

Networking Development

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***Knowledge Economy:
Integrating ICT in Development Programmes***

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Given just ten minutes here to offer my perspective,
I'll be terse and use some verse to make it more effective.

My point is not original, in fact it's rather trite:
“Integrating ICT” is hard to expedite.
It takes far more than funding, or technology galore;
Development requires us to deal with so much more.
It calls not just for strategy, but networking for action;
ICTs* for MDGs** take global interaction.

With ICT, we often see a tendency to dream,
That ICTs transform with ease, their impacts so supreme,
That basic human challenges evaporate before them,
And thus in plans for ICT, too often we ignore them.

But if it is *development* that truly drives our actions,
All these other challenges cannot just be distractions.
Otherwise, we simply spread technology on top,
As if, like fertilizer, it will stimulate the crop.
Politics and culture still remain a human fixture,
So “Integrating ICT” involves a complex mixture.

* ICTs = Information & Communications Technologies.

** MDGs = Millennium Development Goals, a comprehensive set of objectives for global development endorsed at the UN Millennium Summit in August/September 2000 by more than 100 Heads of State.

Globalization Mobilization

The first point has to do with how development has shifted;
How far from national control development has drifted.
Indeed, I think it's critical to recognize how much
Global change can rearrange development as such.

"National development" is now an oxymoron,
A verbal contradiction that we dare not "bet the store" on.
Global pressures so transform the context and conditions,
That governments are placed in quite untenable positions.

They try to "call the shots", but they don't always hold the trigger;
Development depends on how they mesh with something bigger.
Their terms of trade, the deals they've made, their regional reliance,
Their ways of getting capital, their IMF compliance.

These things intrude with magnitude, they limit every option;
So not all possibilities are open for adoption.
It's not just that resources may be scarce or non-existent;
But rather, outside actors may be openly resistant.

And so to do development takes constant interactions,
With those beyond their borders with a stake in their transactions.
Donors and diasporas, and bankers and investors,
Tourists wanting safer streets and human rights protesters.

Vendors with a vision that requires major buying,
And lenders whose decisions raise the cost of not complying.
None of these constituents can really be ignored,
And yet some things they want, not even rich states can afford.

And so to do development takes global integration,
Involvement with a range of actors well beyond each nation.
Development depends, for MDG-based satisfaction,
On quantities and qualities of networked interaction.

National (ICT for Development) Challenges

The second basic point is that the use of ICT,
Depends upon an underlying issue *pot pourri*.
A set of basic challenges that leaders must address,
If ICT can ever be the source of real success.

Armed with good technology and money to apply it,
Even able leadership can fall short when they try it.
Unless their strategies address a range of basic factors,
ICT will be like pretty dresses on bad actors.

1. First is **infrastructure** and the costs of network uses,
The subject of an endless string of telecom excuses.
I have worked for telcos, both in Hong Kong and the States:
I know the basic business and incentives it creates.
I also know how seldom we have seen the planned transition,
Predicted by the classic case for telco competition.
We need more local strategies to access and amend
That network on which other forms of ICT depend.
2. The second set of issues has to do with **applications**,
The content and performance of those core configurations
That multiply our competence in using information,
Facilitating impact through enhanced communication.
Culture issues often cause technologies to stumble,
Communications falter when communicators mumble.
And “open source” of course becomes a core consideration,
Since lifetime software value varies with the situation.
3. The third important set of implementing implications,
Has to do with all the **enterprise** considerations.
ICT can change how institutions will perform,
As long as long as institutions change behavior from the norm.
People must amend each major modus operandi
For ICT through strategy to really come in handy.
And pilot trials of ICT are always bound to fail,
Unless they generate a source of revenue to scale.
4. The fourth set has to with basic governance decisions,
Starting with the need for certain **policy** revisions.
These won't be effective, they will meet too much resistance,
If they are propounded from on high or from a distance.
Likewise, strong e-government cannot be overplanned,
It has to be responsive to real citizen demand.
Using ICT to simply issue information,
Likely will not lead to citizen participation.
5. The fifth set has to do with the **capacity** of persons;
The wider set of skills without which hope for impact worsens.
Using ICT takes not just engineering courses,
But finance, project management and, yes, human resources.

It also takes the building of a “culture” over time,
Across the many sectors that must orchestrate the climb.
Involving universities, commercial operators,
Official types and NGO’s (on both sides of Equators).

Each of these sets illustrates the context of our chore,
The deeper transformations--not collateral, but core.
Integrating ICT is therefore strongly wedded
To dealing with those challenges with which it is embedded.

Global (Networking) Opportunities

Which brings me to my final point, right back to where I started,
The course I see for ICT; the viewpoint I imparted.
For if I’m right, development needs global executions;
Facilitating networks that assist in real solutions.

But more than mere connections, social ties or demonstrations,
Networks, as I mean them, are long-term collaborations.
Trained, attained, sustained, ingrained—not casual and distant.
Relationships of depth, more personal and more persistent.

Seldom, absent crisis, do we see this kind of bonding,
It takes far more than web sites or just emails corresponding.
Real networks need a purpose well beyond communications,
These networks must be driven by a drive toward applications.

As one naïve American who seldom gets to Paris,
I hesitate to lecture, and I hope I won’t embarrass:
But networking, *like love*, needs more than casual liaison,
Its *raison d’etre*, its goal, *peut etre*, its underlying *raison*,
Is building strong relationships that people can depend on,
That donors will rely on and investors want to spend on.

Too often, through the Internet, our links are far too shallow,
The courtship may be torrid, but the climax all too fallow.
We must afford the cord that real development demands;
We dare not do our networking like trysts or one-night stands.
And thus, creating networks in themselves is not the end,
But something instrumental on which deeper goals depend.

The **IeDRN**¹ is one such valuable proposal,
A global resource network to put skills at wide disposal;
Managed by a team that sees its value in providing,
Customized support that's both supportive and abiding.

Yet networks of this kind are not a substitute for meeting,
So distant interactions won't be tenuous and fleeting.
Strategies of ICT deserve global exposure,
To get the outside actors to engage and come to closure.

The rich world should not say that bold "e-strategies" are needed,
And then largely ignore them once these countries have proceeded.
Their ICT development agendas need reactions,
Reviews and recommended changes leading on to actions.

Collective conversations on the choices countries make,
Resulting in commitments to the strategies at stake.
Focusing on MDG's, not metrics of machinery,
As if just spreading ICT will fertilize the greenery.
Perhaps part of our purpose should be getting ICT
Into poverty reduction programs: those PRSPs.²

For all these fancy acronyms come down to real engagement—
Do we meet for action, or for rich-world guilt assuage-ment?
Let us not delude ourselves that ICT productions,
Of "PowerPoint pointisme" or "Web-footed" introductions,
Can substitute for solving underlying implications:
Or thinking high-tech gadgets sweep away deep deprivations.

Technology cannot just be a clever coat of paint;
That may look futuristic, but development, it ain't.
For--lest I have confused you with my rhyming elocutions--
"Networking development" means networking solutions.

¹ IeDRN = International e-Development Resource Network, an initiative of the Canadian government growing out of the G-8 Digital Opportunity Task Force (the "DOT Force").

² PRSPs = Poverty Reduction Strategy Programs, required in order to qualify for major debt relief by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.