Questioning Development Industry Attention to Communication Technologies and Democracy

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The development industry is increasingly investing in global communications technologies assumed to offer critical resources in alleviating social problems. How development intervention conceptualizes and justifies the role of ICTs in the process of social change is explored through institutional descriptions of recent projects. This institutional discourse allows us to consider the underlying assumptions made about democratic reform. Our analytic categories include government management, market efficiency, transparent governance, surveillance, public sphere and praxis. This analysis is confined to projects that used ICTs in conjunction with goals pertaining to democracy and governance implemented since 2000, supported through USAID, World Bank, UNDP, and JICA. This discourse embodies a conception of democracy that suggests limited political processes, privileging of economic conditions, and marginalizing of civil society.

The development industry is increasingly investing in global communications technologies assumed to offer critical resources in alleviating social problems. Prominent donor agencies such as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA), the World Bank, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) are shifting financial support toward building the infrastructure of information and communication technologies (ICTs), encouraging national policies that foster privatization of communications industries, and convincing people to engage these technologies.

The dominance of ICTs as a panacea for global problems is evident in the volume of resources devoted to these projects. The World Bank estimates that their investments in communications technologies have exceeded U.S. $1 billion in the so-called developing world in the first part of this decade (2005 p. 28). Similarly, USAID reports having spent U.S.$200 million in one year during this time frame (USAID, 2003). Almost all (95%) of USAID missions in other countries have at least one ICT project (USAID 2003). The Japanese government increased its funding to U.S.$15 billion over five years for ICTs in its development work following the Okinawa Summit in 2000, which is particularly relevant when the rest of JICA decreased its budget by 10% over roughly the same time frame. UNDP has established a trust

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fund of $7 million for ICT projects though the duration of distribution is not clear (UNDP 2006). In sum, ICT projects are well-integrated into the development landscape.

Heralding the new promise of the millennium, ICTs are expected to enable poorer countries to achieve development. What this development means, and how ICTs are assumed to contribute, needs to be questioned. Development projects support building infrastructure, changing policies and training people to use ICTs toward a variety of goals. In this analysis we focus particularly on how communication technologies are assumed to promote democratic reform. We explore how democratic politics become defined, typically conferring control to the realm of electoral politics at the expense of socio-political movements and how political reform becomes connected with economic privatization, such that access to communications technologies becomes justified through attention to a global market at the expense of more resistant and creative possibilities.

Preaching the Gospel: Blind Faith in Communication Technologies for Development

The development industry owes its basic survival to the premise that social problems can be observed, defined, and resolved through intervention. The faith that communications technologies may serve a greater good allows organizations to allocate resources toward the integration of these technologies into development projects, projected in the same light as medicine necessary for healthy recovery of the diseased. Strategic interventions work with a variety of communicative tools including oral and written persuasion, to guide, or as some would say control, social change.

Akin to the "hypodermic needle" framing of communications technologies, the modernization approach within development posits ICTs as vaccinations with critical and direct effects on the overall economic, political and social health of the nation (see for example Schramm 1963). Resonating with the individualism prominent in western ideological approaches to media effects as well as to models of social change, modernization processes privilege the role of the individual as an actor in a pluralist democratic political structure and a free-market economic base.

On a structural level, the idealized political-economic conditions targeted by development projects closely connect the use of ICTs with commercial interests, assuming that privatization corresponds with the economic health of the nation-state. Although the territory of the nation-state may be clearly identified as a designated recipient of development aid, justifications tend to be made in terms of regional and global economic networks. Over time, early development interventions concentrating on nations as isolated recipients have been replaced by those working toward privatising public interventions within a global context.

Dependency critics have observed for decades how national development becomes tied in with the political dynamics across inequitable nations (Wallerstein 1974; Frank 1981). Investing in ICTs particularly exacerbates this inequity, given that the ability to produce and use new communication technologies is concentrated in an elite group of multinational corporations and nations (such as the U.S. and Japan; Reeves 1993; Schiller 1991). According to Mohammadi, this group has been pushing less wealthy nations toward deregulation and privatization since the 1980s (1997 p. 68). Thus, pressure from

large bilateral, multilateral or even large nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) to invest in technological infrastructure may encourage local government officials to serve commercial interests rather than meet social needs.

