

**Good planning  
or benign imposition?  
Innovation, emergence and risk  
in developmental research:  
Learning from ICTD**

FINAL REPORT

JBS-IKM-BDDG Workshop  
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## About the Workshop

The workshop was organized by Dorothea Kleine and Ann Light, both of whom had been directly involved in Bridging the Digital Divide (BDDG) projects, Mike Powell of IKM Emergent and Mark Thompson of the Information Systems Group at the Judge Institute.

## About BDDG

The Bridging the Digital Divide Group consisted of four ICT4D projects which were all funded by the ES/PRC and which on occasion met together in order to share experiences and develop mutual learning. The projects' titles were Fair Tracing, StoryBank, Rural eServices and VESEL.

<http://www.bgdd.org/Wiki.jsp>

## About IKM Emergent

In April 2007, a five-year research programme was approved for funding by the Directorate General for International Cooperation (DGIS), part of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The programme, Emergent Issues in Information and Knowledge Management (IKM) and International Development, will be known as the IKM Emergent Research Programme.

The objective of the programme is to improve development practice by promoting change in the way the development sector approaches the selection, management and use of knowledge in the formation and implementation of its policies and programmes. It aims to achieve this by:

- raising awareness of the importance of knowledge to development work and its contested nature;
- promoting investment in and use of Southern knowledge production of all types and origins;
- creating an environment for innovation, supported by research on existing and emergent practice, for people working in the development sector to raise and discuss means of addressing these issues; and
- finding, creating, testing and documenting ideas for processes and tools which will illustrate the range of issues which affect how knowledge is used in development work and stimulate thought around possible solutions.

<http://ikmemergent.net>

## About The Judge Institute

The Judge Institute is the business school at the University of Cambridge.

<http://www.jbs.cam.ac.uk/research/groups/information.html>

## Colophon

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## **Abbreviations and acronyms**

BDDG	Bridging the Digital Divide Group
CGIAR	Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research
DFID	United Kingdom Directorate-General for International Development
EPSRC	Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ICTD	ICT for development
ICT4D	ICT for development
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IKM	Emergent Issues in Information and Knowledge Management
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IT	Information Technology
JBS	Judge Business School
LSE	London School of Economics
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PANOS	Global network focussing on communicating for development
WOTRO	Netherlands Science Council

## A. DAY 1

### A1. INTRODUCTORY PLENARY

The workshop started with introductions by the participants and a brief introduction to the concept of emergence and the aims and objectives of the workshop. This was mostly adopted from the document entitled *Good planning or benign imposition? Innovation, emergence and risk in developmental research: Learning from ICTD* which had already been sent to the participants earlier. It is reproduced below by way of an introduction to the workshop:

*The aim of the workshop is to explore the implications for all stakeholders - development policymakers; research councils and funders; researchers and research users - of the deep tension between programme demands for **predictability** and the inevitability of **emergence** in development-related research. This emergence is rooted both in the processes of developing and using applied technologies and in the participatory methodologies which may be used to ensure that the research in question is 'developmental'. This tension can be augmented where the status, and often the funding, associated with the sobriquet 'for development' may demand higher level developmental outcomes beyond the basic outputs of the research.*

*The organizers believe that the issues the workshop intends to address are of relevance to most areas of scientific and technical research for 'development'. Most of the examples they expect to present before and at the workshop come from the field of ICTD but comparative analysis with other technically oriented developmental research disciplines is welcomed.*

#### A1.1 Key issues

One of the key achievements in the field of information systems to date has been a demonstration that people, worldwide, make effective use of ICT in ways that differ from those anticipated by its designers. Several techniques have been developed which seek to acknowledge 'technological drift' (Ciborra, 2000, *From Control to Drift*) as an inevitable component of the design process and not a nuisance to be managed away by project managers. These include Soft Systems Methodology and participatory design, but both have had mixed results.

In the more mature discipline, 'development', where goals are expressed in terms of higher order outcomes, technologies such as ICT are seen as a means to an end not as an end in itself. Nonetheless researchers and practitioners still wrestle with a fundamental tension between the

funders' need for a plan that anticipates both outcomes and benefits of a new technology in advance, and a growing recognition that these predictions often prove ill-founded and plans are subject to contingent changes for several reasons:

- The development and use of new or unfamiliar technology usually only emerges in practice, often in response to the particular opportunities which arise at the interface between perceptions of local challenges and conditions and technological know-how. This process and these conditions are often non-generalizeable across different contexts. The real benefits of a new technology within a specific context thus cannot be known prior to its introduction.
- To be sustainable, technology requires users who want to use it, on their own terms and for their own purposes, and within locally relevant frameworks of governance. Approaches that mandate particular uses of technology prior to its introduction are likely to prove unsustainable and thus unsuccessful.
- Although participatory involvement has become a much-used byword within development, the potential of a new technology, how it will be used in practice and whether this will be sustainable or not are often unclear at the outset to the end-users themselves. Participatory design techniques are thus unlikely in themselves to solve the issue of emergence and unpredictability that characterizes peoples' use of technology.

In contrast to these realities, nearly all projects, including those concerned with development, are planned and managed to identify and deliver predictable outcomes, and minimize the chance of unpredicted outcomes – usually defined as 'project risk'. In this context, risk is seen as unwelcome and leading to "an unsuccessful outcome". We think it has the potential to be seen as a positive element in the process, leading, in the senses articulated above, to more imaginative, appropriate or sustainable outcomes than had previously been conceived.

We think that notions of analysing and managing risk are likely to be familiar to all stakeholders in developmental research. We therefore propose that the issue of how to work through the tension between accountable planning and emergence might be tackled by focusing on the concept of risk. In response to this possibility, the workshop will seek to reach a working (re)definition of risk, as well as identifying some of the immediate implications of such a definition for the way in which technology for development initiatives are conceived, funded, and measured.

