The lost sheep of ICT4D literature
The Lost Sheep of ICT4D Literature
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Abstract

Information communication technologies for development (ICT4D) is a new field of study that contains few grand theories compared to other areas of social science. This article analyzes some shortcomings of ICT4D research. First, there is juxtaposition between ICT4D’s being a multidisciplinary field while its authors are predominantly not multidisciplinary. Second, ICT4D is not a panacea; it is only a piece of the development puzzle. ICTs alone cannot lead to social elevation. Third, who is responsible for the structure of ICT4D literature? Fourth, Habermas’s public sphere is applied to mobile telephony in sub-Saharan Africa to demonstrate how ICT4D could expand upon the theoretical tradition within media studies. The conclusion recommends the creation of a global summit on ICT4D and more grand theories.

Keywords

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs); Development; ICT4D; Social Science; Habermas; Public Sphere; Global Summit; Mobile Telephony; Africa; Theory

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ICT4D projects and policies can best be understood through a value chain model. As shown in Figure 1 below, this builds on a standard input—process—output model to create a sequence of linked ICT-for-development resources and processes. The model can be used for projects and policies in various ways: to trace their history; to analyse their... Readiness: the systemic prerequisites for any ICT4D initiative; both the foundational precursors that we might conceptualise mainly at the national level such as ICT infrastructure, skills and policy; and the more specific inputs (both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’) that feed into any individual initiative. Assessment could focus on the presence/absence of these resources and capabilities, or the strategy that converts precursors into inputs. The ill-defined nature of ICT for development (ICT4D) complicates the space significantly, and much of the literature is ad-hoc or anecdotal. In this paper, we frame ICT4D as a design problem, and use several cases to analyze failures and successes. We analyze these cases in terms of asymmetries of information in terms of inclusion of stakeholders, poor
design processes and misaligned incentives mechanisms. These failures reflect the inability to solve the right problem of needs of development and a technology driven tendency to solve the wrong problem optimally, as is often the case in many d