While development projects operating within a modernization mindset can be seen as proffering a more directed model of media effects --- those emphasizing participatory processes emphasize the potential mobilizing contributions of communications technologies. The hierarchical diffusion assumed in the former model can be juxtaposed with a more horizontal flow (Beltran 1980) through which local communities define and enact processes of social change (Servaes, Jacobson and White 1996). Although quite varied in projected outcomes and processes, this participatory approach emphasizes the importance of locally generated values (Huesca 1995). While some see participatory approaches as an improvement over an ethnocentric and paternalistic modernization approach, others recognize the potential for such interventions to perpetuate inequities within and across communities (Ferguson 1994; Escobar 1995).

While some models of participation emphasize the role of ICTS as enabling a more democratic flow of information across and within communities, social movement models highlight the potential for ICTs to facilitate resistance. Using ICTs as tools to document oppression, inequity, and other social struggles means emphasising the ability of marginal communities to control their own social change. Escobar posits social movements as "the end of development as a regime of representation" (1995 p. 216), arguing that sites of contestation, negotiation and subversion generate an alternative to conventionally practiced development.

Situating these approaches to development within structures of power, the modernization model promotes the use of ICTs as permitting diffusion of information; participatory models emphasize the role of ICTs in mobilizing horizontal flows; and social movement models highlight the potential of ICTs in enabling resistance. Incorporating global context into these sets of development approaches, modernization interventions interpret the value of ICTs as integrating local and national communities into global capitalist systems, while some social movements intend to counter this economic structure.

When development projects are expected to promote modernization, ICTs are framed as channels for transmitting, rather than creating information. More participatory models, in contrast, would conceive of the value of media as creating a community, or enabling dialogue, whereas social movement models highlight the potential for media to facilitate resistance.

Another avenue of critique calls attention to the very power structures within which development processes are situated (Wilkins 2000). Power structures may be conceptualized in a variety of ways, such as through political-economic contexts, normative climates, or elite networks. This approach often takes the form of challenging development discourse as a site of struggle over the representation of problems, communities, and solutions (e.g., Crush 1995; Escobar 1995; Moore 1995). Powerful development institutions conceptualize social problems in ways that benefit their own institutional and political-economic interests. For example, sustainable development becomes defined over time as a process through which we can control our environment in ways that are not antithetical to corporate interests (Escobar 1995; Waters & Wilkins 2002).

A dominant vision within the development industry projects ICTs as neutral yet essential tools toward democratic reform. A common refrain is that these technologies allow citizens to become "well informed" so that they can "successfully participate in the democratic process" (Kakabadse et al, 2003, p. 55). Similar to the role of media within early modernization approaches to development, ICTs are believed to function as effective transmission channels enabling transparent and participatory democratic processes (Wade 2002; Wilson 2003). Just as earlier conceptions of "modernity" could be read as inferring northern, western, capitalist values as desired by and necessary for redemption from the stagnation of tradition, democracy becomes defined in terms of formally institutionalized political structures sanctioned as legitimate in western societies (Pearce 2002).

Several observers note the integration of ICT projects with global capitalist economies, favoring private sector telecommunication industries (Akpan 2003; Archibugi & Pietrobeli 2003). In his review of development projects sponsored by the ITU, UNESCO, UNDP, USAID, World Bank and others, Wilson demonstrates a dominant motif attributing ICT's marketability to connections with a "competitive global economy" (2003 p. 9). Neo-liberal globalization processes accelerate the extent to which private sectors invade public sectors including government agencies (Wilson 2003).

International organizations are able to dominate the allocation and distribution of vast resources through their abilities to control processes of legitimation (Steffek 2003) without the benefit of democratic participation or state control. International development organizations (e.g., WTO and UN) must rely on hegemonic assent to their practices given a lack of direct coercive capacities; but bilateral agencies (e.g.,USAID and JICA) may claim nominally some justification in terms of their political engagement and humanitarian ideals, typically masking the even more impressive economic interests of the donor countries. Multilateral agencies have no such political foundation and thus rely on projected normative stances on development --- again, disguising economic and political agendas as humanitarian interventions. In other words, who could be against the development industry's projected goal: 'to save the world'?

