# From the Associate Editor

## Building Bridges

Roxana Barrantes

*Editors' Note: A year ago, we invited four key members of* ITID*'s editorial board to become Associate Editors by taking on a more active role in shepherding individual issues through the editorial and production processes. We are grateful to Associate Editor Roxana Barrantes, Senior Researcher at Instituto de Estudios Peruanos and Associate Professor at the Department of Economics of Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (PUCP), for taking the lead with this issue.*

Building interdisciplinary bridges is a major challenge for the ICT4D community—and that is true for other multidisciplinary scholarly communities as well. As noted by Best and Bar (2009), not only must our research appeal to our original disciplinary communities, but it also must be intelligible enough for our colleagues in other disciplines to understand. This takes time and energy, and it is easier to achieve when we focus on solving development problems.

It should come as no surprise that we examine those development problems with our own disciplinary toolkits, usually asking questions pertaining only to our own fields of study. We soon learn, however, that improving people's livelihoods requires more than single solutions coming from any particular field of study, such as using a computer, comprehending social structures, or understanding the limits of infrastructure to access markets—all noble efforts, but also liable to affect other aspects of people's well-being. As for the methodological aspect, economists, for instance, may look at regression parameters, which reveal partial elasticities, but do not tell stories. In-depth interviews, on the other hand, inform about pressing issues but limit our ability to make policy-relevant or resource-allocation inferences, and to convince policymakers of the soundness of our recommendations. Burrell and Toyama's work (2009) is a cornerstone in this discussion, and it can serve to help our community in the task of building bridges.

Truly interdisciplinary research will come with truly interdisciplinary dialogue. Researchers must find a common language, and they must use it heavily in the interdisciplinary interaction. This will only occur after respect is built, which is achieved by listening and learning from others. To that end, in this issue, we encounter several examples of different approaches for offering new knowledge that could help shape policy initiatives to improve people's lives. Testing a comprehensive methodology (morphological analysis) for selecting ICT applications for South African service delivery, Plauché, De Waal, Gumede, and Grover describe the resources needed for such an effort. Hosman relies on extensive fieldwork and qualitative techniques to discuss the implementation of an ICT-in-education project in rural Uganda. In contrast to these two papers, hard econometric techniques are used by Majumdar to demonstrate the effects of globalization on workers' compensation in India's technology sector, and by Covic and Wainer to examine digital exclusion of communities of African descent in Brazil.

Different methodologies for addressing similar problems can also be found in the current issue's research report pieces. Following our Special Issue on HCI, Pitula, Dysart-Gale, and Radhakrishnan present a case study in engineering for ICT4D, while Dralega, Due, and Skogerbø offer a fascinating comparison of community re-engagement of youth in Norway and Uganda. Our Forum piece, prepared by Smith and Elder, discusses how open ICT ecosystems could transform the developing world.

Finally, Badshah presents two of the more than 500 applications of the Microsoft "Unlimited Potential" project, showing the importance of local leadership and ownership.

I hope readers will gain meaningful new insights into the challenges and opportunities of exploiting the development potential of ICTs.

## References

Best, M., & Bar, F. (2009). Crossing the disciplines. *Information Technologies & International Development, 5*(3), iii–v.

Burrell, J., & Toyama, K. (2009). What constitutes good ICTD research? *Information Technologies & International Development, 5*(3), 82–94.