From the Editors

It's been a year since I last wrote in this space. Beginning with that edition (8.3), we've tried to make the editors' introductions and the book reviews interesting to read for their own sake. We've been asking authors to reveal some personal opinion about the books they're reviewing or the papers in an issue.

Scholars, though, can be hesitant to editorialize on paper. Most of us are used to staying within the boundaries of established scholarship, and we're often taught to avoid personal preferences—positive or negative—in our writing. Nevertheless, we hope you've noticed some movement in this direction and have found it worthwhile (feedback is welcome!).

In this issue we include reviews of three books: Regina Hechanova reviews Reena Patel's *Working the Night Shift,* a book about women in India's call center industry. Heather Horst reviews Payal Arora's *Dot Com Mantra* and (*ITID* associate editor) Jenna Burrell's *Invisible Users.* The latter books seek to examine the "information society" as it is—as opposed to how it has been envisioned—in parts of northern India and Ghana, respectively. Along with their summaries, Hechanova and Horst indicate what kind of reader is likely to gain the most from the books. Our goal for future book reviews is to continue with more editorializing—the target being something like an academic version of a *New York Times Book Review.*

On the topic of book reviews, I'm sad to announce that this issue is Jonathan Donner's last as book review editor, a role he was the first to occupy at *ITID.* Jonathan ensured a constant stream of high-quality reviews since Issue 7.1, and recently asked to step away. Those of us who have worked with Jonathan know him for his deep insight and professionalism, and we are grateful that he was willing to apply both to the *ITID* book reviews for these past three years. Thank you, Jonathan!

We'll welcome our new book review editor in the next issue. Stay tuned.

Now on to the papers. This issue includes only three research papers, but they are all a delight to read. Economists Julian Jamison, Dean Karlan, and Pia Raffler perform an evaluation of an SMS-based sexual health information service piloted in Uganda. Using both a randomized control trial and post-hoc qualitative interviews, they found that the introduction of the service not only failed on average to increase levels of knowledge about sexual health, it increased risky behavior. The authors refrain from drawing firm conclusions about the mechanism behind this counterintuitive result, but they consider several intriguing possibilities suggested by the data, each worth further investigation. (No spoilers here. Read the paper!) Incidentally, Google, Grameen Foundation, and MTN were the organizations behind the intervention and are sure to have sought a different outcome. Nevertheless, they should be applauded for their willingness to have a third party perform the evaluation and for agreeing to have the results

published. Hopefully, they were able to extract lessons for future work. Certainly, there is much here for the larger technology-and-development community to learn from.

Ayodeji Fajebe, Michael Best, and Thomas Smyth report on the teachers' view of the One Laptop per Child (OLPC) program in Rwanda. OLPC has been the subject of considerable investigation, from analysis of its total cost of ownership to recent evaluations of what students learn in Latin America. But little has been known of the teachers' perspectives, and this paper fills the gap. Although the sample is small—28 teachers drawn from four schools—they have a lot to say. The authors find, for example, that teachers don't use the laptops in the constructionist mode that OLPC leaders have championed. The authors also note great variation in the way that individual students respond to the computers. These and other findings build on what is known not just about OLPC, but about PCs in education worldwide. It would have been nice to see the findings more directly connected to that broader literature, but the paper shines plenty of new light on OLPC programs in practice.

Last but not least, we have a paper by Joerg Doerflinger and Andy Dearden that provides a discussion of the interventionist ICT4D methodology the authors have refined through several projects implemented over a period of six years. Design methodologies rarely go beyond high-level prescriptions, but here the authors consider details such as when and how to engage certain types of stakeholders and which members of the design team benefit from colocation. ICT4D designers and engineers will find a lot in this paper to compare, contrast, and combine with their own methodologies. And observers of ICT4D have a chance to understand the designer's perspective—particularly, how much care can go into incorporating stakeholder views while dealing with the challenges of system building.

Doerflinger and Dearden's paper was also interesting for us at *ITID* because it went through two revisions—major overhauls, actually—before arriving at the final version that appears in this issue. The first round of reviews, which amounted to several pages of text, included a strongly worded "reject," a lukewarm "revise and resubmit," and a more positive "revisions required." The first reviewer, who voted for rejection, felt that the paper failed as a methodology paper, but still valued the authors' experiences. That person suggested the paper could succeed if it were a series of case studies. At *ITID,* we agreed that there was a valuable kernel in the paper and sent it back as a "revise and resubmit." We passed on the suggestion that the paper focus on the learnings from the authors' experience instead of on the methodology.

In their revision, the authors stuck to their guns. They continued to stress the methodology, while addressing the detailed comments of all three reviewers. The reviewers came back with similar ratings as before. But the comments had shifted. The first reviewer acknowledged an improvement, but still expressed problems with the methodology and recommended rejection. The second reviewer noted that the paper continued to have elements worth publishing, but wrote that the paper would spark a discussion about the right way to do interventionist ICT4D. Meanwhile, the third reviewer aligned with the other two and suggested that the paper should cast its methodology as an "offering" rather than a prescription.

That round helped clarify the primary challenge of the original paper. As editors, we returned the paper for one last round of "revise and resubmit" with the comment that the core difficulty with the paper was that it seemed to overreach. The paper gave the impression of offering *the* one right way to do ICT4D interventions, when in fact it was offering *a* way that had worked well for the authors. The former claim, of course, could not stand without evidence that the proposed methodology was superior to all others, and no such comparative study had been done.

The authors took the comments to heart and came back with a substantial revision, but one that remains a methodology paper. All three reviewers ultimately responded with an enthusiastic "accept."

I highlight this case with permission from the authors because it reveals the active problem solving that can occur in the article review process. In this case, I'm glad both that the authors held to their convictions and that the reviewers were vocal about their concerns. Both were right, but it took two intensive rounds to identify the way forward. When asked whether they were happy with the process, Doerflinger and Dearden replied,

> It was clear that all three reviewers read the paper carefully each time and were devoting substantial amounts of time to providing feedback to us. The paper has been much improved by the process. [In addition,] the wording and the timing of the editorial intervention were very skillful.

We're grateful that the authors and reviewers remained deeply engaged throughout, and we hope their efforts are evident in the final product!

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