Summary of the interview with Viola Krebs from ICVolunteers at www.wsis.org/stocktaking

Regina

Dear Stakeholders, today we would like to present you Viola Krebs, Executive Director of ICVolunteers.

Viola Krebs

It is a pleasure to be here.

Regina

We are very pleased to see you here. The first question will be: what are the main activities and goals of ICVolunteers ?

Viola Krebs

ICVolunteers is an international non-profit organization specialized in the field of communication. It recruits, trains and coordinates volunteers for non-profit projects (conference support, cyber-volunteering, language services), both for its own programs and in the context of support provided to its partners. We work with a network of 12,000 volunteers worldwide.The general objective is to empower individuals and institutions for their development by linking knowledge with needs. Through volunteer effort, we cooperate with organizations in the humanitarian, social, environmental and medical fields to implement projects and conferences at local, national and international levels. Many of the volunteers are cyber-volunteers, meaning individuals who use the Web for their volunteer activity

Regina

Could you give us examples of cyber-volunteers ?

Viola Krebs

Someone who works as a Translator, a Web Developer, an Online Editor...Cyber-volunteers also can work off line, for example as trainers of trainers around computers.

Brieuc de Roquefeuil

Dear Viola, I'm really interested to know how you find your onsite contacts ?

Viola Krebs

Through the network and word to mouth. And then also through specific calls for volunteers when we need particular skills for a given project.

Regina

Is it a difficult task to find the volunteers ?

Viola Krebs

It depends for what. Just the other day we were looking for a Russian interpreter, task which turned out to be much more challenging than anticipated.

Regina

Viola, what kind of projects does your organization implement with regards to ICTs ?

Viola Krebs

E-TIC.net, GreenVoice.info, MigraLingua.org, all linked to communications... linking knowledge with needs.

Chris Hortinela

How has the online model for volunteers worked so far? Are there any unique obstacles to managing a network of online volunteers?

Viola Krebs

It works well for some activities, but of course online will never replace face-to-face contact. With regard to the projects, they all incorporate online and off-line aspects.

Brieuc de Roquefeuil

How can we join your community ?

Viola Krebs

Check out http://www.icvolunteers.org, you will find a link that says "Register".

Davetta

Do you have many volunteers from Africa ? and if so which countries?

Viola Krebs

Yes, we do. In fact, about 30% of all volunteers signed up are from Africa. Countries where we also have projects include Mali, Senegal, South Africa, Uganda, Ghana.

Brieuc de Roquefeuil

Thank you for your link I'm really interested in e-agriculture initiative, could you describe us the E-TIC.net project?

Viola Krebs

Sure. You can actually find an article that was just published about it in the latest ITU publication about Stocktaking:

http://groups.itu.int/Portals/30/documents/WSIS/WSIS_ST_Success_Stories_2011.pdf

The E-TIC project aims to provide tools and training components so that small farmers, herders and fishermen be better able to sell their products. Through the creation of this portal and a series of training courses for field connectors (youth, women, community radio journalists), the E-TIC project aims to provide knowledge relevant for efficient and effective farm management.

Davetta

Are there many active volunteers from countries where the bandwidth is low ?

Viola Krebs

Less so than from countries were connectivity is good. Of course, working in rural areas for example means to use other devises than the Web, e.g. mobile phones.

Chris Hortinela

Have you encountered any instances where the users were illiterate, but were still able to participate in the ICT initiative ?

Viola Krebs

Yes, absolutely. In fact E-TIC.net works mostly with illiterate people, with farmers, herders and fishermen, and then also connectors, meaning individuals who do know who to read and write (be it volunteers or also journalists).

Regina

Viola,What linkage could you figure out between your organization and WSIS process ?

Viola Krebs

ICVolunteers has been involved in WSIS since the very beginning of the process at the regional conference in Bamako in 2002. We were part of the preparatory process. I personally served as a member of the WSIS Civil Society Bureau. We also mobilized conference volunteers for the event (in particular during the Geneva phase of the Summit).

Brieuc de Roquefeuil

What initiative do you feel has been the most successful and why ?

Viola Krebs

Well... not an easy question, because I think different initiatives have had their strengths and weakness. One that got a lot of media attention was Africa@home. It makes it possible for volunteers from around the world to contribute to scientific research by contributing their computer's CPU power. See:

http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/2783/2452

The reason why this project was particularly successful is for one because of its innovation but also because of a strong partnership: CERN, WHO, Swiss Tropical Institute, ICVolunteers, ISF. Thousands of online-volunteers contributed. Several workshops took place, including one in South Africa, with researchers from 20 African countries.

Regina

From which countries or regions do you expect the volunteers the most ?

Viola Krebs

Well... it depends for what. If it is for more local projects in Europe, it would be Switzerland, where our headquarters is located. If it is for a local initiative in Senegal, it would be Senegal. We only rarely send volunteers to other locations. Most of them are local or online.

Chris Hortinela

Does the age of users make any difference in their eagerness to participate in your initiatives ?

Viola Krebs

Motivations change with age, but eagerness can be there for any age. Our oldest volunteer is 89 years old. She is very strong and active. She was more involved in offline activities but 2 years ago bought a computer!

Regina

Viola, you should definitely provide us more information about this volunteer !

Viola Krebs

Ok... she used to work as a designer during her professional career. She speaks 7 languages (or more) and often will staff our info desk. She knows all about good restaurants around the conference center here in Geneva.

Davetta

Are there many countries where people with low bandwidth have access to data and email on their mobile phones?

Viola Krebs

Things are changing quickly. The mobile Web is still too expensive, but I think it will come quickly. SMS still is the most used means of communication, more so than speech.

Gitanjali Sah

What is the procedure for placing volunteers - if an NGO in Asia -say India is in need of volunteers for a specific area, how can they get help of volunteers trained by ICT Volunteers ?

Viola Krebs

The NGO can write to us, describing their organization and what specifically they are looking for.
info@icvolunteers.org

Regina

Viola, what are the main challenges an organization such as ICVolunteers is facing and how do you overcome these ?

Viola Krebs

We never have any lack of projects or ideas... We have many motivated people around the world who would like to contribute to projects and an inclusive information society. Funding is a challenge and an evolving situation with regard to funding is as well. It means that it is necessary to be able to adapt, find new ways to cooperate and work with partners and beneficiaries.

Regina

I am sure that after this interview it will be a lot of people who will be interested to be involved as volunteer with ICVolunteers in the implementation of some projects. We will be glad if you provide us with the projects that are running in Switzerland or Europe.

Viola Krebs

Thank you ! The easiest way for people is to have a look at our website, in general, and the project section, more specifically: http://www.icvolunteers.org and http://www.icvolunteers.org/projects .

Regina

How do you see that ICVolunteers could be integrated in the WSIS and WSIS Stocktaking Process?

Viola Krebs

Given our international network and the many partners we collaborate with, we would like to see in what way we can help ITU reach local projects and give them the necessary visibility they need to succeed. Many good initiatives do exist but some of them may not be visible enough.

Regina

Indeed, I hope together we will be able to make some projects more visible, in the database that we have, there are more than 5000 entries and for sure not every of this initiative is well known.
Thank you Viola for your support and we are looking to further cooperation .

Viola Krebs

I think collective efforts can make it happen. And to have a dynamic team working on Stocktaking is an important start. Thank you Regina and all the others part of the ITU Team.