From the Special Issue Editors

Into the Future: Themes, Insights, and Agendas for Information and Communication Technologies for Development

Selected Articles from IFIP 9.4 2013

This Special Issue of *ITID* contains a selection of articles from the IFIP 9.4 2013 International Conference on the Social Implications of Computers in Developing Countries, held in Jamaica May 19–22, 2013. This biennial conference took place in collaboration with the University of the West Indies at Mona and ICT4D Jamaica. It was the 12th conference held by IFIP 9.4, previous conferences having most recently been held in Nepal (2011), Dubai (2009), Brazil (2007), and Nigeria (2005). The theme of the 2013 conference was "Into the Future: Themes, Insights and Agendas for ICT4D Research and Practice." The academic program comprised more than 80 research articles, and nearly 200 participants were registered.

We had 11 diverse tracks. One track addressed the theme of the conference, "Into the Future." A number of tracks focused on a particular domain of study such as health or social media. Other tracks focused on specific themes such as development goals, collaboration and innovation, engagement, and technology design. A number of tracks had a conceptual focus such as the track on the capability approach and another on actor network theory. Especially valuable was the track that considered the Caribbean region in particular. The incorporation of tracks into the 2013 conference allowed for not only an increased number of participants, but also for some themes to be discussed in detail. We had three excellent keynote speakers: Minister Julian Robinson, Ministry of Science, Technology, Energy and Mining, Jamaica; Professor Saskia Sassen, an internationally renowned sociologist; and Professor Sundeep Sahay, a leading ICT4D academic. Supplementing the academic program, many Caribbean NGOs had interactive exhibits and ran workshops and panels. We also visited a telecenter in a remote farming community.

The articles presented at the conference and published in the proceedings (Hayes & La Rovere, 2013) highlighted the multiplicity of perspectives and concerns that participants addressed—from computer science to anthropology and from theory to policy and practice. In relation to the conference theme—an agenda for research and practice—cumulatively, the articles considered a number of crucial challenges for the area: gaps in ICT4D research and practice that have been insufficiently addressed, new technological possibilities, better understanding of institutional dimensions, critical reflection, the need for further rich ethnographic studies, a focus on policy makers, reflections on our own contributions as a group, methodological approaches, and theoretical positions that may guide our future thinking. Clearly, this is an exhaustive agenda, and the bad news is that we did not have enough time to answer any of these critical areas definitively! The good news, though, is that there is still work left for us all to do . . .

The articles submitted to this Special Issue were initially selected by the track chairs and then considered by the Special Issue Editors. These decisions were based on the reviews of the conference articles as

well as the interest they generated at the conference. We wanted to allow this Special Issue to reflect the diversity of the conference and the interesting tracks that were represented. Once we had shortlisted the articles, they were sent out for several rounds of reviews. Unfortunately, not all the shortlisted articles survived the reviewing rounds. For those that did, this has resulted in significantly different and enhanced articles compared to those that were part of the conference proceedings. We outline each below.

This Special Issue comprises four articles that adopt very different positions. Two are explicitly theoretical position papers, while the two other articles are case study–based and report on primary empirical data. One case study focuses on Malawi and the other on Jamaica. Cumulatively, they represent many of the concerns that the IFIP 9.4 group attends to and issues that require further development.

The article by Stan Karanasios argues that, thus far, the ICT4D field has a paucity of theoretically informed accounts. Indeed, the role of theory in ICT4D research was one of the key discussion points at the IFIP 9.4 conference. His article can be viewed as a position paper, and we envisage that future studies will draw on it when thinking about ICT4D's theoretical foundations. Karanasios presents activity theory as one approach that may help to address this omission. His article usefully outlines some of the key theoretical constructs developed by activity theorists and argues that ICT4D should be viewed as a practice. His article then provides an account of how activity theory may inform future ICT4D studies. He concludes by setting out a research agenda for activity theory and ICT4D and posits five activity theoretic contributions that can be drawn on to frame future ICT4D studies.

The article by Niall Hayes and Chris Westrup discusses the role of consultants in ICT4D, focusing on consultants' roles as intermediary and mediator.[1] The authors do this by drawing on some theoretical concepts from science and technology studies. Linking to the conference theme and looking at insights for the future, the authors discuss possible agendas that international consulting firms may have for development and the role of objectivity in these consultancies. The article presents insightful and interesting arguments on the positioning of consultants in the development sphere and implications for future discussions in this area.

The article by Terje Sanner and Johan Sæbø picks up the important theme of the possibilities for long-term sustainability of ICT4D project interventions. This is a topic that has had considerable debate in the literature to date and one that is of great importance for our domain. Their article reports on primary empirical data collected in Malawi. The data offers a rich account of why different actors participate in a mobile health project, their priorities, and what they would like to participate in. They develop an analysis of how to encourage participation in ICT4D development projects. Central to this is the issue of per diem payments. Sanner and Sæbø highlight the contradictory role that they have played in this debate. On one hand, they offer the prospect of attracting local participation to ICT4D projects, while on the other hand, they highlight how they have also undermined long-term capacity building and sustainability. Sanner and Sæbø draw specifically on institutional theory and institutional logics to develop their analysis and argue that while some institutional logics may appear contradictory, in fact, they require each other. As well as some useful reflections on institutional theory, they offer some normative insights pertaining to sustainability and incentivization.

The article by Deana Brown and Rebecca Grinter presents relevant and interesting research related to the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to support interaction and to connect children of migrant parents and their home school–parental support networks. Through empirical data collected in Jamaica, supported by earlier interviews with migrant parents, the authors examine the modes of existing interaction between migrant parents and teachers, and propose supporting

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1. One of the conference chairs and special issue editors is an author of one of the contributions; he recused himself from the selection and editorial process for that article.

ICT mechanisms for enhancing the ongoing involvement of parents living abroad with their children's schools and caregivers. The proposed network would provide flexibility, transparency, security, and mobility in facilitating these interactions to support educational outcomes.

This issue also includes a review by Tim Unwin of the book *Evaluating Communication for Development: A Framework for Social Change,* authored by June Lennie and Jo Tacchi. The book review provides insights on the need for evaluation in development interventions, and highlights key components of the authors' framework. Synergies with areas discussed in the special issue are evident as evaluation of ICT4D initiatives continues to be critical in informing ongoing and future interventions that are designed to address complex development challenges.

We would like to thank Renata Lèbre La Rovere, Arlene Luck, the reviewers, and the *ITID* journal editors and editorial team for their insights and contributions to the development of this Special Issue.

Niall Hayes and Arlene Bailey

Reference

Hayes, N., & La Rovere, R. L. (Eds.). (2013). *IFIP 9.4 12th International Conference on Social Implications of Computers in Developing Countries Proceedings.* University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica. Available online at http://www.ifipwg94.org/files/IFIPWG94_2013Proceedings_FINAL.pdf