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Call for Papers for special issue

Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D): The Next Grand Challenge for IS Research

Guest editors

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Background

Research in ICT4D delves into the complexities and debates surrounding the role of ICTs in the development of low and middle income countries (LMICs) (referred to as “the south” in development literature). The literature on conceptual and theoretical frameworks in ICT4D, as well as empirical research seeks to understand the challenges provided by the socio-political context in which ICTs are used in LMICs. The concerns are not just technical, but also include social, organizational, economic, legal and ethical aspects. The overarching question that lie at the heart of ICT4D research is “are ICTs contributing to development, or in the words of Geoff Walsham “are they creating a better world in which we live?”

“Mainstream” IS research, on the other hand, typically focusses on the managerial concerns of how IT supports, enables and influences the effectiveness and competitiveness of enterprises, typically located in developed countries from North America and Europe (referred to as “the north” in development literature). While in current times, other countries like India, China and Brazil have also gained the attention of mainstream research efforts, the focus is typically not on development-related concerns, even where the research is located in a LMIC. Mainstream research concerns are typically driven by needs of

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expanding efficiencies, how new and emerging technologies promise new benefits, what challenges exist to adopt them, and the benefits that accrue (or not).

From the preceding sketches, it is quite easy to get the impression that the ICT4D and mainstream IS research represent diverse areas with little in common. While both research areas may be thought of having originated in the developed world, in evolution they have taken distinctly diverse paths. Mainstream IS research concerns have primarily remained those of the developed world (the “north”) while ICT4D by definition took the developing world (the “south”) as its empirical setting. Research communities in each have evolved along those lines with separate conferences and publication outlets. Even when mainstream IS has shifted its research gaze on the LMICs, the locus of interest has remained on the concerns of the developed countries. Outsourcing research is a prime example. Although conducted mostly in LMICs, the perspective has been the benefits derived for enterprises in developed countries.

We would contend that this view comprises a false separation between developed countries and LMICs, to the detriment of both. This separation denies us all the vast potential for synergistic learning in a variety of research settings, developed or not. Take, for example, the topic of eGovernment, where research focusses on how ICT can, or has the potential to, transform the relationship between government and citizens. Specifically, research looks at issues related to better provision of services to citizens, better governance and increasing citizen participation. While a vast body of research exists in eGovernment, the empirical setting has been mainly the developed countries. However, there is much to be learnt from eGovernment research in the LMICs that can be applied to developed countries. LMICs are rapidly adopting eGovernment initiatives. These are often out of necessity (admittedly, there are other motivations such as “modernising” or sheer influence of funding and aid agencies). The weaker and different socio-economic context of the LMICs, often coupled with a less open and relatively unstable political climate has fostered many innovative approaches to eGovernment. Innovations in the developing world are happening in other areas as well, driven to a great extent by mobile technology. For example, Kenya has been leading the world in mobile payments for almost a decade – technologies for which are just about to take shape in the US and Europe.

The more developed countries can learn much from this. Moreover, there are sizable pockets of underdeveloped areas within the developed world – developed countries still need to address extreme social deprivation in some urban and rural settings. At the very least, the more complex context in such underdeveloped areas and LMICs provides a rich arena for theory building and theory-testing for IS researchers. The transformational potential of ICT could initiate fundamental and structural changes, which could increase our understanding of the role of the intertwined relationships between ICTs, organizations and society.

This potential for cross-fertilization has not gone unnoticed. There have been some ad hoc attempts to bring synergies between these two domains of research. For example, in 2005, the IFIP 9.4 (on Social Implications of Computers in Developing Countries) and IFIP 8.2 (Organizational Implications of ICTs) held a joint conference in Athens, Greece in order to develop such synergies. The establishment of The AIS special group on Global Development (SIGGlobDev) is a further step in this direction. With the same aims, there have been special issues of mainstream IS journals like *MIS Quarterly* and *Information Society* relating to IS in developing countries. Such efforts, which have been too few, have been unable to create the required momentum for the two research domains to mutually contribute systemically. The interest on ICT4D has remained minimal in mainstream IS.

This objective of this special issue is to stimulate and re-ignite this interest by advocating ICT4D as the next great challenge for IS research. Effects of emerging technologies, such as mobile telephones, have a huge impact in LMICs. This offers an exciting setting for *reverse innovation* whereby the lessons abstracted from research in ICT4D can offer great insights for IS research in general. Accordingly, we invite papers that examine the mutual synergy and cross-fertilization potential between ICT4D and mainstream IS research. Papers must have LMICs or underdeveloped areas in the developed world as a primary focus. They must emphasize how ICTs can foster development, and how the lessons learnt can inform and transform mainstream IS research. We invite both empirical and conceptual papers such as case studies of IS initiatives in developing countries, theoretical and conceptual frameworks and essays on how ICT4D research can inform general IS research.

Topics include, but are not limited to:

- Empirical studies of ICT initiatives in LMICs
- Novel theoretical and conceptual frameworks around ICT4D
- Essays on the role of ICT in shaping the future of development
- Potential and realization of mobile communication to development
- Theoretical premises for studying ICT4D
- Critical analysis of literature on the changing landscape of ICT4D research
- Potentials and challenges relating to emerging ICTs and data for development
- Methodological contributions towards cross-country research
- Analysis of ICT applications in emerging development issues relating to human displacement, disease epidemics, conflicts, security and peace
- How social media are used to support social and political organisations in LMICS, and what we can learn from those contexts

Revised Critical dates

Submission of one-page abstracts (optional)	Past due
Feedback on abstracts	Past due
Submission of full papers	January 30, 2016
Decision on first round of reviews	March 26, 2016
Submission of revised papers	June 25, 2016
Decision on second round of reviews	August 27, 2016
Final decision	October 22, 2016
Submission of final version	December 24, 2016
Planned publication	2017

We also plan to hold a development workshop for those authors who are invited to submit a revised paper after the first round of reviews. The time and date will be announced in due course.

Submission Instructions

Abstracts should be submitted directly to the Special Issue editors (sundeep.sahay@yahoo.com) with full papers submitted to the JAIS Manuscript Central system (mc.manuscriptcentral.com/jais). Please indicate in your cover letter that your manuscript is for the “ICT4D” Special Issue.

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