



From the Guest Editors

Research on ICT4D in Latin America

Latin America has experienced deep transformations over the past decade. Although a significant portion of the population in most of the countries in the region experiences poverty and severe restrictions in access to basic services, economic growth and relative political stability are presenting new opportunities for leveraging ICTs to achieve development goals. Among policy makers, there is substantial interest in the tools, methods, and initiatives that have been shown to be effective in the fight against poverty. As a consequence, ICT4D is increasingly present in political agendas, an encouraging development to the many researchers and practitioners who are designing, testing, and evaluating technologies, as well as examining deployment models that make their use sustainable.

However, this activity is hardly observed in international scientific journals and conferences. After the ICTD2010 conference held in London, this point was discussed in several ICT4D fora. One of the main concerns was that language barriers were preventing many researchers in Latin America from publishing their findings. As a result of this debate, a proposal to publish a bilingual special issue of *ITID* emerged.

The result is this first *ITID* bilingual issue, which compiles seven high-quality research articles, plus a “Notes from the Field” article and a book review. We are grateful to the *ITID* editors for the opportunity to collaborate as guest editors on this milestone publication.

The research articles included in this special issue analyze how ICTs evolve and impact development across Latin America. The first article, by Judith Mariscal Avilés and Carlos Brambila Paz, examines the evolution of connectivity at a national level in Mexico. The second, by Luis Fernando Baron-Porras and Ricardo Gomez, analyzes the impact of public access computing venues in Colombia. The third, by Roxana Barrantes Cáceres, Aileen Agüero, Martín Cavero, and César Huaroto, examines how mobile adoption affects productivity among microenterprises in two industrial clusters in the city of Lima. The fourth article, by César Huaroto, extends a similar analysis related to Internet access to a larger sample of Peruvian enterprises. Following these four are two articles which examine different ICT in education initiatives. The first of these, by Lucía Pittaluga and Ana Rivoir, discusses the OLPC implementation in Uruguay, called Plan CEIBAL. The second, by Eduardo Villanueva-Mansilla and Paz Olivera, examines a similar project in Peruvian schools. The last research article, by Sury Bravo, Miguel A. Valero, Iván Pau, Jimena Duarte, Monserrat Carrillo, and José R. Blandino, discusses the results of an e-health project carried out in rural areas of Nicaragua.

Next, there is a “Notes from the Field” article by Martin Hilbert titled “Toward a Conceptual Framework for ICT for Development: Lessons Learned from the Cube Framework Used in Latin America.” The conceptual framework presented is a powerful tool for ICT4D policy makers and evaluators that

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was first introduced by Hilbert some years ago in previous publications. In this article, the author analyzes several experiences in Latin America using this tool.

Finally, Ismael Peña-López reviews *Comunicación Móvil y Desarrollo Económico y Social en América Latina*. This book is the outcome of a large international research project, led by Manuel Castells, that is aimed at documenting the contribution of mobile telephony to social and economic development in Latin America.

ICT4D is generally presented as an interdisciplinary field in which engineers and social scientists meet to propose appropriate technologies and methods to make ICT useful for development, and to evaluate the impact of what has been done in this field. However, the process toward real interdisciplinary work is slow, as there appears to be a gap between the research done by engineers and the contributions coming from the social scientists. Although this special issue was addressed to all, most of its contributions study or propose methods, or they evaluate the impact of technologies in use. This reflects that the interdisciplinary perspective is still a bit elusive in Latin America, and additional efforts need to be undertaken in the region for the research community to benefit from the valuable experience of engineers developing ICT4D initiatives all over the region.

We hope that this first-ever, entirely bilingual special issue of *ITID—Research on ICT4D in Latin America*—motivates ICT4D researchers in the region, both from the social sciences and the various engineering fields, to recognize the great value and strong interest in what they do, and to consider publishing their work more widely in the coming years.

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