## **A2 WORKSHOP PROGRAMME AND PRACTICE**

The workshop programme is attached in the Appendices section of this report as C1. Essentially, the first afternoon was spent trying to tease out the issues; a discussion which continued in various locations throughout the evening. The morning was spent trying to think through how some of the issues might be addressed. Other than the welcome and introduction, there were no prepared speeches. However, at various stages, a number of people were invited to make a five-minute

contribution giving a perspective from their own particular role or discipline. On the first afternoon, some contributions were also read out from people who were interested in the issues but not able to attend the event. These contributions have not been identified specifically in this text but can, in some places, be identified by their more personal or experiential tone.

### **A3 PROBLEM-FRAMING SESSION**

The group discussions in the Problem-framing session revolved around the issues of risk, methodology and how to change the dominant paradigm in development research policymaking. A discussion got underway about whether it was productive to use the notion of 'risk' or not as it clearly has negative connotations. Risk is seen as non-delivery of something i.e. negative outcome. It was also noted that empirical studies are required to ascertain to what extent the real outcomes of a project are plan-oriented, or envisaged in the plan. In terms of policymaking, it was acknowledged that a paradigm shift is required, however it requires an analysis of the status quo and a strategy for intervention.

The common perception is that better plans make the implementation process easier. The plans are developed around outcomes achieving which is considered to be the ultimate purpose/goal of the project. Outcomes are normally viewed and evaluated using only the rational measures (indicators) such as GDP growth, rather than say happiness. Therefore a re-conceptualization of "Outcomes" is required. An important aspect in this regard is that the 'activity' itself is development, not only the outcome. So one can say that just 'doing' (i.e. the development activities) is the output in itself. One learns from doing and 'learning' itself means change. It is important to recognize here that change is situated and localised and one must look at the heterogeneous models of change rather than homogenous. Also it was noted that the notion of 'Planning' is not neutral, rather it is imbued in politics. The planning process attempts to define something that does not yet exist; it is looking inwards to find what that external reality might be. For example, the metaphor that there is something that can be referred to as the Information Society or Networked Society (the way *they* talk about) as the outcome of certain initiatives.

Development is about negotiating conflict where people play multiple roles, and includes issues of power, politics, trust, etc. However, recognizing conflict can be good thing. Therefore, going forward and building coalitions of practice can be a step in the direction of negotiating conflict. Focusing on the realm of practice, it was noted that the funding bodies have their own internal processes and pressures, such as the system of accountability. The accusations of corruption can only be avoided by showing "results". This is where emergence and seeing risk as positive may be problematic (unless there is a paradigm shift). One potential solution may be to try to create space (in the systems of accountability) for creativity (however it may be required to 'mask' it at the moment). In any case, development practitioners today have no option but to show the results that the donors want to see. Creating space for 'creativity' and 'emergence' is therefore a challenge. The current system

discourages risk taking, for example an interdisciplinary research proposal is more difficult to go through the accountability system because of perceived risks being associated with it.

The first practical step towards encouraging a paradigm shift is to try to build a platform where knowledge can be exchanged; a kind of farmers' platform that can serve multiple stakeholders. It should be emphasized that the development field is unique in nature – development is something that we 'do', experiencing failure and success is a part of it – and practice is very important; reading books is not enough. So experiences, especially those emanating from failures, should be encouraged. Furthermore, unpredictability, the inevitability of which is currently unrecognized, should be welcomed and embraced. One way of doing this and creating space for creativity is to try and allocate 10%-15% of the budget for unforeseen opportunities. Admittedly, it may not be possible for everyone, or at all times, but an effort should be made to include such a space. It was also observed that the methodology/preferences change very quickly as a result of different ground realities or a fast-changing environment, therefore 'learning on the go' should be encouraged.

As the cases of rapid diffusion of mobile technologies, solar-powered MP3 players, the \$100 laptop and other technological innovations for poverty alleviation show, research is trying to incorporate cycles of learning. There is also increasing recognition that the reason projects such as M-pesa (a mobile-phone based money transfer service in Kenya) were successful is that they mushroomed/bloomed (or emerged) on their own. However, we need more recognition of the notion that the objectives/goals of a project may change. More time may be needed to evaluate an initiative because it may be declared a success in one phase and a failure in another.

One positive development is that 'Intermediaries' have been getting more attention recently and their role is being recognized in the funding and project planning. However, a huge investment is still being made in top-down projects, some of which never get implemented while others have huge opportunity costs.

The participants noted that the research questions are generally framed around, or tailored to attract, funding. Researchers worry more about what is, and what is not, a 'sexy' subject. The research agenda is often thus decided by the market and this constitutes a big dominant discourse. We need to decide how we are going to deal with it. Should we subvert or challenge? It is to be able to answer such questions that research about research, or initiatives such as this workshop, are so valuable.

The notion of 'rationality' was also scrutinized and seen as 'contested', raising questions such as "From whose perspective is this rational?". This includes the issues of power and goes back to the need to uncover the neutrality of dominant discourse.

The nature of ICT4D as a subject was also discussed and the diversity of participants in this field was noted. It was also noted that much discussion in this area relates to 'success stories' which are not

properly connected with empirical research. There are also not enough discussions on the links between research and policy.

The participants noted that there is not enough research on actual ground level practice and this is an important gap in the literature. There seems to be a 'disconnect' between the policymakers and practice and ground level contextual details/localization. Emergence at the local level is often not recognized and is disconnected from decision-making power structures. Much research on this topic is high-jacked by 'managerialism' and is influenced by Management Research. There is a need for more social theory to be incorporated in research on ICT4D. This will allow the research in this domain to expose otherwise normative power relations.

