

**Developing countries and the network revolution:  
Leapfrogging or marginalization?**

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Panel

**ICT in development cooperation:  
Models and realities**

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Many factors are at play in determining diffusion and use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) at the local level in developing countries. They include country-specific factors, among them the economics and technology of providing trunk capacity, bureaucratic issues, environmental and topographic facts, financing, culture, and the predicament of history. They also include factors located outside the country. The latter, again, consists of a complex set of issues.

The panel addresses the relationship between the latter northern issues, specifically causal priorities and values that lead to the present priorities in investing and building ICT capacity, as they appear through the application of ICTs in countries in the South. These northern issues are understood as models. Models are two-tiered. At the bottom are values and norms that constitute cultures. Models understood in this way are a foundation and point of departure for models, understood in a more traditional and narrow sense, that are intellectual, heuristic, and analytical constructs with the purpose of describing, analysing, and predicting human and organisational behaviour.

Models exist in a fuzzy area, an interplay between scientific and objective standards for advancing knowledge, on the one hand, and the fact that models are, in the final analysis, partly the result of culturally specific rules and values that are subjective and that guide action, whether we are conscious of it or not. Models are, essentially, simplifications of the reality. A part of the reality is left out, rendered in a more or less superficial way, considered to be static, and/or to be a dependent variable. Thus, the elegance and power of a model is invariably attained at the cost of compromising (part of) the reality. Models can be macro-level constructs (top-down) or they can be micro-levels constructs (bottom-up). In either case, models will, to a greater or lesser extent, be based on data gathered in the past, constructed in the present, and applied to or targeting the future. This speaks to the difference between blueprint models and processual models, and to moving the emphasis towards the latter.

The panel looks at the application of some models in the area of ICT in development cooperation. The aim is to contribute to understanding the historical, cultural, and intellectual roots and foundation of the prevalent and largely Western-based conceptualisation of the relationship between culture, development, and the role and use of ICTs. Models can serve several purposes, from guiding macro-level political action to facilitating local development intervention. Through it all, the usefulness of a model hinges on its ability to accurately describe and predict the real world. In the context of development cooperation, this speaks to

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the difference between models where ICTs are understood as means, and models where ICTs are understood as goals.

These issues are addressed by means of four papers. The papers are partly models themselves, and partly they address models, implicitly and explicitly. The papers are: Tellef Oegrim's discussion of the ruling Norwegian technology paradigm, Eva Karal on NORAD's evolving ICT strategy, Lars T. Soeftestad and June J. Steen on modelling communication and use of ICTs in knowledge management networks, using the HIV/AIDS sector in Botswana as a case, and Boipuso Nkwae's comparative analysis of the present and future use of ICTs in selected African countries.

Taken together, the papers throw light on some of the key aspects of the current paradigmatic shifts between the North and the South in the wake of the ongoing globalisation that, in large measure, lies behind the differing views on how to understand and use ICTs. That is, ICTs as means vs. goals, ICTs vs. culture, and the usability of ICTs.

The applied goal of the panel rests on the argument that, in order to realize the promise of ICTs in both local (e.g. equity, poverty eradication, participatory approaches) and national development (e.g. good governance, the rule of law, sustainable development), an exposure between these northern and southern paradigms is necessary to arrive at a better fit between them. Specifically, good models are constructs that are optimally true to the reality on the ground through employing a processual and learning approach to adaptation and evolution.