

Research Proposal Diploma Thesis
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The Impact of Information and Communication Technologies on Development - A Comparative Case Study of South African ICT4D Projects -

„The new technologies that are changing our world are not a panacea or a magic bullet. But they are, without doubt, enormously powerful tools for development.”

Kofi Annan

Introduction

With the “Digital Revolution” in developed (industrialized) countries during the mid-nineties, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have gained immense significance and today have a huge impact on politics, business and in private everyday life.

This development has also continued in international cooperation, especially international development – opening up a new field mostly labeled “Information and Communication Technologies for Development (ICT4D)”. In 2000, the United Nations agreed in their “Millennium Declaration” to achieve eight so-called Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015, with goal number eight aiming at the development of “a global partnership for development.” One of the targets here is to “make available the benefits of new technologies - especially information and communications technologies.”¹ Moreover, since the “World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)” 2003 in Geneva, Switzerland and 2005 in Tunis, Tunisia, questions concerning this field are being discussed internationally even more than they were before.

Also, facing greater needs to legitimize international cooperation in donor countries, questions about impact assessment and sustainability of development projects gain dramatic importance.² Since technologies, in particular information and communication technologies, advance very fast, it is not yet possible to get much empirical evidence about the immediate developmental impact and outcome of programs with ICT components. It is undisputed, however, that using ICT in development countries, both as a tool and as program components, has the potential of enhancing chances for development in general – particularly when these countries build up their own knowledge and information capacities.³

¹ see <http://www.millenniumcampaign.org/site/pp.asp?c=grKVL2NLE&b=186389>, February 14, 2006

² Vgl. u.a. Caspari, Alexandra/Paul Kevenhörster/Reinhard Stockmann (2003): Das Schweigen des Parlaments. Die vergessene Frage der Nachhaltigkeit deutscher Entwicklungszusammenarbeit, in: Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte B 13-14/2004, Beilage zur Wochenzeitung Das Parlament, March 24, 2003.

³ See <http://www.gtz.de/de/themen/uebergreifende-themen/8310.htm>, February, 14, 2006.

Although it is difficult to directly research the developmental impact of an ICT4D project, it is possible to look at the output dimension of projects, and/or the achievement of the program's goals or targets. Reaching those goals or targets repetitively determines the impact and the general outcome of a program in the long term. Hence, one way to discover and improve the effect that potential information and communication technologies could have for development, is to look at the different factors that determine the output of ICT4D projects.

Therefore, the research question this thesis will pursue is: What are the critical factors for a successful ICT4D project?

Methodology

This paper will be structured in six main parts:

The opening chapter deals apart from a general introduction into the topic with defining important terms and the clarifying methods used in this thesis.

In the second chapter, in order to identify success factors for the following case studies, I will discuss relevant theoretical approaches of authors from the 1980s, seeing technology as an enabling tool for development or talking about the transfer of technology as a goal for international development itself. Also, I will look at Manuel Castells' "The rise of the network society"⁴ as well as more contemporary works on ICT4D.

The third chapter will be the link between the "big" topic ICT4D and the then following case studies: the National Level. Here, describing the national framework of South Africa, I will first show why it was chosen as the regional focus and which specific (ICT) problems South Africa is facing. Then, I will examine national ICT and/or ICT4D policies to find out whether the later analyzed projects are embedded into larger strategies and how these strategies fit with factors found in the theoretical chapter.

In the fourth part, the examined projects will be introduced along with their respective framework and background.⁵ Using interviews made with various stakeholders of the projects, factors found in chapter two will be tested and possible new unintended factors detected.

In chapter five, I will summarize and analyze the outcomes of the earlier chapters, comparing them to the results of the theoretical part. Additionally, possible effects for both the policy and the project level will be presented.

Concluding the results found during the research in the last chapter, I will also try to point out consequences for international development and cooperation with the field of information and communication technologies.

⁴ Castells, Manuel (1999), *The rise of the network society* (The information age; 1; Malden, Mass.: Blackwell) XVII, 556 p.

⁵ The examined projects are: (1) Cell-Life (<http://www.celllife.org>), (2) tuXlab (<http://www.tuxlab.org.za>), (3) Africa Drive Project (<http://www.adp.org.za>)

Example for outline

1. Introduction, including
 - Definitions
 - Methodology
2. Relevant Theoretical Approaches
 - Technology as an enabling tool for development; transfer of technology as a goal of international development
 - The network society (Manuel Castells)
 - Current literature on ICT4D
3. National (Policy) Level
 - Why choosing South Africa? Which specific problems is South Africa facing?
 - National Framework
 - ICT Policy (Policies) of South Africa
 - ICT4D Policy?
4. Project Level - Case Studies
 - For each case:
 - Project Framework and Background
 - Case Study Analysis
5. Analysis
 - Consequences for ICT Policy on the national level?
 - Consequences for ICT4D Projects?
6. Conclusion
 - Consequences for International Development/Cooperation?