### **A3.1 Research User, Policymaker and Private Sector Perspectives**

This session discussed what the limits of emergence should be. One point of view was that anything can go except one's alignment with the purpose. Due to rapid changes in the environment, the research question, research methodology and the participants of the research can all change, but alignment with purpose is the researcher's contract with everyone and with themselves; and as long as this stays the same, the emergence should be allowed to happen. It was noted that issues of emergence and risk are also associated with the issue of accountability. This may mean accountability to the funding bodies, or to the people we are working with, depending on each case.

From the practitioner's point of view, it is known that the notion of planning is not neutral; it is always political in some sense, and there are always various interests associated with it. The emergence is not neutral either and it is also political and we should keep this in mind. We are not talking about good or bad necessarily; we are talking about both in different proportions. Conceptualizing emergence in such a way is helpful because it means that we ourselves are not trying to approach something that is not yet created. Most funding bodies have matrices and measures to gauge progress towards achieving something. Everyone who is involved in taking the money and using it for some purpose has to live with the accountability and performance evaluation according to some measures or matrices of performance. So the basic ethos or logic of matrices and measures for something called 'progress' is a reality in which all the people working on projects have to live. The milestones or signs of progress are the states of future that are imagined at the time of planning. These are then shared to get other people to buy into these futures as well. This requires a particular language to articulate that imaginary state of future and seems to be a huge challenge.

The word *participation* has become a buzz word for something positive and good, but as critical researchers we must remember that participation can be empty despite all its usual appeal. Participation can be both empowering and disempowering. Practice is what really matters, not just the words, not just the ethos, so when it comes to bidding for funds, or reporting on outcomes of funding,

practice is what matters. It is essentially about people and building coalitions of practice, and managing conflict and negotiation.

From a policymaking perspective, when you are working in the ministry, even if you are the minister, your hands are tied because of the issue of accountability. A minister is accountable to parliament and, ultimately, to the voters. The development sector in particular has been criticized for many years. There are persistent accusations about wasting money on corrupt regimes, so perhaps the only way we can defend ourselves against such accusations is by showing results. This leads to planning outcomes and results and the establishment of criteria to hold those you give money to, responsible. This is the way the ministry works. You may still be able to create space for creativity and emergence, but you will have to mask it behind the logical framework (or performance measures and results etc.). All stakeholders need to be satisfied.

At a research council the work is a bit different, but funds are still received from a ministry and we have to spend funds for research excellence. Here too, we have to make sure that the funds we pass on produce the results that the ministry wants to see. So the same criteria/framework is passed on to the researchers. However, we also want to create space for creativity, emergence and ground-breaking work. Yet we have a very limited number of tools at our disposal to do this. One way in which we try to do this is by inviting a large number of proposals, and then selecting a few to provide us with detailed proposals or to conduct pilot studies, and a small proportion of funding is provided for this purpose. This allows researchers to involve all the relevant stakeholders and adopt a participatory approach in formulating the research questions and methodology. This allows the research to be innovative, interdisciplinary and socially embedded. However, making the research too trans-disciplinary is more risky because it may not then fully conform to the objectives/framework of ministry.

## **A4 PLENARY SESSION**

In the final plenary session of Day 1 the group discussions were summarised and all the groups contributed to the 'wall of hope' and the 'wall of laments'. The issues raised are listed as follows:

### **A4.1 Hopes**

- Research in general is trying to accommodate cycles of learning. Evidence shows that, traditionally, the project may be deemed as a success but, after a while, may also be declared a failure. So it is gradually being recognized that research projects, especially in ICT, require a larger cycle to be evaluated. This is because the objective, goals and the ground realities may change and so the evaluation criteria should also change accordingly. The funding

agencies are now more aware of the fact that research requires a longer time-span in order to accommodate the cycles of failure and success.

- There is more debate in academia, and also within the funding agencies, about the role of intermediaries in the development process and this is being built into the funding regimes.
- The success of mobile telephony and solar-powered technology shows that - if allowed to happen - emergence can produce desirable results.
- It is possible to educate the senior managers about the possibilities of change, and in some cases they have demonstrated flexibility to allow emergence.
- In many cases pre-defined matrices of performance can be re-negotiated, however there may be a limit to how much re-negotiation is possible.

#### **A4.2 Laments**

- A huge investment is still being made in top-down projects and, despite growing recognition of its limitations, this has still not gone away.
- The lack of capacity building in the areas of research on the interface between ICTs and Development. There is less policy focus on this issue.
- While dealing with a person face-to-face, the communication occurs within a context, but the way funding bodies work, the whole planning exercise and bureaucracy gets further and further away from the shared meaning and values and other contextual details. This can be termed as 'progressive decontextualizationalism'.
- Things become abstracted and interpreted in various ways and so have the potential to become unclear.
- The research question ends up being framed by, and framed around, chasing money and attracting funding.
- ICT4D is a new field and is shifting. However, it is dominated by one discourse biased towards 'managerialism'. The content and framework of the 'development' aspect is unclear.

- From whose perspective is a thing, 'rational'? This underlines the issues of power and politics in policymaking.
- It is important to recognize and acknowledge the incentives of various stakeholders including ourselves. We have to negotiate within boundaries and have our own constraints.
- The separation of the formulation of the project and its implementation creates rigidity and inertia that resists emergence.
- Technocentricity is a lament and should be avoided.

