What are the key lessons of ICT4D partnerships for poverty reduction?

Partnerships and ICT4D

Against a wider background of an increased global move towards development partnerships, there have also been very specific reasons why partnerships have played such an important role in ICT4D initiatives.

♦ The role of the ICT industry in wider processes of globalisation;

♦ The need for technical capacity in delivering ICT-based initiatives; and

♦ The impact of the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and associated follow-up actions.

Development Practices

The ICT field has expanded so rapidly that most 'development practitioners' have little idea of what is necessary in order for its potential impact to be achieved. Unfortunately, most ICT specialists likewise have little real understanding of the complexity of implementing effective development programmes. Consequently, many costly mistakes are made and numerous ICT4D initiatives fail to deliver on their potential.

Key Findings

Five specific success factors are important in implementing ICT4D partnerships:

♦ Success is increased when detailed attention is paid to the local context and the involvement of the local community in partnership implementation.

♦ It is important for such partnerships to have clear and agreed intended development outcomes, even where constituent partners may themselves have different reasons for being involved in the partnership.

♦ Sustainability and scalability of the intended development intervention need to be built into partnership design at the very beginning.

♦ Successful partnerships are built on trust, honesty, openness, mutual understanding and respect.

♦ A supportive wider ICT environment needs to be in place, both in terms of policy and infrastructure, if such partnerships are to flourish and deliver effective development outcomes.

Recommendations

What can policy makers, funding agencies and researchers do differently as a result of this review of the evidence?

Future Research

Better quality evidence is needed to understand the following two questions:

♦ What are the factors in ICT4D initiatives that actually improve the sustainability of the development impact, be they undertaken as partnerships or in some other contractual way?

♦ What is the role that partnerships really play in contributing to development impact? Although there has been much normative assertion about the value of partnerships for development, rather little rigorous research has yet been done to distinguish the development impact of partnerships from the impact that other modalities of delivery might achieve.

This systematic review has revealed a need for more research on the latter, which could build on our generic findings and ask questions about them.

Improve Methodologies

♦ Many of the publications that we reviewed lacked a rigorous account of research methodology. Sometimes this is due to space and other restrictions of journals. We recommend that commissioners, when sponsoring research, encourage researchers to document their research methodologies more fully in all of their publications.

Assess Impact

The majority of materials reviewed did not specify a) what kind of development outcomes they were pursuing or b) what they really understood by partnership.

♦ Commissioners should urge practitioners and researchers in receipt of funding to be explicit about their aims and the conceptual framing of their work.

♦ Practitioners need to clarify the meaning of 'ICT4D partnership' and its relationship to development outcome.

♦ Clarify the relationship between research and contribution to poverty reduction.

It is recommended that future funding should support research to determine development impact.

Policy and Practice

What makes ICT4D partnerships different from other type of partnerships is their specific focus on ICTs as a means to achieve development ends. Therefore, such partnerships benefit from a supportive technological environment.

♦ The technology chosen should be appropriate for the local context. Simpler is often better.

♦ Open source software can lower the costs and reduce the risk of failure after funding is withdrawn.

♦ A favourable regulatory environment needs to be in place to safeguard the use of information and promote telecommunication networks .

♦ Taking note of the five key findings and putting them into practice is largely the province of practitioners.

The full report of this systematic review can be found at: http://www.dfid.gov.uk/R4D/PDF/Outputs/SystematicReviews/DFID_ICT_SR_Final_Report_r5.pdf

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