“ICTs for Development” or “Development for ICTs”?

Opening Address INIT workshop, 12 January 2016
Outline

• ICTs for “development” (ICT4D)
  – But what kind of development?
• ICTs and inequality
• Development for ICTs (D4ICT)
  – The new reality
• Why this matters
• What we might do about it
ICTs for “Development”

What we would all like to believe
ICTs can make a difference

- Enabling access to vast amounts of information
- Globally connected networks
- Contributing significantly to economic growth
- The internet as a profoundly democratising vehicle
- The ubiquity of mobile devices
  - Individual, anywhere, anytime
- Social media
  - Enabling new forms of social interaction
Largely an economic view of development

But Internet also has important social and political implications
“Development” as growth?

• The hegemonic view: to eliminate poverty
  – Economic growth
  – Democracy
  – Washington Consensus (1990)

• Institutionalised by
  – Global institutions
    • World Bank, IMF, UN agencies...
  – International agreements
    • MDGs, World Summit on the Information Society...
  – Academic research
  – The international ODA system
    • Donor and recipient governments

• Dominant in recent Sustainable Development Goals
“Development” as growth?

• Economic growth will lift people above the $1.25 a day threshold
  – Now $1.90 a day (UN October 2015)
• Need for good governance and democracy
  – So that growth can occur
  – Little to do with this being “right”
• Based on absolute notions of poverty
  – Greater GDP
• Growth and the symbolic modern
  – Typified by ICTs
But growth increases the potential for inequality

Even in the richest societies...
Increasing global inequality

GAP BETWEEN RICH AND POOREST WIDEST SINCE THE NINETIES

The gap between rich and poor is at its highest since the 1990s and is growing – with children hit hardest, according to our new report, Born Equal, published today.

Thursday 1 November 2012

In some countries, the gulf between the richest and poorest families has increased by up to 179% over the past two decades according to the findings of Born Equal.

What's more, the gap between rich and poor children has grown by 35% and in some countries more than twice the numbers of poor children

http://unwin.wordpress.com
Global inequality: Gini Coefficient c. 2013


http://unwin.wordpress.com
Changes in Gini Coefficient 1980-2010

More or less unequal
Gini coefficient*, % change in inequality 1980-2010†


http://unwin.wordpress.com
ICTs and increasing inequality

The reality
Mobile subscriptions per 100 people

Mobile ‘phone subscriptions per 100 inhabitants (Source: ITU, 2013)

Source: Rachel Strobel based on ITU data, 2013

http://unwin.wordpress.com
Internet users per 100 people

Internet users per 100 inhabitants (Source: ITU, 2013)

- Developed Countries
- Developing Countries
- Least Developed Countries (LDCs)

Source: Rachel Strobel based on ITU data, 2013

http://unwin.wordpress.com
Internet usage 2012


http://unwin.wordpress.com
ICTs and inequality

• ICTs are an accelerator
  – Those who have access to the latest technology will achieve greatest benefits
  – Those without will be left further behind

• Imagine the differences
  – between what you can do with latest smartphone with access to the Internet
  – and an old 2G phone

• When ‘everyone’ has basic Internet access, the rich will have a new generation of advantageous technology
Development for ICTs (D4ICT)

The idea of “Development” being used to promote expansion of ICT sector
“Development” for ICTs

• The idea of “Development” is now increasingly being used as a driver and legitimation of ICT expansion, especially
  – Broadband connectivity
  – Mobile connectivity
  – Structural change in regulation

• Reflects a complex set of interests
  – Private sector
  – Governments
  – Civil Society
Private sector interests

- Two fundamental drivers
  - Market expansion into emerging economies
  - Lowering production costs
- Pilots, going to scale and sustainability
  - Pilots showing “development” potential
  - Expecting governments and donors to pay for roll out
- But pilots usually never designed to go to scale
- Engagement in global ICT governance agendas
- The “next billion” rather than the “bottom billion”
  - Or rather, the “First billion"

http://unwin.wordpress.com
2015 State of Broadband

• 4.2 billion people do not enjoy regular access to the Internet
  – 57% of world’s population
• Internet growth is slowing
• In 48 LDCs over 90% do not have any kind of Internet connectivity
  – At least 20 countries have <5% individuals using Internet
  – Pakistan: 13.8% use Internet; 5.1% mobile broadband use
• Private sector is increasingly worried about slowdown

http://unwin.wordpress.com
Civil society interests

- Civil society often seen as without question being “good”
  - But in reality as many internal contradictions and challenges as other sectors
- Often uses the idea of ICTs contributing to “Development” as a means to gain funding
  - Needs to generate revenue to maintain existing staff and interests
  - Real issues around ICT and Ebola in West Africa in 2015
- “Development” used as a means through which ICT projects can be funded
  - Assumes “innocently” that ICTs will necessarily bring positive impacts

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Government interests

• Politicians want to be re-elected
  – Hence delivering “hard”, visible “kit” is seen as being highly desirable
  – ICTs also encapsulate the idea of modernity
  – ICTs ideal for delivering traditional largesse

• Civil servant potential for personal gain
  – From “share” of lucrative contracts
  – From attending international events
  – Sweeteners and inducements
Why does this matter?

Not just because of economic arguments
Why the link between ICTs and inequality matters

• ICTs become a means in themselves rather than for their contribution to development
  – Growing evidence that ICTs may not be the best vehicle for effective “development”

• Growing inequality is dangerous
  – Socially
  – Politically

• The dark side of ICTs
  – Crime, violence, anti-social behaviours

• Governments should have the interests of all citizens in mind
  – This is never the remit of the private sector
What should we do about it?

The next session: how can we reclaim ICTs for “development”