## A5 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS OF DAY 1

The key issues that emerged from the discussions were summarized in this session. These are listed as follows:

- 1) The Nature of Technology as a subject is unique. The transformational nature of ICTs could also be a double-edged sword. ICT for Development (ICT4D) in particular attracts a diverse pool of participants and there is a danger of falling into Technocentricity.
- 2) One positive development is that research agencies now seem to get the idea of allowing longer spans of research to allow an understanding of cycles of success and failure.
- 3) There is not much policy-directed ICT4D research and discussion on policy formulation. The ICT4D research has a role to expose the otherwise normative or underlying power structures in the discursive relations that surround ICT4D.
- 4) In the realm of *practice*, there is more recognition of the role of intermediaries and that of the incentives that different practitioners may have, especially considering that this is a very diverse bunch.
- 5) The normative assumptions that surround and underlie development-related activities and 'disconnect' between policymakers and practice are being recognized. There is a 'water and oil' disconnect between emergence on ground level and its contextual relevance and necessary 'de-contextualization that occurs at policy level. The question is how do we, as believers in the contextualized and emergent nature of research, push these agendas while co-existing alongside pre-existing power relationships.

The discussion then turned to the culture of 'managerialism' around policymaking, and the fact that researchers are expected to express their aims in 'managerialistic terms' and convert these into business cases and plans and so on. This distances it from the local context and meaning-making process.

Accountability emerged in the proceedings as a key cog in the current system. It was noted that accountability itself may be non-negotiable, but how it is described and delivered is possibly negotiable, challengeable and even changeable. A development corporation will probably never drop the accountability and evaluation criteria to ensure effectiveness, but it is also a matter of interpreting “What does it mean? And this interpretation is certainly negotiable. However, to practically change the system, one needs to complete high-quality research projects that meet the current criteria and make a good impression, then these researchers get a high standing and can be involved in the committee proceedings (that allocate funds) where they can try to change the way other committee members interpret the criteria and in this way one may be able to change the culture. Of course, this cannot be done in a single year or so, but it can be done.

## **B. DAY 2**

On Day two, the main activity was the group sessions where all participants were divided into three groups, and each one was given a particular task. Group 1, for example, was responsible for discussing evidence in support of emergence, while groups 2 and 3 were responsible for discussing the theoretical grounding of the concept and its implications, respectively. The discussion in each group has been summarized as follows:

### **B1 THEORETICAL GROUNDING**

The discussion revolved around the theoretical issues relevant to the notion of emergence. The group raised some key questions such as “What do we mean by emergence?” “What are the main problems in the recognition of emergence?” and “Theoretically, what is the group’s understanding of what is wrong in the current system?”.

It was noted that the “managerial” perspective attempts to control emergence because this is thought to give predictable results. Such a perspective seems extremely seductive because it promises predictability and control. However, often the most developmentally relevant outcomes were those that the architects had no idea about at the planning stage. This does mean that planning has no role and one will have to live with the planning, but our argument is to also recognize the emergence. Generally, the managers react very strongly when one refers to the idea of emergence, because it is perceived to mean that they are not entirely in control. The strong emotions that this idea evokes need to be considered carefully. However, managers should also be taught that the project can only be controlled to a certain extent, and that the majority of it is in a flux. Similarly, saying that it is all complex and emergent and there can be no control is not viable as a theoretical position. There is, of

course, some element of control as well. We will not go so far as to deny this. We believe that one needs to work with certainty and uncertainty, both at the same time.

A book by Cook and Kothari does well to explain the participatory approach and identify the problems that most people felt across the board, but which no one had been able to articulate. So just by identifying these problems, they initiated a debate. Another book then came out and carried the debate further (Hickey and Mohan). Cook and Kothari's book is particularly inspirational because they showed how to take on something that is absolutely mainstream and is the dominant paradigm in development and without which not even a penny is allocated for any project. They showed what that approach had become, and its shortcomings.

This leads us to another key question, "What are the key pillars of this dominant order of thinking?" The project normally starts with the pre-defined elements that are included in the plan which are expressed in different shapes and forms such as a Gantt chart with a time-line, milestones and the details of the tasks involved. However, as the project progresses the spiral of unpredictability widens. Sometimes the whole project may change as a result of emergence and there are often unexpected outcomes. Opportunities or other benefits may emerge in the process but the plan may be incapable of recognizing or adapting to these. At root, the planning process is intellectually incapable of conceptualizing such changes on the ontological level. The reason for this is that plans depend on abstractions at the epistemological level that create the imaginary situation that the project aims to achieve. By having this pre-defined abstraction as the target in the plan, the managers get an illusion of control. But the chasm or gulf between what the policy document or a plan is capable of visualizing and what may actually happen can be huge. We have to demonstrate this gulf and show how wide it is backed by evidence to make our point that we need to adopt an approach and methodologies that are more capable of recognizing the unpredictable and emergent realities of development projects.

One of the sacred cows of the status quo is the relationship between development and economic growth. Development is a much more personal experience and is philosophically richer. If people are asked about what they value, most would not say money *per se* but rather what they want to have as a result of using that money. Economic growth or other financial indicators, on the other hand, may be popular among policymakers because these are easy to quantify and control. Also conventionally, development is considered measurable and this leads to the tendency to do what is measurable and so the drift towards input-count, money-count and head-count starts, as other forms of accountability such as integrity, are neglected. Yet even business people value relationships as much as the financial figures when negotiating contracts with suppliers.

Theoretically, this represents an ontological obsession with 'things' such as cars, money and the number of workshops to be held rather than experience, and this leads to this trend that attempts to measure development as a 'thing' rather than conceptualizing it as a potential 'experience'. This is important because ultimately development is about improving people's 'life experience' rather than measuring the 'things'.

