

# The Bellagio Initiative

The Future of Philanthropy and Development in  
the Pursuit of Human Wellbeing

## Online Consultation

### ICTs and Development

Kelly Shephard  
Knowledge Services, IDS

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1. It seeks to build resilience that enhances individual, community and institutional capacity to survive, adapt, and grow in the face of acute crises and chronic stresses.
2. It seeks to promote growth with equity so that poor and vulnerable people have more access to opportunities that improve their lives.

In order to achieve these goals, the Foundation provides much of its support through time-bound initiatives that have defined objectives and strategies for impact.



For further information on the Bellagio Initiative:  
E-mail: [contact@thebellagioinitiative.org](mailto:contact@thebellagioinitiative.org)  
Web: [www.bellagioinitiative.org](http://www.bellagioinitiative.org)

# ICTs and development

Kelly Shephard, Knowledge Services, IDS

## Executive summary

As part of a series of global dialogues, in September 2011 IDS Knowledge Services brought together and facilitated an online community to discuss the relationship between living well and ICTs.

The online forum was held over three days, 27–29 September. It was hosted on the Eldis Communities platform and was facilitated by Abigail Murphy and Kelly Shephard. Technical support was provided by Adrian Bannister, Knowledge Services, IDS.

The objective of the forum was to bring together a wide range of voices that would help to shape the Bellagio Summit in November.

This document reflects on the approach taken and summarises the views expressed.

### Approach

The online forum (which was hosted on Eldis Communities) ran for a defined period, starting at 10 am (BST) on Tuesday 27 September and concluding at 11 am on Thursday 29 September.



HallerJ  
9 posts

27 Sep 2011 08:18 PM edit delete move 8 of 19 44 views

This is a fascinating conversation...Sorry for joining so late. I would like say a little (and hear more) about the importance of diagnostic and monitoring technologies for health. The introduction of diagnostic devices (for the diagnosis of HIV or STDs, for example) and the invention of new, portable, diagnostic devices (e.g., portable ultrasound) can be used as powerful tools to diagnose and screen patients in need of critical, life-saving treatment. Portable diagnostic and monitoring devices can be made even more useful by the addition of communication technologies (e.g. wireless, mobile health technologies) and the meaningful use of the information. Examples of meaningful use include the judicious use of limited resources for drug treatment, or the treatment referral of patients with life-threatening conditions (e.g., ectopic pregnancy).

Reply



AngelaKuga...  
12 posts

28 Sep 2011 07:00 AM edit delete move 9 of 19 42 views

Thanks Karen for posting information on GEM and good to see you here, Masum! I just shared something on D.Net's "Pallitathya" helpline project under Theme 2!

I want to highlight the need to not only look at "new technologies" but "innovation in the use of existing technologies". I think the latter is equally important if not more important. Why do I say this? Contexts differ across countries and even within countries, depending on localities. Infrastructure in some places can be quite horrendous. And I like what Masum had emphasised, information to ensure better healthcare practices and thereby ensuring well-being cannot be overlooked. We all appreciate that "prevention is better than cure". The other aspect to early diagnosis of health issues, is also access to treatment and affordability of treatment. These are very real issues. In Kenya, a two-time small grant recipient under GenARDIS, KAIPPG, works with people living with HIV and AIDS. Their work is in very rural areas, where even managing to pay for mobile phone credit is difficult, and sometimes, there's no coverage, no connectivity.

Participants were sought from a variety of sources and locations – from existing interested Southern based-partnerships, philanthropic organisations, bloggers, ICT professionals and academics.

In advance of the event the facilitator contacted participants to prepare the ground for the conversation. We did this to ensure their involvement but, more crucially, to glean the maximum benefits from their engagement.

We grouped the discussion into thematic areas – the aim was to guide people in their comments but we were clear that this was as much about the participants leading the debate as the facilitator. We hoped that these questions would inspire and stimulate further debate that we may not have considered.

The conversation was preceded with a video from Allister McGregor, Director of the Bellagio Initiative. Our intention here was to ensure that everybody understood what definition of wellbeing we would be taking in this discussion. We also thought it important to personalise the community.

In short our definition of wellbeing was:

... a positive state of being with others in society, which can arise when needs are met, when one can act effectively and meaningfully to pursue ones' goals, and when one is able to experience happiness and feel satisfied with one's life.

(McGregor 2007)

Using this as our springboard the three discussion themes that we identified were:

- Theme 1: What is the value of focusing international development on human wellbeing? What do we mean by ICTs in this context?
- Theme 2: In what ways can ICTs help improve the ways in which we live well together? What particular case studies are you aware of that help illustrate this?
- Theme 3: What new technologies, communications and platforms do you see as beneficial for promoting and protecting wellbeing? What others don't achieve these objectives as well?

