Empowerment as development

An outline of an analytical concept for the study of ICTs in the global South

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ICTs

In a context of state sanctioned persecution of sexual minorities; **ICTs** (Information and Communication Technologies) could be an important tool for **empowering this marginalized groups**

Situated empowerment: Mobile phones practices among market women in Kampala

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Abstract

In this article we depart from studies on empowerment and its intersections with the informal economy and market women in the Global South and promises of the mobile phone in so-called developing regions. Conducting an explorative study among market women in Kampala, the aim is to examine what roles (if any) the mobile phone plays

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ICTs & Development

ICTs have been hailed for improving access to information and providing space for communication as well as organization of collective action and social change.

It is a certainty that the proliferation of ICTs (mobile phones in particular) have opened up a range of possibilities and new avenues for individuals, aid agencies and NGOs

ICTs & Development

ICT4D/ ICTD (ICTs for/ and development)

Disenchantment with the concept of 'development' in the study of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and social change in the global South.

Theories of Modernisation, Diffusion of Innovation and Bottom of the Pyramid criticized

ICTs & Social Change

ICTs for development are primarily driven by market logic, market deepening, technological fetishism and serve as a rationale for trade and investment liberalisation (Nederveen Pietersee 2010).

Hann and Hart (2011) argue that the ultimate drive for development in postcolonial times is a world in which the rich, developed countries help poorer regions (often former colonies) in order to improve their *economic* prospects. Western development paradigms development is questioned and even considered hypocritical in times when debt repayments drain the income of countries in the global South and undermine these governments' ability to protect their citizens, while at the same time, aid levels have shrunk to the point of being merely symbolic

Furthermore, conceiving of people in so-called developing countries as mere consumers, situated at the bottom of a postcolonial pyramid, and as such, are only interesting for enterprises that aim to accumulate capital, is not only unattractive but also leads to questionable development interventions (see Dodson et al. 2013).

The concept of development has thus been gradually replaced by social change (Tufte, 2017)

ICTs & Empowerment

A deliberate attempt to structure and analysis around the notion **empowerment**

Not an easy concept, no **analytical** outline of the concept has been found

- There is no shared definition of it (Choudhury 2009: 343).
- It is considered fuzzy (Kabeer 1999:436) and elusive (Hill Collins 2000:19).
- It is both under-defined and overused in academic, policy and public discourses (Kleine 2013: 31).
- It occurs on many different levels (individual, group, organisational and community [see Sadan 2004]) and covers and materialises through a variety of different processes (Drolet 2011: 633).

Define empowerment *as those without power taking control over their life situation, destiny and environment* (Lincoln et al., 2004). As such, it is **normative** concept (see Servaes and Lie 2015: 126) and deeply **political** concept (Meyer-Emerick 2005: 543), as it conceptualises social change in terms of the powerless gaining greater control (Sadan 2004) and challenging existing power relations (see also Kabeer 1999: 437).

ICTs & Empowerment?

Tracing the roots of empowerment in community psychology and in feminist and black power movements as well as exploring different understandings of the concept in various disciplines I suggest that empowerment should be analytically approached out of 4 different levels

- a) an **intersectional** level,
- b) a **contextual** level
- c) an **agency** level, and
- d) a **technological** level.

These four levels intersect and must be studied in tandem to understand whether processes of empowerment are taking place, and if so, in what ways?

Intersectional level

This level concerns the roots of powerlessness in terms of **intersecting** structures of power such as ethnicity, gender, class and sexuality.

How are the powerless under study situated in the larger structures of power?

Such a description should not be made *von oben*, but rather involve the **standpoints** of those under study in order for them to define their own realities on their own terms.

Here, it is also important to avoid the individual versus collective dichotomy, as it is more appropriate to explain how these dimensions interrelate instead.

Contextual level

This level concerns the particular context of those without power and how their actions are **situated** in this context.

How do their contexts provide both **opportunities** and **constraints** (in terms of institutions, local community, local culture, economic and family arrangements, et cetera)?

Which configuration of resources, institutional arrangements and historical precedents exist in the contexts of those under study? How open or closed to change are important institutions, authorities or organisations? What is the capacity of these to advance change and effectively implement policies once they are decided?

Agency level

This level concerns the **capabilities** of individuals and groups under study and their ability to make choices and thus control their life situation, destiny and environment. What capabilities, resources, agencies, skills, choices and achievements can be discerned?

How **critically conscious** are those under study of their situation? Do they have possibility/ capability to imagine that change is possible? And does such critical consciousness lead to action, and thus, change?

Technological level

This level concerns the **affordances** of the communication platforms used by those under study.

What access to communication platforms do they have? What is their communication/media literacy? How do they use these platforms? What affordances do they perceive these platforms to have? Do they find new affordances over time?

How are these communication platforms situated in larger **media/communication ecologies** and how does this influence their use?

The necessity of approaching ICTs as deeply nested within communication ecologies and that ICT practices are a result of the perceived benefits given contextual opportunities and constraints

Thank You for Listening!

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