The framing of development interventions needs to be changed as does the language of development. However, paradoxically we are still interested in using some of the managerialist discourse and terminology. We use concepts such as 'efficiency', 'over-arching' goals, and the 'harvesting of knowledge' because we, like everyone else in the development field, have to invoke a sense of their relevance to these developmental goals to obtain legitimacy. Therefore, we can say that our approach is also relevant to 'better life experiences' and the achievement of overall development goals. It may make sense to use managerial terms (because these are already out there and used in practice) and to argue that taking greater account of emergence is a better or more efficient way of achieving developmental goals; that in fact an obsession with planning and measuring stuff is not the most efficient way of pursuing these goals. Thus we can challenge dominant discourse and practice in their own terms.

Escobar wrote an excellent analysis, an insightful deconstruction of the development field in his book *Encountering Development*. However, here we can cite such work and claim that there are many people who have problematized the construct of development, but this is an area in development where we can see that something is clearly wrong, so it may be better to limit our scope to the particular issue of emergence that we are talking about rather than challenging the whole concept of development the way it is.

Control is interpreted by development funders as accountability (or accountability is interpreted as control?). Predictability and quality are also linked to control. The logic goes that if you can control the research project from the beginning, the quality will be high, because you can have a design that is completely structured, whereas in the case of emergence it may be difficult to create a discursive space that it is about quality and rigour. Since we are also not immune to the accountability and quality requirements, we have to come up with something that is accountable and still incorporates emergence.

Our aim is to make emergence visible, so that people can recognize it, see its potential, and use it. One benefit of recognizing emergence is that it can save the money that is spent on stopping people from using the technology the way they want to use it rather than as stipulated in the original plan.

## **B2 EVIDENCE**

This group session discussed issues relating to collecting evidence to support emergence. During the discussion it was noted that the development process is very complex and difficult to measure. The collection of data for researchers is often difficult and problematic. Selecting the correct methodology is critical in this regard. However, it is very difficult to gauge how effective a particular method will be in increasing the instances of community participation. There is no homogeneous model to measure

change and development: the 'one-size-fits-all' approach should not be followed. Rather, it is a heterogeneous process and therefore one model cannot be applied in all places. More contextual details need to be captured in deciding the methodology and the model used must be localized.

The collection of evidence also has its political dimension. The history shows that most of the time powerful stakeholders attempt to impose their terms/models on others. It is normally the most powerful who decides whose values are better, whose ideas are relevant to the process and which process will privilege which group. Development projects are often long-term and, over time, evidence about their operation or impact can become hard to find or may be manipulated by powerful stakeholders.

Development projects are often variable and fluid. In many cases, the story is the same, but it all depends on who is framing it. For example, many researchers with the agenda to promote e-government often provide evidence which is techno-centric and emphasizes technology rather than governance. Researching the use of technology is particularly problematic because it is so rich and rapidly changing that it is not possible to collect the evidence of its success. The focus, therefore, should be on people and this seems to be increasingly recognized, which is a positive development. There should be more collaboration and coalitions among people, while technology should only be seen in a support role.

The group also discussed some examples, mainly from India:

In one particular initiative, a platform is being developed in India where knowledge can be shared by local farmers. However, not all farmers are willing to share this knowledge in a formal setting as it is very precious to them and they believe that by sharing this knowledge they may lose their most cherished asset. Yet, conversely, in an informal setting they do share this knowledge with their other colleagues. The challenge we face here is how to strengthen the voice of the one who actually farms for a living, as opposed to the one who talks for a living.

Another key issue is that evidence is also sometimes 'constructed' and this also relates to the political aspects of conducting research. Various enterprises, for example in the mobile telephony sector, at times want development organizations such as NGOs to provide a rural setting for launching a particular service, or for a pilot study. But development may not be the real goal, rather they may just want to enhance their brand image by constructing evidence of their concern for the poor.

It should also be noted that the research must capture the local realities and local context for it to have any relevance to the real issues people have. A researcher with a foreign lens in this regard may never be able to fully understand the issues involved. We should also acknowledge that interpretation of evidence is also very important. Data may be interpreted in many different ways depending on the subjective judgment of the researcher. Open access technology for example may be considered as a method of transferring wealth by some, while others may believe it is for a higher cause. Wikipedia is

a good example of this; for many people it has the potential to spread knowledge while many others dislike it for its potential inaccuracy.

Evidence shows that the Indian states of Karnataka and Kerala had very contrasting experiences of using the open source technology. Kerala, which opted for open source technology, recorded improvements to its education system and had better student results, as compared to Karnataka where the computer usage by students and all other indicators were very low. Kerala also implemented a platform where teachers were able to exchange their ideas on a peer-to-peer basis, and the same was the case with the students. They all found it very useful.

In West Bengal the 'Right to food' movement was supported by mobile text messages. Local people would receive a text message telling the when the food truck left the warehouse along with information about how much food it was carrying and the shop where it was going to offload the food. Equipped with this information, the people could scrutinize the supply of food, thereby making it impossible for the shopkeepers to steal or store the food illegally.

### **B3 IMPLICATIONS**

The third group discussed the implications of the concept of emergence on various stakeholders. The discussion raised some key questions about who we are, what we want to do differently, how we should disseminate the vision we articulate, how the discourse could be changed and personal contacts used, and how we should work with the system as it is now, i.e. in the short term.

Certain features of the concept of emergence and the approach preferred by this group were recognized, such as unpredictability, value-based and greater freedom. It was suggested that we should adopt a long-term approach. This would mean thinking about how to get other actors on board and what we wanted to say/tell other actors to change their behaviour (i.e. What is our pitch?). However, in the short term, we may not want to challenge the established structures.

It was noted that initiatives aimed at destabilizing the existing structures are problematic because you would ending up with something that you did not exactly want at the first place. Therefore the process of doing so is more important than its desired end-result or goals. The focus should be on getting a dialogue underway rather than attempting to change the establishment. Nevertheless, it is better to be overt about it and engage with the existing power structure on different platforms e.g. publishing, negotiating with funding bodies, etc.