Shielded with this humanitarian cloak, development agencies are able to assert some control over how ICTs are integrated into the structure of less wealthy countries. This process reinforces the inequities across donor and recipient groups given the dependence of the latter group toward financial and other support, and the interest of the former group in maintaining advantageous control of the system. Wade (2002) details how wealthier countries, such as the U.S., are able to influence the global software market, Internet network structure, and other telecommunication industries. For example, the high costs of maintaining and upgrading computer software and hardware -- as well as Internet infrastructure -- increases dependencies on global corporations. The connection then between development programs designed for the public good with corporate interests in the private sector means that this partnership, as it is often called, amplifies the ability of wealthier institutions to control decisions regarding ICTs, at the expense of more varied, self-reliant development strategies.

Thompson's (2004a; 2004b) critical analysis of speeches produced by the World Bank President suggests that the projection of ICTs as a solution for development problems builds on western values of technological expertise. Poverty then, may be resolved within this framework, by using ICTs to integrate

developing countries into a capitalist global political economic structure. In one illustration, the World Bank's $70 million project Global Development Gateway, a portal website for developing countries, provides information which is filtered by 'editorial expertise' from the institution for 'quality' content (Thompson 2004a; Wade 2002). Playing the role of gatekeeper allows the World Bank to filter out content that may be antithetical to its neo-liberal financial agenda.

The central issue to be explored in this work concerns the implications of dominant development discourse concerning the role of ICTs, particularly in terms of democratic governance. First, how are ICTs expected to contribute to democratic processes? What particular functions are emphasized in this framing? Next, how does this discourse construct democracy itself? Specifically, how are political structures and processes, economic conditions, and civil society framed within this discourse?

Research Approach

How development intervention conceptualizes and justifies the role of ICTs in the process of social change is explored through institutional descriptions of recent projects. This institutional discourse allows us to consider the underlying assumptions made about democratic reform. There are many ways ICTs tend to be -- but also could be conceptualized as facilitating development -- just as there are many ways to conceptualize development itself. Development may be focused on improving economic conditions of private industry or of individuals or communities; facilitating political participation in formal political structures such as encouraging voting or standing for elections; or addressing community interests as a way to transmit information or possibly even promote dialogue and action.

Building inductively from reflections of current projects as well as deductively from relevant theoretical expositions in development communication literature, we analyze development approaches through the lens of nominal categories not meant to be mutually exclusive but rather to offer idealized types to further discussion on democracy and governance. Our analytic categories include government management, market efficiency, transparent governance, surveillance, public sphere and praxis.

A central approach involves using ICTs as a tool toward **government management.** This function includes coordinating management functions within a defined group. Sharing information within government agencies, for example, becomes the primary focus of the project. At this level the underlying focus is on horizontal flows of communication restricted to those already formally defined as part of the structure. These projects may be supporting infrastructure development for government use or training political leaders to use these technologies more effectively.

Another central goal may be to promote **efficiency of markets**. Here economic growth is highlighted, with the use of ICTs as promoting free market functioning within industry more broadly. ICT structures may be put into place to enhance communications across consumers and suppliers or connecting sellers to global or regional markets. Further, supporting policies that privilege private industry falls within this purview.

When ICTs are seen as ways to connect the government to public groups, this link can be interpreted in a variety of ways, such as a tool toward **transparency** or **surveillance.** While both approaches link the government to public constituencies, the underlying motives differ dramatically. With transparency, ICTs are used as a way of demonstrating to viewers what the government has been doing. Documents are made available to those with the access to view them. Following a transmission model of communication, public communities are able to view but not participate in the conversation. Look but don't talk.

Surveillance, on the other hand, while connecting the government to public communities does so with the goal to control rather than expose information. Here we follow Phillips' understanding of surveillance as "processes of identification, tracking, analysis and response which organize social knowledge, social relations, and social power" (2006 p. 1). Gandy's (1993) adoption of Foucault's panopticon structure works well as a visual metaphor for the process of technological surveillance in which conditions structure a centralized, unilateral process through which data are acquired and used. As Phillips reminds us, the process itself can be used in a variety of ways. Countries monitor other countries about various conditions from the threat of disease to the threat of terrorism. In Korea, public resistance to potential privacy invasions implied in national policies attempting to digitize information into identity cards suggests that social concerns may be raised through this surveillance process (Jho 2005). In this analysis, the surveillance function specifically refers to the use of ICTs by governments to monitor publics for the purpose of control.