Each participant was sent joining instructions and, from a relatively quiet start (nobody likes to be first at a party), the conversation started to flow.

## What people said

From an initial guest list of 60 people, 19 people actively took part in the online discussion.

We had attendees from all around the world and from different areas of expertise to give as round a view on the areas we were discussing as possible. These ranged from academics working across the field from University of Berkeley and IDS to practitioners delivering ICTs to communities – BRAC, Frontline SMS and D.Net.

The comments were wide-ranging and detailed. Broadly speaking, the views expressed can be grouped under the following headings.

### **Wellbeing is defined differently for different people**

We were heartened to see members of the community pick up on the complex nature of defining what 'wellbeing' is. Several comments reflected on how wellbeing is a subjective concept that can be dependent on a variety of factors. A quote from Angela Kuga Thas, APC, succinctly sums up this strand of thought:

Poverty can hold different meanings for different people. It is not only about not having an income or not having a sufficient income, it can be about not having an enabling environment,

not having access to opportunities, and in the words of one woman I remember from a story, not having the love of her husband (a case of domestic violence).

## **Contextual analysis is key particularly with regard to gender roles**

Moving the definition of wellbeing on, many participants talked about how, in addressing issues of wellbeing, contextual analysis was key. Joining up the dots is often hard when looking forwards, but with some advance planning it was felt that you would have a better chance of making connections.

When thinking of approaches or solutions it seems important to think ahead to who ICT services would benefit and how they would be used.

This may not be as straightforward as first thought. As one respondent stated, 'If we are serious about ensuring human wellbeing and as Professor Allister McGregor says, to address the challenge of "living well together", then the solution is never linear'.

The theme of gender in this context came up in several comments. Masum Billah, of D-Net in Bangladesh, cited the role that Infolady provided in enhancing wellbeing. This project provided a clear example of a technical response to providing access to rural, impoverished areas of Bangladesh. Essentially, women ride bicycles, armed with gadgets including netbooks and GSM mobiles. As one 'Infolady' explained in a recent interview with a British newspaper, 'It was a scandal when I started my rounds two years ago with just a mobile phone. Now it is more of a phenomenon'. She is treated like a champion by people whose lives she's shaping with once 'scary machines'.

The online community discussed the value of Infolady being female and established that part of the success of the project was not necessarily down to the tools that she peddles but also the person who promotes their use. As Massum Bilah commented,

... why Infolady? Why not man? In Bangladesh a lady is accepted inside a homestead without any restriction and the majority of service recipients are women. Women feel comfortable to describe their problems with a woman and a major portion of women used her service to receive medical (gynaecological) advice.

## **ICTs as enabler but not cause of improving human wellbeing – the technology is only part of the solution**

The awareness that people and technology need to work hand-in-hand if they are to be successful came across loud and clear. Again, mapping out the perceived users and the environment in which they work was seen as key to the successful take up of ICTs.

Professor Robin Mansell, LSE, reflected on this when she said,

First, it starts with what people may value, not with what ICT producers think they may value. Second, it suggests that we pause and recall that ICTs embrace so many different possibilities, not all of which may be valued by everyone.

## **Not just about 'new' technologies**

When asked to give examples of ICTs that work and ones that don't (a list of case studies discussed is provided below), it became clear that it wasn't just about the technologies but how they can be used in innovative ways. It was felt that creating an enabling environment and creating opportunities to innovate solutions are also critical aspects of the application of any technology, old or new.

From SMS to cassette recordings, the overarching message was that low-tech could often provide high-value solutions. Talking about a project in Kenya, Angela Kug Than explained that when connectivity is poor and there is a need to get voices heard, sometimes some of the old ways are not just easier but the only ways:

Even managing to pay for mobile phone credit is difficult, and sometimes, there's no coverage, no connectivity. Landlines don't work. In a context like this, what could they do?

They went back to using the tape recorder, and recorded stories of survivors of people living with HIV and AIDS on cassettes, and passed these through staff who cycled from community to community, so that they could have sessions to listen to these stories, and to enable villagers to raise their questions, and have a discussion. Why? Because after the diagnosis, those visibly sick with AIDS were isolated, the families who looked after them were also isolated and literally abandoned by their fellow villagers.

## **Use of cost-benefit analysis/VFM**

Quantifying wellbeing was also discussed by some of the participants. Whilst this wasn't a big topic of conversation, measuring the impact of ICTs was touched upon.

For Angela Kuga Than, such measurement has to be seen in context. She explained, 'It is so difficult to value the benefit of ICTs unless there is a strategy that enables communities' uptake of the ICT concerned, and then the uptake could be measured'.

Meanwhile, Professor Robin Mansell made the point that,

Most cost-benefit models require a quantification of value which is fine if the issue is about economic sustainability of a project or programme involving ICTs, but generally is not helpful if the question is the 'return' in terms of enhanced wellbeing.