The vision of emergence should not be one of 'everything goes' but should be set within certain parameters. What we are up against here is something that has sturdy roots; the political regime that controls funding. It may be better to frame a vision in a loose and vague way in order to achieve a broader consensus. This intended process of change has implications for all the stakeholders

involved as well as the relationships between the donors and researchers, and the researchers and their subjects. Here we are focusing on the Donor or commissioner of the research and the researchers (who may also include consultants, along with academic researchers).

It was suggested that we first need to articulate the vision, then we must identify who we are trying to influence and, finally, how we should go about it.

Some of the stakeholders identified are as follows:

- Journal Editors;
- Funding Bodies (Private donors, research councils, bilateral and multilateral ODA);
- Development Organizations;
- Researchers (academic, private sector based, practitioners, consultants);
- Research Co-ordinating bodies or other Intermediaries (as they impact policy but may not hold funds);
- Policymakers.

A debate ensued about whether or not the communities we are talking about can be considered to be stakeholders and whether they would be or should be mere passive recipients of the new system. It was noted that communities have no impact on policymaking, therefore they are not the ones we have to convince. It was, however, argued that by definition, a stakeholder is everyone who is somehow or other involved in the process, irrespective of whether they are influential or not. However, pragmatism demands that it is more important at this stage to focus on those who need to be influenced. Especially as in this case we ourselves are a frustrated community dealing with the 'way research is controlled'.

The participants noted that in order to achieve our goals, we need to translate the benefits of our approach and align our interests. One way is to look for allies in places where we have not yet looked; for example, a typical academic tool is a 'special issue'. We should not treat ourselves as a homogenous community; rather we should bring on the conflict and differences of opinion. We should try to articulate our own interests as well as those of the stakeholders. Aligning interests and finding people is almost a recruitment exercise that requires offering something to them. Thus, we are looking for allies and the incentives that can be provided to them, e.g. a higher purpose (vision). For example, we are ourselves motivated by the goal of doing something differently.

Furthermore, we should look at the stakeholders and the actions we need to take. Some of these can be listed as follows:

Academic Field:

- Recognize the key outlets (e.g. journals);
- Write influential papers;
- Become editors;

- Be overt about it, discuss it in the conferences (the argument is weakened when you are covert, while by being overt you will find genuine allies);
- By exposing yourself, you expose others.

So what are the journals or other relevant publishing venues? In the ICT4D field it is quite clear, but if we want to change policy at a higher level it is different i.e. at the disciplinary level and at the policy level.

What the developing research policymakers read needs to be considered. Also, the empirical evidence can be extremely helpful if we can compile a compelling piece of evidence. One may use a chapter written in a book to write a piece in *The Guardian* newspaper and then use it to speak at policy forums. In this way, getting published in mainstream media is important for credibility and vital for engaging the wider audience. We also need to know more about the funding bodies and think about ways of influencing them.

In addition to the above, it is also imperative to use online media, e.g. blogs or a page on wikipedia or Facebook. This is almost like a marketing campaign that might include media publications, blogs, setting up a body of knowledge, starting discussions, and getting the word out. However, it is also equally important to 'walk the talk'.

There may be two possible approaches to change the perspective of the funders/donor regimes. One approach involves telling them to change and give up power, the other is to keep floating ideas in the common knowledge/discourse of the organization/field to influence behaviour.

Face-to-face interaction was considered to be very important for the process of influencing key decision-makers, however it requires a channel or contacts within the different organizations since you cannot just knock at the door and say "Can we have a chat?". It is about listening to their needs as well, to see if we have anything to offer.

It was noted that the Implications for this paradigm shift are much greater for applied research and research institutions as they might need to make substantial changes to their entire way of working and assessing themselves, as opposed to the donors who might only have to change the funding criteria.

The following concluding remarks were made at the end of the session:

- It is important that we identify the key outlets to engage with the power structure explicitly.
- We need to look into existing strategies to influence different disciplines/stakeholders.
- Saying things absolutely explicitly is a highly political act so, while being overt about it, we should think how best to frame it.
- We should realise that our own message may change or shift over time.

## **B4 PLENARY SESSION**

In the last plenary session of the workshop, each group presented a summary of their discussions. These were rounded off with some concluding remarks.

### **B4.1 Theoretical Grounding**

We discussed where our thinking was focusing at the moment and decided that we did not need to discuss at the very high level the different interpretations of development and could not see much convergence in the group on this issue, but we did acknowledge that there are some alternative approaches to development, such as Escobar's and the work of others that would be worth bearing in mind in this context for the bigger picture. We were inspired by the work of Cook and Kothari and the debate that they managed to unleash following the publication of their book entitled *Participation and New Tyranny* which took a sort of meso-level approach to challenge a host of practices and unleashed all sorts of reactions, and this is the level at which we can place the concept of emergence, and challenge the practices that are anti-emergence. This is where a set of practices that we will be critiquing lie.

We think it is our responsibility to theoretically explain the things that we are dissatisfied with. We see this as three levels of reality or abstraction, at the bottom we have project plans, so we have project planners and a bit of a time line which is supposed to represent a traditional Gantt chart. Then in the existing regimes we have a plan that sits here and stipulates that in two years time we are going to achieve this outcome, which has a certain dollar value. This is effectively how the system works at the moment. The argument is that the current planning exercise is actually only capable of identifying outcomes which are in reality just guesses at the time of planning. It shows that the utility of attempting to predict the future is dependent on a particular way of planning that focuses on the delivery of objects. This is the emergence at the ontological level. Furthermore, part of the problem consists of the epistemological abstractions that are the realities which people construct and set as the object that they want to achieve. This is the way in which development plans are made. The reason and the underlying power relations sustaining this and the way in which these things are wrapped up are the policy documents. This managerialist approach toward development offers us a very seductive illusion of control. Also because the people who make policy are accountable and must appear developmentally relevant, there are a host of terms such as 'harvesting knowledge' and 'guaranteed outcomes' etc., that sound incisive and in control and very comforting and of course we can be much more accountable to the people spending money if we can guarantee a particular object/outcome. So this was the description of the problem.