Instead of situating political participation solely within the functioning of established government agencies, one could privilege community engagement in political dialogue and action. Two ways of conceptualizing the possibilities of ICTs in this process entail promoting a public sphere or praxis.

With a **public sphere** model, members of a community, at least those with the resources to access these technologies, are not only viewing as if watching television, but also are discussing issues as if party to one large telephone conference call or mediated town hall. The Habermasian public sphere model described and critiqued by Schudson (2002) emphasizes "civil interaction around a common political subject" (2002 p. 484) through normative, rational conversation. Although this framework suggests the value of active engagement in political issues among communities, it suffers from the very problems of pluralist models of social change more generally. Downing (1996) recognizes the pitfalls of assuming equitable and active discourse when many groups, differentiated in terms of gender, ethnicity, location, socio-economic status and other conditions, are unable to access and contribute voice to that public sphere. In this work, public sphere refers to the development goal of allowing citizens to participate in political discussions. This framework does not address, however, differences in power due to problems in access or the nature of debate.

In an attempt to address these problematic issues within the public sphere model, the final analytic category encourages praxis. In the Freirean sense (1983), praxis here refers to serious reflection coupled with political action, recognizing differences in structures of power. The purpose of this framework then highlights the need to fight oppression through critical analysis recognizing inequities and active

resistance to dominant agencies. In terms of this project, praxis refers to the use of ICTs to facilitate the process of recognizing and fighting oppressive conditions.

Analysis

This analysis is confined to those projects implemented since 2000 supported through USAID, World Bank, UNDP, and JICA. We attempted to select those projects that used ICTs in conjunction with goals pertaining to democracy and governance. Given the different parameters of each database, the specific keywords searched differed slightly.

Searching the USAID on-line library (http://dec.usaid.gov) for projects including key words "ICT," "communication technology" in the realm of "democracy" and "governance" resulted in six projects implemented in Azerbaijan, Bolivia, Eastern Europe/ Eurasia, Jordan, Sarajevo Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Rwanda. Similar search techniques through the World Bank's Project portfolio database resulted in nine projects, implemented in Ethiopia (two projects), Sri Lanka, India, Rwanda, Afghanistan, Ukraine, El Salvador, Serbia and Montenegro. Searching the UNDP projects resulted in the inclusion of sixteen projects implemented in fifteen countries including Albania, Armenia (two projects), Bhutan, Bulgaria, Egypt, Guyana, India, Kosovo, Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho, Lithuania, Macedonia, Romania, Swaziland, and Vanuatu/ Solomon Islands/ Papua New Guinea. UNDP projects were accessed through their publication *UNDP Access to Information: UNDP´s engagement and a Guide to Key Actors* (2003). Because JICA does not categorize its projects as pertaining to democracy and governance directly, projects using ICTs addressing e-governance were included in this analysis (JICA 2001; JICA 2004). JICA's projects were obtained from the project lists indexed in their publication *Approaches for Systematic Planning of Development Projects: Information and Communication Technology* (2004). Eight JICA projects implemented in Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Bhutan and World Wide regions are included in this analysis.

These 39 projects have been purposively selected to reflect current development practice among specific organizations. Findings then are restricted toward understanding how these four organizations use ICTs to promote democratic governance. Other organizations may, and probably do, use ICTs differently. Similarly, the role of ICTs has shifted over time toward more integration with the private sector since the mid-1980s, reflecting larger economic trends among wealthier countries. This study is also specific to those projects mentioning democratic or other political issues; ICTs may be conceptualized differently across sectors such as health, agriculture and other development areas.

USAID Projects

According to a recent review of its own ICT projects (USAID 2004), the largest proportion goes directly to democracy and governance. About a third of the 250 described ICT projects in the USAID 2004 document are categorized as such. Other topics in descending attention include education, economic growth, natural resources management, health, conflict management, energy, agriculture, HIV/AIDs, poverty reduction, humanitarian assistance, environment, population, and women & development. According to stated policy, projects using ICTs for democracy and governance promote e-government

through offering public information services, encourage public participation in elections through monitoring systems, making government information available to citizens on-line, improving efficiency and reducing corruption. In practice, recent USAID projects tend to focus on Internet use (although one also includes CD-Rom technologies) as follows: 1) toward using e-government facilities to promote market-based economic growth in Jordan; 2) improving governance by making legal documents accessible in Azerbaijan; 3) improving the capacity and professionalism of local governance in Bolivia, and as well as Eastern European countries; and 4) training national politicians in Internet skills in Rwanda.

