

The *e*-Development Challenge

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There is a dynamic tension between the global and the local aspects of development. Globalization is a reality in a networked world, and it is often at odds with local needs. What is the impact of this tension on the development challenge? What are the requirements imposed by local language, customs and culture, and the local infrastructure and enabling regulatory environment? Within this context, what are some of the opportunities for e-development? And what is the role of new media?

The fundamental development challenge for the new millennium is poverty. Half the world's population – 3 billion people – live on less than \$2 a day; and 1.2 billion people live on less than \$1 a day. Yet, consider that the average European cow lives on a subsidy of \$2.50 a day, and the average Japanese cow lives on a subsidy of \$7.50 a day.

Every day a quarter of a million people are added to our planet – 99% of them in developing countries. The World Bank increasingly see its role as a catalyst, as a facilitator, broker, and connector - positioned at a major intersection in the network economy - connecting global learning opportunities and knowledge sharing together with investment assistance for local development.

Development practitioners and advocates need little convincing that information and communications technologies – including the new media like the internet – can play a significant role as an enabler of economic and social development. **The internet has**

vastly increased the speed, scope, and immediacy of knowledge sharing. While these advances in information technology have empowered people, liberated lives, and created stock market miracles and debacles, only a fraction of the world's poor have seen any direct benefits. The stark reality is that nearly 2.5 billion people have never made a phone call; and Manhattan alone has more phones than all of sub-Saharan Africa. The market for practical application of new media to development is large. There is a steadily growing number of public and private sector leaders, entrepreneurs, and educators who are very interested in the results of discussions like this workshop that identify ways to help developing countries share fully in the new media revolution. **There is a great need and a great opportunity for e-development.**

At the World Bank, information technology is central to the Country Assistance Strategies that are jointly developed with the Bank's clients and partners. **What we are learning is that successful IT-enabled development must deal with the realities of the relentless integration of economic activity across all kinds of boundaries – the global networked economy – and at the same time recognize a fundamental truth, that all development is ultimately local.**

Take an example from the **cyberkiosks of the Gyandoot network, in rural India:** a **soybean farmer** can now check the going price for his crop at distant wholesale markets by looking at the rates on the village internet kiosk. He pays Rs 5 for the service. A year ago he would have had to travel all the way to the district wholesale market by bus for Rs 10 just to find out the current selling price. Now that he is able to find the best price, he wants to take the risk of renting a truck. He has said that next, he wants to know the price of soybeans in the global markets so that he can predict what the markets shifts are likely to be in India.

This same approach may need to be adapted however in another country where internet connectivity is not available. Perhaps it will require replicating the Grameen model of village entrepreneurs renting cell phone time. **Many IT-enabled development projects combine old and new media for a “glocalized” solution.** Cemina, a Brazilian NGO

whose mission is to educate on gender issues, equips local radio stations with hardware and software for downstreaming radio programs from the internet. The project provides locally relevant radio content at low cost. Through internet connectivity, radio stations can download information and programming based on demand, and communicate via email with listeners who have internet access. This community radio project is strengthening women's leadership in community development. In a similar project in Sri Lanka, poor villagers who have no computers or cell phones are logging onto the internet. How do they do this? They send handwritten queries to the local community radio station, which in turn, browses the internet and broadcasts the responses. The point is that the internet is not a silver bullet. We need to merge it with old technologies as well. **It is not necessarily about putting a PC in every house - it is about delivering value in the language and context of the people who need it with the appropriate technology.**

“Glocalization” can also be on the other end of the spectrum. In China, the Bank has been helping the government set up distance learning centers. The Minister said to me, “I want to educate my people, but I cannot send the best of our teachers to far-off rural areas. So I want to use technology to bridge the gap, and give them multimedia distance learning centers.” Taking a more global approach leverages scarce educational resources to reach a huge dispersed population. At the same time, China is an example of the technology leap-frogging phenomenon. China already had laid a high speed fiber backbone when many people in Washington were still having trouble getting connected to broadband.

Another major challenge for “glocalized” new media solutions is the required sensitivity to cultural and indigenous dimensions. There are real concerns among developing countries that as they plug into the global network they will be overwhelmed by cultural values and messages from beyond their borders. Large investments will be required in many cases to organize local information and make it accessible electronically. For example, when the World Bank put up an indigenous knowledge web

site in Wolof – a language spoken in the west African nations of Senegal and Coastal Gambia – the Wolof site quickly began to get more hits than the French site.

What is the role of new media in the business of development? Can new media be put to the task of sharing global knowledge to coordinate development work? Consider as an example a country like Tanzania, which until recently had to produce 2,400 quarterly reports a year for its donors, and suffer over 1,000 missions from different donors each year. Since that time the development community has made some progress on donor coordination with the bilaterals and the regional development banks—but not enough. At the World Bank, given our donor coordination role, we are now taking advantage of the internet as a platform for coordination. AiDA (Accessible Information on Development Activities) – which you’ll find on the Development Gateway (www.developmentgateway.org) - is a catalog of information on development activities found on the web sites of development organizations. Participating organizations share information on planned, current and completed projects and programs that they fund, execute or implement. With nearly 500,000 records on development activity, AiDA provides information to meet the demand for timely and reliable information about who is doing what in various locations, and with what results. The Gateway also provides – through Country Gateways – development information resources at country levels – emphasizing the importance of local development in a global context.

The development challenge is such that no one has the right answers. We are all learning with experience. This workshop and other discussions hopefully will help us to answer questions such as the following:

- To what degree do the cases being presented at the workshop effectively balance the realities of both globalization and the essentially local nature of development?
- What local innovations have been particularly effective in adapting technology to leverage local resources?
- How do you leverage the local context to ensure the sustainability of a project over the long term?

- What provisions have been made to ensure that local content can be organized and made accessible?