This approach has limitations and our suggestion is that we should stop potentially planning development around 'things' and measuring things we have delivered, such as mobile phones or workshops with a particular number of female participants. In short, we should stop measuring things

and start recognizing 'experience', and the development should be oriented towards experience rather than delivering 'stuff'. This is the implication of this ontological and epistemological mess.

In contrast what we are saying is that the world is emergent and so there is a spiral in which there are all sorts of unintended consequences and effects which may include opportunities such as the use of technology in ways that might not have been envisaged before. It makes no sense to ignore these emergent realities in order to stick with a pre-ordained plan. There must be processes for identifying, analysing and responding to the unexpected or the emergent and changing plans, possibly radically, in accordance with the above. A couple of initial ideas for an alternative model were presented and will be developed further. Both allowed the idea of 'successful' outcomes which look very different from the initial outcomes or targets set in the project plan.

## **B4.2 Evidence**

A development agency would like to see development outcomes, but sometimes it is really difficult to demonstrate this as the project might be able to show some steps but not the final outcome. We looked at some of the technologies that emerged such as wikipedia, money transfers, and open access journals and saw how emergence cannot be predicted. Then we talked about emerging technologies and harnessing these for development. Some examples from India, such as the use of open source software in the public education system, were especially relevant in this regard. We also discussed the need to see opportunities as they emerge on the one hand, and the things emerging in a market-led way on the other, for example, as the growth of mobile telephony has been completely market-led whereas other innovations, such as the one laptop per child (OLPC) initiative, have resulted from developmental discourse. The fundamental point however is whether the organizational culture and approach is open to processes of emergence or, effectively, prohibits it.

## **B4.3 Implications**

We are engaging with the system, so 'Who are we?' 'Who are they?' and 'What is this all about?' We identified one set of stakeholders, such as researchers, out of the many different types such as funding bodies, practitioners etc. We also made a list of those who have the power to change the system, so communities were left out of this list. We discussed what concrete actions could be done to engage with the existing power structure. We thought we would have to be explicit about what we believe and that we cannot be covert. We are trying to build a movement of people who want to be explicit about it. We need to reach stakeholders through academic papers; special issues of professional journals, mainstream media and by making alliances with others: it is almost like a marketing campaign. It is about the process and having conversations with the people and listening to them to encourage an interaction about our concerns and the ideas that we have. However this might also mean that as a result of this two-way communications process, we could change as well.

## **B5 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

### **B5.1 Some Final Perspectives**

Changing the nature of the academic field concerned with this area is one of the things this group is intent on doing. It is very difficult to plan something in a very precise way. Take, for example, the academic papers that we write; it cannot be determined with any certainty beforehand which papers will be better received and preferred by the people over others. The way it works is that you do your best and you complete a paper, and no one can predict how these will be received. We should forget about achieving a certain state of affairs and just get on with trying to put our message across by publishing it all over the place over a long period of time and being absolutely explicit about it. We should put it out there and then see if someone likes it. I do not think that we can plan how we change the field, so we should just get on with it, and maybe in five years time things will have changed, but we cannot predict it at the moment.

We have to recognize that not all new ideas and situations are the result of emergence. Many are the result of expensive and well-planned campaigns by political or economic interests to make change happen in a certain way. However, emergence or the nature of change in general can never be controlled, even if you explicitly try to do it, and therefore emergence has tremendous value. In India we have noticed that the whole social policy is very much influenced by the Neo-Liberal approach. In the field of ICTs, for example, they only focus on IT jobs, IT diffusion, etc. In some ways, this whole ideology that everything needs to be "commodified is deeply entrenched in the mind-set and psyche of the nation. The dominance of mainstream discourse is so potent that it hypes the need for planning and the process of hand-holding, support and mediation. By challenging this paradigm, we can be perceived as anti-participatory or undemocratic. But there is some evidence now from India that shows that if you allow emergence to happen, if you allow people to take ownership and adapt new technologies, then the outcomes are very different, and because of the rapidity of change there is often no other way.

In the context of DFID's funded research, the strategy is set for five years and there are five themes within that strategy including health, agriculture, climate change, food and governance, future challenges and opportunities. Future challenges and opportunities are broken into two parts and 'new and emerging technologies' represents one of these parts. One basic question is "What is all the research for?" and one simple answer can be that it is to inform policy and practice. However it is easier said than done. It is the practice element that is more important because the policy can be written and just ignored. So how do we develop research which is going to have impact on practice? The current paradigm at DFID is oriented towards evidence-based research and this is supported by the institutional framework. It is believed that evidence can be collected and channelled in such a way that it will influence practice. It is, however, important to think about what the evidence would look like' "What would be the shape of the evidence to convince DFID or other funding bodies to back this

approach?". To sum up, a clearer understanding of what evidence is needed and how it can be collected and presented is required.

## **B5.2 Looking Ahead**

There can be a number of initiatives based on the discussions so far. We have tried to come up with some concrete actions for those who want to take this process forward. First of all, we have a shared e-mail list that can be very useful for sharing ideas and keeping everyone up to date on the follow-up of this workshop. Pictures can also be shared as well as planning more Round Table suggestion rounds. Using the internet, including blogs, wikipedia, Facebook and structured online discussions are a few of the other options that can be pursued. It also emerged from the discussion that we need to focus on publishing outlets including journals, special issues and mainstream media to express our ideas following an overt rather than a covert approach.

