The ICTD2010 Pre- Conference Wiki discussion Summary

The ICTD2010 Pre- Conference Wiki discussion session served as a space for engagement on the reflections of papers submitted to the preconference wiki. The discussion was segmented into two main sessions, the first dealing with bridging the divide between practitioners and researchers and the second; ICT as a tool versus ICT in a social political context and as 'alternative spaces'.

Session 1

The purpose of this particular session was to have a discussion on how to bridge the divide between Practitioners and Researchers In ICTD.

This divide being a contributor to the status quo in ICTD research where we see irrelevant research executed technically well and good interventions that 'hide' the knowledge quest that lead to successful interventions.

In the field of ICTD all researchers have a 'practitioner' inside and all practitioners have a 'researcher' inside.

It is important to write in such a way that you can 'show' and not merely 'tell about'. All successful interventions are based on valid research, and this contradicts the idea that practitioners are not researchers.

What can practitioners do to come and meet the researchers half way? What can researchers do to come and meet the practitioners half way?

The concept of the 'reflexive practitioner' and the 'action researcher' can be helpful.

An element in the divide between researchers and practitioners is a divide in the language they both use. For there to be a bridge, there has to be a shared language and this language has to be useful to both.

A good description of a case has sets of implicit theories: Mid Range theory asks the following questions: What works? For whom,

And added to that can be asked: What did not work? And why did it work or not?

There is no framework for understanding the influence and use of ICTs: But it is people who use ICTs for a purpose and hence ICT use, ICTD and ICT policy is about people with a purpose.

there is no feedback from practitioners on ICTD interventions in terms of process, peoples' perceptions, experiences, the outcomes, and the impact.

In the absence of that understanding, the field of ICT policy, and ICTD and therefore ICTD research can be over powered, dominated and defined by powerful parties that have a lot to gain like the corporates (money) and the governments (control) have their purpose met. So they do not see the need for policies. Difference with other governments would be a matter of degree not essentially different.

Session 2

ICT as a Tool versus ICT in a social political context and as 'alternative spaces'.

Two main ideas came to the fore: ICTs are tools and as tools they meet real peoples' needs in real ways.

But they are also much more than tools. ICTs are and are not tools because they affect the spaces in which we exist; they can become a parallel universe; a new social economic environment; a third space with economic and social and cultural spaces within it. It can be

argued therefore that it is important for us to name 'it' appropriately because how we name it will affect how we interact within it.

ICTs are tools that can be used to disrupt the current paradigms of injustice, we can grow the technology and economy of developing countries by technological deployments, use certain tools to influence, for instance the mapping of Kibera, Kenya that took place and the way how that was used by the community for their own use: in that sense ICT is very much a tool.

ICT innovations are not only technical, even they are in first instance technical, they are also social and we must put them in a larger framework.

People may be trained to use technology within their context but what is the relationship with policy? ICT only becomes more than a tool when it is connected to policy. ICTs cannot be sustainable if they are not grounded within a wider framework that is political.

Importing technology and making people adapt to imported technology may misdirect the fulfilment of real social needs: creating needs that you do not have. What is a real basic need?

ICTD has not developed an agenda yet; it is in its infancy. We are at the point where we can create something new, create a new world but then we have to look at the whole picture and frame it in a wider political perspective: otherwise we will just entrench the old power fault lines of poverty, education, gender, etc.

Information is not knowledge; Yet you need to have knowledge to make the information on the Internet useful to you.

With literacy you also develop cognitive skills, which are necessary to really empower yourself through the use of ICTs. Therefore it is not viable to design ICT tools that 'skip' literacy. Simple ICT tools could be an entry point to the more complex ones.

We need to build in the consciousness that ICTs are not merely tools.

Participants included;
1. Kiss Abraham (GRACE, Zambia)
2. Khaled Abuarja (Gulf Business Machine, Quatar)
3. Andreas Bollinger (ict4d.at, Austria)
4. Gloria Bonder (Gender, Society and Policies Area; UNESCO Chair on Gender, Argentina)
5. Ineke Buskens (GRACE, South Africa)
6. Michael Downey (Indiana University, USA)
7. Hamish Frazer (Harvard and Partners in Health, USA)
8. Pamela Maclean (Dadamac, London)
9. Jonathan Marks (Critical Distance, The Netherlands)
10. Blasio Douglas Namale. Map Kibera Trust and Kibera Journal (Kenya)
11. Ahmed Muhammad (Sudan)
12. Matt Smith (IDRC, Canada)
13. Florian Sturm (ict4d.at, Austria)
14. Vivian Sunsed (Dominican Republic)
15. Philip Tigo (SODNET, Kenya)