

Chapter 1

Network Cooperation: Development Cooperation in the Network Society

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ABSTRACT

Trends in international development cooperation point to the increasing networking of initiatives and programmes, facilitated by information and communications technology (ICT). This allows many more people and organizations from around the world to contribute to a given project, as with the case of online volunteers. There are various types of networks active in development cooperation, but network management needs to be incorporated by involved organizations in order to extract the expected benefits from their involvement. Network analysis practices will help determine if they are set up and managed appropriately.

INTRODUCTION

Human Development in the Network Society

This article is rooted on two central paradigms, ‘Human Development’ and ‘Network Society’, and its aim is to explore one of its bridging drivers,

namely the international development cooperation system (and its actors), that can contribute to how Human Development can be best advanced in the context of Network Society.

First the objective, which is Human Development. The concept was developed during the 80’s by the Nobel laureate Amartya Sen (1999), and spread beyond academia as it becomes embraced by UNDP in the 90’s, when it starts issuing Human Development Reports under the guidance of

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Mahbub ul Haq. Human Development is about expanding choices for people, so they can live a dignified life. A seemingly simple, yet highly powerful notion. Behind choices are freedoms, made possible by capacities and empowerment and capacities. Very importantly, Human Development provides the basis for a paradigm shift in development goals, moving from *fromcs*. This last point has important implications in terms of information and communications technology (ICT) for Development, such as proactively seeking to open up opportunities and doing so by promoting local talent and capacities—in addition to directly helping to satisfy needs.

Secondly the context, namely the Network Society. The concept was developed by Manuel Castells, which he described as the social structure of the Information Age (1998a, 1998b). It is related to the more popular notions of ‘Information Society’ or ‘Knowledge Societies’ (Mansell & When, 1997), but more rigorously constructed and goes beyond the raw materials (information/knowledge) to infer the structural fabric of this stage in society. The Network Society paradigm characterizes new models of production, communication, organization and identity, all organized around and through networks. And while it is possible to speak of specific ‘network societies’, the combination of both economic/financial globalization and a widespread communications infrastructure provide meaning to the notion of a global Network Society.

In the Network Society, development may be viewed from the perspective of a higher-level connectedness, i.e. moving between inclusion/exclusion poles. Perhaps one of the most troubling consequences of the Network Society context is that exclusion from it amounts to a kind of absolute exclusion. Castells refers to a ‘Fourth World’ as an isolated and almost invisible realm outside the networks, not delimited necessarily by national boundaries, where people, institutions and entire social groups are connected and unconnected to the Network Society without their control. (1998b,

p.335). It is the grand ‘socio-economic-everything’ exclusion, and while appearing in all countries¹ it certainly affects many more people in the under-developed South.

Therefore we should be asking about the types of elements and factors that favor the expansion of choices/freedoms (and thus inclusion) in a highly networked social context². At this time, ICT is undoubtedly one of those elements to explore.

ICT4D 2.0

The field of ICT for Development (ICT4D) is arguably on the verge of a significant leap ahead. Reasons that point towards a much-accelerated absorption of ICT in development processes include (i) expansion in the ICT market covering less developed countries, (ii) an accumulation of moral imperatives (related to the impact of digital exclusion) and (iii) improved knowledge about what works and a sizeable number of experiences. And it is happening during an explosion of participation-oriented and network-friendly ICTs, grouped under the Web 2.0 label. Heeks (2008) appropriately terms this phase as ICT4D 2.0.

In his view, ICT4D 2.0 presents new opportunities for development processes and actors, as well as sector companies and professionals. It requires a new combination of expertise and world vision. Very importantly, it will be characterized by innovation of all sorts, not only technical but also process-related. By contrast, an earlier ICT4D 1.0 phase would be characterized by the popularization of the Web and its association with the Millennium Development Goals, a proliferation of pilot projects (few of which ever making the transition from the development cooperation ‘laboratory’ into regional or national scale) and little impact measured with inadequate methods.

ICT4D 2.0 would then be geared towards large scale implantation of the technologies to really finally exploit its much and often touted development impact. It is about putting these technologies to use to confront some of the most severe prob-

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