More specifically, some people expressed interest in developing a book about the potential impact of emergent thinking on the practice of development and development research. The aim of the book would be to engage with practitioners and demand attention from the policymakers.

It was agreed that more such meetings and workshops should be arranged. With respect to this, it was mentioned that some expressions of interest in discussing these issues had come from Canada, Denmark and Switzerland.

There was also enthusiasm for working out ways to stimulate an interest in and a debate on these issues at the next ICTD conference, which is being organized by Royal Holloway in London in December 2010.

# C1 Workshop Programme

## 17 September 2009

12.00-13.00	<b>Introductory Plenary</b> Chair: Mark Thompson	Welcome Explanation of Workshop Programme Brief 'Why we are doing this' from the organizers Personal introductions by the other participants Problem statement
13.00-14.00	Lunch	
14.00-14.30	Problem framing/ 'Must air' issues	Small groups of 4
14.30-15.30	Missing issues report back Input/ reports of interest from 'absent friends'	
	Perspectives	Research user perspective Policymaker perspective
15.30-17.00	Issue workarounds 'Help yourself' tea	Groups of 8 Wall of lament/wall of hope
17.00-18.00	<b>Plenary</b> Chair: Ann Light	Report Back Framing of emerging issues Alter/Agree on programme for Day 2
19.30	Dinner	

## 18 September 2009

09.30-10.00	<b>Plenary</b> Chair: Ann Light	Reflection on the previous day. Proposals for the morning
10.30-11.30	Group work	Evidence Theory Arguing the Case
11.30-13.00	Perspectives	Political economy Research theory Development and research
	<b>Plenary</b> Chair: Dorothea Kleine	Report back from groups Framing of issues and possible actions Proposals for further collaboration
13.00	Lunch	

## C2 List of Participants

Andy Dearden	Human-Computer Interaction, Sheffield Hallam University, UK
Anita Gurumurthy	IT for Change, Bangalore, India
Anna Wissmann	International Foundation for Organic Agriculture
Ann Light	Sheffield Hallam University, PRADSA, Bridging the Digital Divide Group, UK
Antonella Pastore	CGIAR, Rome, Italy
Sir Brian Heap*	Fellow of the Royal Society, UK
Chris Mowles	Complexity and Management, University of Hertfordshire, UK
Clodagh Miskelly	Independent: research and communication – works for PANOS and others, UK
David Grimshaw	Practical Action, Senior research fellow, DFID, UK
Dorothea Kleine	Royal Holloway, BDDG, ICTD 2010, UK
Geoff Walsham	Professor of Management Studies, Judge Institute, Cambridge, UK
Ineke Buskens	Independent: ICT4D research, research theory, works for IDRC and others, the Netherlands
Hannah Beardon	Independent: participation, knowledge management, works for IKM, IFAD and others, UK
Henk Molenaar	Executive Director, WOTRO/Netherlands Science Council, the Netherlands
Julie Ferguson	PhD student, Knowledge, Info, Networks Research Group, Free University of Amsterdam (VUU), Amsterdam, the Netherlands
Mark Thompson	Information Systems, Judge Institute, Cambridge, UK
Mike Powell	Director, IKM Programme, UK
Patricia Ocampo-Thomason	Science Officer, International Council for Science, Paris, France
Robin Mansell**	Professor of New Media, London School of Economics (LSE), UK
Roger Tucker	Outside Echo, speech and language technologies, UK
Shiri Madon	London School of Economics (LSE), UK
Tariq Khokhar	Aptivate (UK-based, ICT4Dev NGO), UK

\* Attended parts of the workshop only.

\*\* Attended first day only

## **IKM Working Paper series**

Julie E. Ferguson, Kingo Mchombu and Sarah Cummings (2008) Management of knowledge for development: meta-review and scoping study. *IKM Working Paper* No. 1, April 2008, 45pp.

D. Wickremasinghe (2008) Communicating Information and Knowledge Management: Challenges and Approaches. *IKM Working Paper* No. 2. April 2008.

Serafin D. Talisayon (2009) Monitoring and evaluation in knowledge management for development. *IKM Working Paper* No. 3, July 2009, 50pp.

Laxmi P. Pant (2009) Learning networks for bridging knowledge divides in international development: approaches and initiatives. *IKM Working Paper* No. 4, August 2009, 39pp.

Harry Jones (2009) State of the art literature review on the link between knowledge and policy in development. Joint *ODI-IKM Working Paper* No. 5, August 2009, 37pp.

Stephen Kirimi and Eliud Wakwabubi (2009) Learning from promoting and using participation: The case of International Development Organizations in Kenya. Joint *PAMFORK-IKM Working Paper* No. 6, October 2009, 44pp.

Hannah Beardon and Kate Newman (2009) How wide are the ripples? The management and use of information generated from participatory processes in international non-governmental development organizations. *IKM Working Paper* No. 7, October 2009, 29pp.

Adnan Rafiq and Nazish Rafiq (2010) Good planning or benign imposition? Innovation, emergence and risk in developmental research: Learning from ICTD. Final Draft Report. JBS-IKM-BDDG Workshop 17-18 September 2009. *IKM Working Paper* No. 8, January 2010, 29 pp.

## **IKM Background Paper series**

Sarah Cummings (2008) IKM Emergent Communications Strategy, *IKM Background Paper*, December 2008, 45pp.

Joitske Hulsebosch, Mark Turpin and Sibrenne Wagenaar (2009) Monitoring and evaluating knowledge management strategies, *IKM Background Paper*, October 2009, 44pp.

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