Government management seems to be the central focus in projects in Rwanda, Eastern Europe, and Bolivia. In order to improve the functioning of the transitional government in Rwanda, 45 parliament members received Internet training over a two-week period in 2004. Although project documents admit that in the planning stages it was found that many of these politicians already had IT skills and thus did not need further training, the overall evaluation of the program emphasized that participants were positive, being pleased to have their "eyes opened" to the World Wide Web (USAID 2004).

Using the Internet to create electronic information services such as bulletin boards, agendas and calendars aids the functioning of the Bolivian government. By attempting "to improve the capacity and professionalism of local government through the exchange of information and experience and through the coordination of activities for reform" in Eastern Europe (I.C.C.M.A 2003), this project uses list serves, message boards and e-newsletters to improve administrative functioning of the government.

This latter project could also be seen as attempting to promote market efficiency secondarily. USAID intends ICTs to facilitate commerce in Europe and Eurasia within a "global marketplace" (I.C.C.M.A 2003). The private sectors, along with other groups such as NGOs, are considered "partners" in these strategies. USAID's project in Jordan also invokes market efficiency as a framework in its discussion of the need to reduce administrative costs for private businesses.

The remaining two USAID projects promote transparent governance through making political documentation available for public viewing. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, government budgeting processes are made accessible, in order to reach toward becoming a more "modern" and "progressive" government (Rosenbaum 2001). In Azerbaijan, legal documents are available through Internet and CD-ROMs.

World Bank Projects

Recent World Bank projects using ICTs in this area do not always specify which technologies are used (3 cases). When technologies are described, they refer to computer and Internet systems (5 cases) or telecommunications (only 1 case). Whereas USAID projects work with a variety of nongovernmental organizations in the implementation of their projects, World Bank projects contract with official governmental authorities, such as ministries of finance and of economics. Several projects focus on policy development, particularly in support of private industry, while others see the value of implementation in terms of building the capacity of private industry, through training, and through promoting personal and property rights.

Those projects enabling the professionalization and coordination of government management are implemented in Rwanda, Ukraine, and El Salvador. In Rwanda, the World Bank, along with USAID and other donors, seeks to facilitate institutional capacity of governments. This project trains public officials in ICT applications as well as providing equipment and technical assistance. In the Ukraine, the World Bank funds a "modern" high-speed electronic network so that government members can email each other (World Bank 2002b). In El Salvador, ICTs are meant to improve ("modernize") the criminal justice system (World Bank 2002a).

Many World Bank projects appeal to market efficiency. According to project justifications, Sri Lanka's development "suffers from inefficient information flows," which ICT services can improve so that critical issues such as market prices can be known (World Bank 2004a). In Afghanistan the World Bank intends to promote market efficiency through pushing for public policies that support open competition and private sector investment in the telecommunications industry. While other goals are referenced in this project description, the central aim is to support a market economy, projected as necessary for "modernization" (World Bank 2003). The light of "modernization" is similarly cast on Ethiopia, as ICTs are posed by the World Bank as a solution for governance problems. Specifically, the project notes the need to promote policy to support the growth of private ICT industry and to increase access to markets (World Bank 2004b). The Serbian project aims to facilitate the efficiency of the real estate market, through enhanced data collection across property owners and real estate professionals.

In contrast, the World Bank project in India follows a surveillance model. The project funds computers, software, and training toward the collection and analysis of health data. The central objectives are to "coordinate and decentralize surveillance activities; integrate disease surveillance at the state and district levels, and involve communities and other stakeholders, particularly the private sector" (World Bank 2004c p. 8).

UNDP Projects

Similar to the multilateral operations of the World Bank, UNDP also works directly with governmental organizations in the implementation of their projects. These projects specify Internet in all but one project, which refers more broadly to ICTs.