She went on to say,

In this case, the criteria that need to be brought to the table are difficult and in some cases impossible to quantify. This leaves decision-makers with a problem. I suggest that one of the greatest needs is for a discussion of how decision-makers who find themselves in a position of choosing among alternatives should proceed. What aspects of wellbeing in a given place should they be taking into account beyond what they have been trained to do in making the economic judgement?

# Key messages

Overall, the general consensus was that technology on its own is not enough. Understanding the context in which it would be used, considering the technical literacy of the people involved and scoping out the desired impact all seem to be contributing factors to successful applications.

This online forum reinforced a strong point that technology is just a tool – how and who uses those tools determines their value.

As Ken Banks, kiwanja.net, so succinctly put it in the forum, 'Let's start with the people, then the problem. And then the tech'.

# What next?

At the end of the second day, a presentation summarising the key points was posted on the forum site.



Participants were asked to comment on the content and at 11 am (BST) on the third day we thanked and closed the community.

The group who had voluntarily gathered online should be credited for the quality of the debate. Despite a relatively small group, the thoughts expressed were detailed and thought-provoking. Participants described the forum as 'fascinating', 'informative' and 'valuable'.

Technology can often be seen through rose-coloured spectacles. However, moving forward it would be good to reconvene this group and invite others to cite specific examples of technology that has not been successful. In inviting examples of failure we may unearth some of the barriers to success. By looking at where technologies have failed it may help us learn, make better decisions, and avoid making the same mistakes again.

# References

## Case studies highlighted throughout the discussion

- InfoLady in Bangladesh, [www.knowledgebrokersforum.org/videos/1437205](http://www.knowledgebrokersforum.org/videos/1437205)
- FLOW (Field Level Operations Watch), <http://watermapmonit>
- The Global eHealth Observatory of the World Health Organization, [www.who.int/kms/initiatives/ehealth/en/](http://www.who.int/kms/initiatives/ehealth/en/)
- [www.modise.org](http://www.modise.org) – mobile diagnostic tools
- EDGE (GSM-based) internet
- MAMA Bangladesh is a country-owned, country-led initiative managed by a broad coalition of stakeholders. Through a core group of founding partners, MAMA Bangladesh is designing and testing a platform to provide both audio and text health messages to pregnant women and new mothers linked to their delivery date
- GEM is an evaluation methodology that integrates a gender analysis into planning and/or evaluations of ICT4D initiatives
- Ushahidi
- MySociety
- Android Framework. We at OneWorld South Asia (<http://southasia.oneworld.net>) are working on GPS-enabled android mobile phones to monitor the sanitation behaviour of rural people in India
- [www.mpowering.org](http://www.mpowering.org)
- Frontline SMS
- Safe Motherhood initiative in Nigeria [www.healthpartners-int.co.uk/our\\_projects/documents/NPQ\\_FinalVersion-SafeMotherhoodTechnicalBrief-1\\_000.pdf](http://www.healthpartners-int.co.uk/our_projects/documents/NPQ_FinalVersion-SafeMotherhoodTechnicalBrief-1_000.pdf)
- <http://mobilecitizen.bidinnovacion.org/en/>
- KAIPPG using tape recorder for HIV education
- Indigo for Development

## Articles and journals sited in the discussion

[www.guardian.co.uk/journalismcompetition/professional-two-wheel-triumph](http://www.guardian.co.uk/journalismcompetition/professional-two-wheel-triumph)

[www.amazon.com/Pallitathya-Information-Knowledge-System-Marginalised/dp/1461036135/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1317135136&sr=8-1](http://www.amazon.com/Pallitathya-Information-Knowledge-System-Marginalised/dp/1461036135/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1317135136&sr=8-1)

<http://dnet.org.bd/KPBookDetails.php?BookType=5&&Id=38>

Many thanks to all who took part in the forum

# Attendees



Adhiambo Odaga  
Ford Foundation



Laura Walker Hudson  
Frontline SMS



Masum Billah  
DNet



Rob Worthington



Angela Kuga Thas  
APC



Adesina Iluyemi  
PhD Candidate  
mHealth/Telemedicine



Gracien Chimwaza  
ITOCA

Benjamin De La Pena  
Rockefeller



John Haller  
Ph.D, National Institute of Biomedical  
Imaging and Bioengineering



Rafael Anta  
Inter-American  
Development Bank



Kedar Dash  
Oneworld SA



Ken Banks  
kiwanja.net



Karen Higgs  
APC



Kentaro Toyama  
Researcher,  
UC Berkeley



Robin Mansell  
LSE



Kate Ahern  
Case Foundation



Sharath Jeevan  
Globalgiving.org