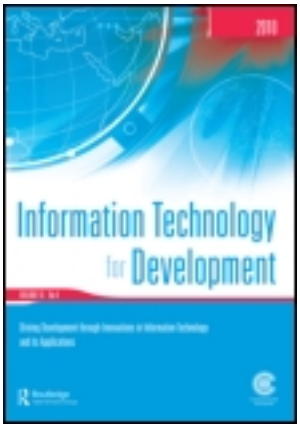

Information Technology for Development

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/titd20

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Published online: 03 Mar 2010.

To cite this article: Sajda Qureshi (2007): Information technology innovations for development, Information Technology for Development, 13:4, 311-313

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/itdj.20080

Information Technology Innovations for Development

Editorial Introduction

Sajda Qureshi
Editor-in-Chief

Information Technology Innovations for Development: Facilitating Private Enterprise With Institutional Reform

Information Technology (IT) for development research thus far has considered the application of information and communication technologies to improve the lives of people with low incomes who have limited access to services such as healthcare, education and sanitation. While this definition still remains useful, a broader range of contributions have been made to help us understand how IT supports core processes or does IT contribute to the creation of new processes for healthcare provision, business development or even industries such as tourism? Under what conditions can IT implementations deter efforts to apply IT for economic, social or even human development? According to theorists, economic development is fueled by technical innovations that increase the efficiency with which entrepreneurship takes place (Schumpeter 2002, Ohara 1994). Innovations in IT for development appear to be most apparent in the new ways in which IT can be used to support small businesses. In particular, the use of IT by entrepreneurs appears to follow disruptive innovation processes proposed by Christensen (2000) when applied to micro-enterprises (Wolcott et al., 2007). This raises further questions of what conditions need to be created to enable IT implementations to bring about measurable improvements in people's lives? The articles in this issue consider the different ways in which IT is applied, the obstacles that prevent countries from taking advantage of these opportunities and what can be done to assist in IT for developments efforts. Innovations to enable IT for development entail 1) new ways of applying IT, 2) new products to support unique ways of life, 3) new methods to assess development outcomes, and 4) new skill sets and knowledge for businesses and governments to use. These innovations in IT can potentially increase the opportunities available to achieve development outcomes.

Building the capacity of a country to use IT for development remains a unique challenge because of the multiple factors associated with that country. The first article is by Mariyam Adam and Cathy Urquhart and is entitled "IT Capacity Building in Developing Countries: A Model of the Maldivian Tourism Sector." This article suggests that lack of IT skills and human capital are a significant obstacle to the successful implementation of IT projects in developing countries. The model discussed in this article draws on theories of knowledge management, and social and human capital, and has been developed for research in the tourism sector in the Maldives. The model is grounded in some preliminary findings from

Information Technology for Development, Vol. 13 (4) 311–313 (2007)
Published online in Wiley InterScience (www.interscience.wiley.com).

DOI: 10.1002/itdj.20080

their study of the Maldivian tourism sector. The authors draw some initial conclusions about the role of the national context, social capital, knowledge sharing and geographical isolation when considering IT capacity building for that sector. The model also makes a wider contribution in focusing on an under-researched issue, IT capacity building in developing countries, and by bringing some useful theoretical perspectives to bear on the problem.

The growth of the Internet can also increase the marginalization of the world's poor unless steps are taken to ensure they too get access, or they may get left behind in the Internet economy. There appears to be a social gap between those who have access to the basic social services such as education and their effects on development of communities that are often rural. While the disenfranchised may not be served by the growth of the Internet, this divide brings to light problems of exclusion from the knowledge economy where know-how replaces land and capital as the basic building blocks of growth (Norris 2001, World Bank 2003). The second article in this issue by Allam Ahmed addresses this issue by investigating the open source movement as it relates to development in Africa. This article entitled "Open Access Towards Bridging the Digital Divide: Policies and Strategies for Developing Countries" suggests that Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) hold the promise for development by connecting people to more accurate and up to date sources of information and knowledge. However, the evidence so far shows that the benefits accrued from the utilisation of ICTs have been inequitably distributed with most developing countries facing the prospect of being marginalized. The question addressed by this article is will Open Access solve Africa's information famine and help the continent bridge the digital divide? This article aims to assess and evaluate the Open Access Movement (OA) as a proposed solution to avoid the restrictions over accessing scientific knowledge in Africa. It outlines the problems that can be observed and what opportunities for building OA in Africa are available. Finally, the article concludes with a discussion of strategic and policy implications of these findings for bridging the digital divide while building OA in Africa.

The third article in this issue is by Honest Kimaro and Sundeep Sahay and is entitled "Analyzing Processes of Decentralization around Healthcare Systems in Developing Countries: An Institutional Perspective." This article suggests that attempts to decentralize Health Information Systems (HISs) are ongoing in various developing countries as a part of health sector reforms. Donor communities in particular have often insisted on decentralization of health care systems as a mechanism to encourage quality and sustainability of health services and availability of timely resources at local levels by removing layers of bureaucracy. The decentralization of HISs along with the system of health care delivery is emphasized to support the efficiency and management of health services by incorporating local use of information in decision making and planning. However, these goals of decentralization are not easily achieved because of the complexity of the institutional context in which the decentralization is being carried out. Drawing from institutional theory, the authors study the process of decentralizing a HIS in Tanzania. They identify three key sets of institutional influences on the HIS originating from the political administrative, health management and health service delivery systems. Through an ongoing empirical analysis, they identify the gaps between the formal rules that govern the reform process and the informal constraints which operate on the ground. The existence of these gaps, contributes to the ineffective results obtained through the reform process. The authors emphasize the need for both vertical and horizontal alignment as an approach to addressing these gaps in the future.

The fourth article in this issue is by Mario Spremic and Vlatka Hlupic entitled "Development of e-commerce in Croatia: A Survey." This article considers the main issues related to e-commerce by presenting the results of a large survey carried out in 116 Croatian companies. The objective of this survey was to investigate the current practices related to development and implementation of e-commerce in Croatia. The results obtained indicate that the amount of investment in e-commerce projects is still very low in Croatian companies. Furthermore, it was discovered that although the potential benefits of e-commerce development were ranked very high by Croatian managers, it became apparent that the e-commerce projects were predominantly focused on simple and static Web sites development in the form of on-line catalogues. Furthermore, this research has revealed that Croatian government's efforts to promote e-commerce are not producing desired results at organizational levels, and one of the contributing factors to this is top managers relatively low awareness of the importance and potential benefits of e-commerce. The results of this study are likely to have wider implications both for research and practice of implementing e-commerce in the context of developing regions.

The "View From Practice" article of this issue is by Charles Kenny, Robert Schware and Eliud Williams and is entitled "The Impact of Reform on Telecommunications Prices and Services in the Countries of the OECS." The abbreviation OECS stands for the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States which are Dominica, St. Kitts & Nevis, Grenada, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent who established a common regulatory framework for their telecommunications sector. The authors report on the impact of the Eastern Caribbean Telecommunications Authority (ECTEL) established in 1998. This is the first regional telecommunications regulatory authority in the world to facilitate the harmonization of the regulatory regime. The authority was established under treaty with the support of the OECS Telecommunications Reform Project, financed by the World Bank. The reform has increased competition and expanded services to provide increasing access and promoted growth in the mobile market. The macroeconomic impact has been to stimulate foreign direct investment and employment in the telecommunication and ICT sectors. While high speed internet access is only available in some parts of the islands, the technical capacity is growing and, backed by political leaders, has enabled prices to be lowered and the quality of telecommunications services to improve.

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