



From the Guest Editors

Introducing the Essays from the Harvard Forum II

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This special edition contains reports from the Harvard Forum II, a two-day event held September 2009 at Harvard University. Sponsored by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and hosted by the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard University, the Forum assembled a prominent group of thinkers and practitioners from around the globe, including Nobel laureates Amartya Sen and Michael Spence, to discuss the theme *ICTs, Human Development, Growth, and Poverty Reduction*.

The Forum was a unique chance to advance new, important areas for ICT4D research, as well as to reflect on changes that have occurred in the world since the first event in this series, the Harvard Forum I, was held in 2003 on *ICTs and Poverty Reduction*.¹ Several consensus action points arose from the Harvard Forum I: a) to focus on expanding ICT access, which was low and tremendously uneven at the time; b) to undertake ICT governance and regulatory reform, especially of the telecommunication sector; and c) to expand services and content that focus on the poorest of the poor—in particular, on ways to encourage entrepreneurship as a means to achieve poverty reduction.

One memorable moment from the first Harvard Forum came during Muhammad Yunus' presentation, in which he asserted that the quickest way out of poverty was to own a mobile phone. A similar moment from the second Forum was Amartya Sen's story about how a mobile phone recording of a human rights abuse galvanized the public in the Swat Province and the whole of Pakistan. These observations, when threaded together, illustrate a shift from the pairing of mobiles and economic opportunities to one of mobiles and political change, and in a larger context, they are indicative of other significant changes that have taken place in the past six years.

Many other important and potentially transformative changes in the world of ICTs and development have occurred since the 2003 Forum.² On the positive side of the ledger, notable developments include the following:

1. The explosive spread of mobile phones in the developing world has brought ICTs to sections of society that had previously had little or no contact with new information technologies.
2. The development of new social media technologies have the potential to spur greater political mobilization and civic participation.
3. The emergence of new models of open and collaborative content development and distribution have moved from the relative fringes of society (open source software) into almost all sectors of society in developing countries (including this journal!).

1. See http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-46261-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html

2. The following lists come from a Harvard Forum II background paper that can be found at http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-139409-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html

4. An increasing focus by the international development community and the private sector on marginalized communities and the potential for new business models targeting the bottom of the pyramid.

However, these new opportunities must be tempered by concurrent emerging challenges, including the following:

1. Increased sophistication of states in exerting political and technical control of and through ICT-mediated technologies, in cases expanding state control and threatening civil liberties.
2. Growing use of ICT-enhanced social mobilization for destructive purposes, e.g., the use of mobiles in instigating conflicts.
3. Enhanced ability and opportunities for privacy invasion, by both the public and private sectors.
4. Proliferation of cybercrime and national vulnerabilities to cyberwarfare.

In light of the new developments and challenges, 2009 was considered an opportune time to revisit issues of ICTs and poverty reduction. The broad objectives of the Forum were the following:

1. To consider ways in which information and communication technology policies, management, and investments can be made more effective for human development, growth, and poverty reduction.
2. To take stock of what has changed in the areas of development and technology since the 2003 Forum and concentrate on the lessons to be learned.
3. To identify new development research opportunities in the area of new technologies, and to examine their relationships to human development, growth, and poverty reduction.

This special edition of *Information Technologies & International Development* is devoted to papers emerging from this event. We hope it reflects the richness and diversity of ideas that came out of the Forum, and offers a valuable contribution to the continued development of the ICT4D field and practice. Most of the edition is devoted to updates of short papers that were submitted by the participants prior to the Forum. Each of these contributions was reviewed by at least one external reviewer and two guest editors. The reviewers were instructed that the papers are written in the journal's "forum" style of brief articles that engage the readership, rather than as full research pieces. Also included in this special edition are two insightful papers by Amartya Sen and Michael Spence that were provided after the Forum.



The edition's overall aim is to expose the readership to a range of perspectives—including nascent ideas—from both scholars and practitioners, in order to provoke reflection and new research that will affect the future course of the field.

Please see the following links for full details of the Harvard Forum II and evening Colloquium entitled *ICTs, Human Development, Growth, and Poverty Reduction Communication and Human Development: The Freedom Connection?*

Harvard Forum II

http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-140355-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html

Internet Archive—Harvard Forum 2 Audio Cast (2009)

<http://www.archive.org/details/HarvardForum2AudioCast>



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