

CIDC2006 Conference Paper Abstract details

Title:

Developing a CI Based Theory of ICT for Development (ICT4D) Sustainability

Abstract:

Developing a CI Based Theory of ICT4D Sustainability In this paper, I present for your comment and feedback, a Doctoral research project, currently in progress, on the topic of ICT for Development (ICT4D). The goal of my research is to determine whether, by adopting a community informatics approach to community based ICT4D projects, the sustainability of such projects can be significantly improved through by leveraging social capital as distinct from economic capital. A secondary goal is to determine whether this process can make ICT4D more inclusive, that is, sustainable by more marginalised communities, so that the contribution which ICT makes to development is increased overall. The theoretical frame of reference for ICT4D research and literature has been primarily techno-economic, that is, how to derive economic benefits from ICT and how to make community ICT economically sustainable. Community informatics challenges the techno-economic based approach to ICT4D in favour of an approach based on a theory of the social shaping of technology, that is, that society influences technology rather than the other way around. It is the social capital of a community that then becomes more important in sustaining ICT initiatives for community development. The paper has three parts. In the first part I overview the literature relating to this topic and extract key research questions relating to: - the role of community informatics in enhancing ICT4D sustainability; - the relevance of existing social structures at a community level for ICT4D project success vs externally imposed techno-centric structures; and - the implications of a bottom-up, community driven ICT4D agenda for national policy, the ICT industry, and measuring the contribution of ICT to development. In the second part I present, in terms of the key research questions, a critique of a community project and country case study with which I am very familiar as the Vice President and Project Manager of the NGO conducting this project (www.microdevpartners.org). The aim of the project is to pilot a specially developed curriculum for English as a Second Language integrated with Computer Literacy for Grade 1 and 2 children in remote village schools in Sri Lanka. This project has not explicitly followed a CI model and is presented critically to identify current challenges and how it can be enhanced using a CI approach. In the third and final part of the paper I outline an emerging theory of ICT4D which is anchored in the social paradigm of technology as distinct from the techno-economic paradigm.

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