; www.pageflakes.com; www.netvibes.com.

**An example of a 'mash-up' using iGoogle mash-up software. It uses RSS feeds to gather together links to new and existing content from many different websites in one place. See www.google.com/ig**



for people to participate. One thing that became clear from the conference was the strong role that mobile phones can play in providing this access (see Samii; Okolloh; and also Karamagi and Nakirya, this issue).

## Participation

While many emphasised the important role participation plays in Web 2.0 approaches, some regretted that presentations at the conference did not emphasise this enough. However, it seemed as though that this was the reality for many (although certainly not all) organisations at the time of the conference.[14] While Web 2.0 is also known as 'the participatory web' we need to make a distinction between simply using the 'participatory web' and combining the use of these tools with participatory approaches which generate, collect and share information.

[14] A good example of a participatory online community is the Open Forum on Participatory Geographic Information Systems and Technologies – a vibrant international community of practice which hosts four distinct online discussion lists: Anglophone, Latin American (Spanish), Lusophone (Brazilian) and Francophone. See: www.ppgis.net

## Content

Whatever the new technology, the same concerns about content remain. Some were concerned about how northern information continues to dominate new Web 2.0 services. Others saw the new tools as a way to more readily capture, generate, validate and share local content (see e.g. Karamagi and Nakirya; and Corbett *et al.*, this issue). This worked particularly well for audio and video materials where literacy was less of an impediment to their use. In addition, Web 2.0 tools such as RSS feeds are coming into their own, helping to filter the sheer volume of content available. But the same concerns remain: what content, made and shared by who – and who with? The way we present content will depend so much on the audience we are trying to reach. The new tools provide a completely different way of working, for example allowing many people to work on a document at one time, but there are still times we still need to structure the review and final editing process. Quality, relevance and clarity will still need to be maintained, regardless of the process used, whether using a pencil or Web 2.0 tools.

## Measuring impact: is it worth it?

The discussions running through the conference focused on a need to measure impact – not just in terms of number of visitors to a website, or how many people use Web 2.0 services – but what impact the information has had on their lives.

I think this point is extremely important. It is about the impact these technologies can have on our lives, from sharing information and knowledge to improve our livelihoods, to building social networks and online communities united in a common cause. Positive change is the goal – not just introducing new technologies. We need to put in place monitoring and evaluation to measure how well – and whether – these tools are having the impact that we have sought. Many participants commented on how this could be done. The two techniques most often mentioned in this context were Outcome Mapping approaches and Most Significant Change. Both are monitoring and evaluation methodologies focusing on the changes around the people in a project rather than outputs from the activity such as reports, publications or networks. Outcome Mapping captures changes in what people do differently (behaviours, actions), while Most Significant Change documents how they perceive and appreciate change.[15]

### General conclusions

The general conclusions of the participants in the closing session of the conference stressed the scale of change. So this dialogue was essential. The conference participants were people working in many different aspects of the development sector. And everyone stressed that our approaches to Web 2.0 need to be interdisciplinary. There was particularly

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an emphasis that often anthropology and technology were needed in combination: good practice requires careful consideration of process, inclusion, transparency and accountability. Web 2.0 tools are like any other set of tools – and their selection and use should be based on considerations of power in the process.

Many expressed their enthusiasm to get home and try Web 2.0 approaches. One interesting observation was that participants would still be taking paper home from the conference – noting down email addresses and writing articles on what they had seen – so more traditional forms of communication were not replaced by Web 2.0 tools. In particular, one point resounded with me. Participants needed to experiment to find which tools were appropriate to their situation. There may be a whole array of Web 2.0 tools and opportunities available, but they each match a particular need. And as the story about the hands says, you should be careful how you use them.

We may meet or greet with our hands and different cultures use different gestures. The fingers may represent our tools and approaches, but some combinations may cause offence. Web 2.0 tools should always be supportive of a development action. So when exploring the new web for development, it is useful to remember the toolkit represented by our two hands.

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[15] See Ricardo Ramirez, Impact of Public Access to ICT (IPAI) project wiki: http://tinyurl.com/dz5jat. For information on Outcome Mapping see: www.outcomemapping.ca. For Most Significant Change see: www.mande.co.uk/MSC.htm