Facilitating government management is promoted in several of the UNDP projects. In Swaziland, the UN considers access to information part of "empowering" future leaders (World Bank 2003a). Training leaders is also a part of the strategy invoked by the UN in Lesotho, along with supplying computers, so that politicians can use e-mail with each other in order to "contribute to the quality of debates as members increasingly conduct research and are better prepared to participate in the business of Parliament" (World Bank 2005). In Bhutan, the technical capacity of the Planning and Finance Ministry is to be enhanced through better coordination of data. Electronic information exchanges, such as those through established government email systems, are expected improve the administrative capacities of governments in Albania and Lithuania. The project in India is designed to improve information flows among government agencies thus restricting the benefits of the ICTs to this defined group (UNDP 2002a).

UNDP's work in Egypt focuses the benefits of ICT also within the domain of the local government, training staff and developing information systems for the administrative benefit of local authorities (UNDP 2002c).

Many of the UN projects promote transparent governance through making legal documentation accessible. In Romania and other territories, the UN sees this transparency as crucial to the overall development of the area. More specifically, the UN project in Armenia is designed to establish an e-governance system that makes government information available to the public on-line. Similarly, in Kosovo the UN supports an electronic archive chronicling the government's proceedings.

Unlike the USAID or World Bank projects, some UNDP projects attribute issues of governance to a public sphere. These projects include ways for citizens to participate in decision-making and not just having access to previously recorded material. Projects in Bulgaria, Guyana, Kyrgyzstan and Lesotho explicitly describe the intent to promote public participation in governance processes. Community ICT centers are positioned as a way to foster development in Bulgaria. Conceptualizing the Internet as a tool not only for sharing knowledge and experience but also collaborating, outside the government sector, makes the UN work in Guyana fit this framework as well. In Kyrgyzstan, the UN asserts the role of ICTs as promoting democratic governance through offering "pluralistic" forums, as well as "open monitoring of use of state power, and … increased public participation in national decision making" (UNDP 2000b). The UN's project in Macedonia, establishing 18 Information and Communications Centres, approaches the model of public sphere interaction, in that non-government employees are trained to create web pages, but not quite the spirit of political engagement. The connection between local governance interaction and public discussion, clearly the emphasis of the project, is weak (UNDP 2000c). In the Pacific Islands, the UNDP established national e-mail networks with the express purpose of sharing information across social groups as well as government offices, media, businesses and other groups (UNDP 2004c).

Table 1. Project Themes across Development Organizations

	USAID	JICA	World Bank	UNDP	Row Totals
Government Management	58 %	44 %	33 %	38 %	16 (41 %)
Market Efficiency	25 %	56 %	44 %		10 (26 %)
Transparent Governance	17 %		11 %	24 %	6 (15 %)
Surveillance			11 %		1 (3 %)
Public Sphere				38 %	6 (15 %)
Praxis					0
Column Totals	6	9	16	8	N=39

JICA Projects

In terms of development communication strategies, JICA uses a variety of communication technologies in its approaches (Wilkins 2003). For the most part, although Japanese projects using communications strategies reflect some distinct patterns, its development discourse bears a striking resemblance to the dominant modernization approaches advocated by many other prominent development institutions. The focus on economic conditions, emphasizing the importance of the private sector along with attention to national development strategies, national identity, and technological innovation, fits the modernization model advocated in western approaches to development.

Some of the JICA projects employ ICTs to improve government administration. Two projects train government officials to manage and use communications technologies more effectively. Another project sends Japanese volunteers to create databases for government agencies in Bhutan.

Most of these JICA projects fall within the realm of market efficiency. Projects in Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam focus on enhancing the administration of intellectual and industrial property. Another project not designated in any one specific country promotes the standardization of telecommunications systems toward more efficient functioning of the industry.

Discussion

Summarizing results (See table 1) across this particular sample, most of the projects devote ICTs toward government management and administration (41 %), as well as market efficiency (26 %). The remaining third promote transparent governance (15 %) and public sphere (15 %) interests, with only one example of surveillance (3 %) and none of praxis.

The organizations themselves differ dramatically in terms of the way they approach this work. Market efficiency is most likely to be addressed by JICA (56 %) and the World Bank (44 %), with some attention by USAID (25 %) and none by UNDP. Transparent governance appears to attract attention across UNDP (24 %), USAID (17 %) and the World Bank (11 %), but not at all by JICA. UNDP is notable in being alone in its recognition of public sphere interests (38 %). What unites these groups though is consistent framing of these efforts in terms of government management (58 % of USAID projects, compared with 44 % of JICA, 38 % of UNDP, and 33 % of World Bank projects).

