

From ICT for Development to ICT for Human Flourishing: A shift from top-down ICT enabled development practices to bottom-up approaches on ICT implementations

Success stories from grassroots and indigenous communities' approach to ICT in Mexico

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Abstract

The advances achieved in microelectronics and telecommunications in the 1990s, and the efforts made towards a transition from Internet 1.0 to Internet 2.0 in the early 2000s, have made Information and communication technology (ICT) ubiquitous. As people are eager to continuously generate and consume digital information through contemporary online platforms, there is a prevalent idea of living within a global Information Society (InSoc), where digital transactions and economic development are closely interlinked.

Owing to the assumed strong relationship between ICT and economic development, as set out in the InSoc paradigm, global institutions and governments worldwide have proposed institutionalised top-down ICT projects as a measure to simultaneously bridge socioeconomic inequality and the digital divide, in the form of numerous ICT for development (ICT4D) projects.

Despite these efforts, claims ITU-T, more than 40 percent of the world's population has no access to internet in the year 2020. Moreover, according to the World Bank, close to 46 percent of the world's population lives on less than \$5.50 USD a day and close to 26 percent lives with less than \$3.2 USD a day. In both cases, the most severely affected populations are located in the global south. In spite of

adverse conditions, there are documented successful bottom-up ICT implementations in the global south.

This research aims to contribute to the field of ICT4D with a general postcolonial overview on what it takes to locally and successfully trigger and implement ICT among grassroots. By doing so, this research expects to provide further knowledge on diverse approaches to ICT that could eventually bridge the digital divide in the world.

For this goal to be achieved, first of all, the reasoning behind the construct of the Information Society and its feasibility worldwide will be critically analysed. Secondly, the narratives that triggered the interest in ICT as a means for economic development will be put forward. Thirdly, an assessment on whether the global expectations and guidelines on ICT4D have resulted in successful ICT implementations in Mexico — in terms of user's acceptance and technological adequacy — will be presented. Fourthly, the effect that the country's cultural diversity has on the idiosyncrasy of the population, and how both elements can affect institutional ICT planning, will be explored.

Moving on towards an exploratory stage of the research, seven anthropological case studies of successful bottom-up ICT practices initiated by grassroots and indigenous populations to protect their culture, improve their quality of life or to target indigenous users as majority users will be presented. Through these, the plausibility of bottom-up approaches for ICT projects being a means to support cultural preservation, cultural continuity and reduce social inequality in the country will be assessed.

As a last stage of the research, the need to rethink ICT4D will be expressed as the base for further theory building. Thus, instead of focusing on economic development, a Human Rights Based Approach regarding ICT as a means to pursue self-agency, human flourishing and ethical values — such as happiness, penetrating wisdom, optimal well-being, together with authentic love and compassion — will be proposed. Moreover, Martha Nussbaum's Capabilities Approach will be put forward to draft a framework for ICT projects and practices that could enable alternative voices and critical perspectives from grassroots and to delineate a bottom-up approach to ICT for self-agency and human flourishing.