Implications

The development industry follows an historical path established with the projected promise of radio and television 50 years ago: communications technologies, today as before, represent both tool toward and symbol of modernization. Establishing telecommunications and digital communications systems in resource-poor countries tend to be couched in terms of "modernization" interventions, typically situated within the private sector. Concomitant with earlier models of media toward modernization, current enthusiasm focuses more on the potential than the constraints and contexts of ICTs.

The World Bank's project in Afghanistan illustrates this trend stating its objective as transforming telecommunications policy in order "to achieve modernization" moving toward a "technologically neutral, open and convergent status" (World Bank 2003). This projected neutrality means that these technologies are offered as apolitical resources in the process of development work. Technological aspects are emphasized, minimizing attention to the direct political and economic consequences of their distribution and use.

This discourse embodies a conception of democracy that suggests limited political processes, privileging of economic conditions, and marginalizing of civil society. The high proportion of attention focused on improved management of existing government administrations limits attention to formal political processes and agencies --- thereby restricting the potential benefits of ICTs within the network of existing political agents. Servaes' (2006) distinction between the government, restricted to formal political agencies,and governance to encompass civil society, seems apt here. Even using ICTs to permit domestic governments to monitor and control their citizens through surveillance gets less attention than the basic administrative functions of political agencies (perhaps given that development institutions and their various allies might like to maintain this control themselves). Given needs arising from a history of devastating genocide and overwhelming poverty, the Rwandan development strategy of market-based agriculture and privatized communications, with specific strategies training politicians to use email, seems a strong juxtaposition.

Economic conditions take precedence over civil society issues in this discourse as well. The economic context of a global marketplace becomes the context of relevance, so that networked societies are engaged to transcend national borders. The free market system is assumed, not questioned, particularly among bilateral and World Bank projects.

The connection between political agencies and citizens tends more toward transparence than other approaches within USAID while the UNDP is the only organization emphasizing public sphere action. Overall, political action among citizens gets much less attention than governmental diffusion of information to those publics with access to these resources. Public sphere functions are more likely engaged than other potential approaches to participation. Issues of access that restrict participation in the rational discourse assumed within this framework need to be more directly addressed.

The notion of praxis is conspicuous by its absence in the discourse of this development industry. Yet, in the broader field of social change, praxis is possible. Social movements such as those arising from Zapatista communities and against WTO proceedings were able to mobilize support and plan strategies through these very same technologies offered to help governments administrate more efficiently (Martinez-Torres 2001; Kahn & Kellner 2004). The practice of re-appropriating corporate sources toward different objectives illustrates the potential to work toward resistance.

Attention to civil society also addresses the nature of the citizens and the process of debate. Citizens are absent in frameworks highlighting government administration and market efficiency and passive, but perhaps informed in the arena of transparent governance --- as opposed to passive and not informed with surveillance. Citizens are engaged through their participation in public sphere activities, but

again, the nature of the debate needs to be questioned [for more discussion of the construction of citizens in the case of American and British television news, see Lewis & Wahl-Jorgensen 2004], as being more reactive than proactive.

For example, when debates ensue over whether Negroponte's $100 "green machine" laptop or Gates' cellular PC would be better for a "poor nation," (Markoff 2006), economic and technological issues triumph over social and political concerns. The nature of this argument focuses on open-source software and the costs of production while the communities targeted catch a glancing reference as "the masses in developing nations" (Markoff 2006). The distribution of these technologies is also situated within private domains with corporate sponsorship (although there is also some attempt to acquire financing from the developing country governments themselves). Even UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has been quoted as finding the green machine "inspiring" for development (Twist 2005). Joining the chorus of adulation for the role of ICTs in development, Negroponte describes how "every single problem you can think of, poverty, peace, the environment, is solved with education" (Markoff 2006).

Questioning development industry attention to communication technologies raises critical issues regarding the nature of democratic reform being imposed upon foreign aid recipients. Development institutions, particularly those based in the west (note that democracy was a keyword in western development institution databases but not in the Japanese case studied here), preach the gospel of democracy, baptized through the good graces of communication technologies. However, it is neither the spirit of dialogue nor action that is bestowed, but rather the strengthening of governments friendly to the American Way and to global capital. Instead of building a structure in which citizens can be engaged and processes participatory, in the guise of humanitarian aid, elite networks of power are further reinforced.

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