

Open content creation: the issues of voice and the challenges of listening

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Abstract

This paper examines the proposition that increased ability to have a voice and be listened to, through ‘open ICT4D’ and ‘open content creation’ can be an effective mechanism for development. The paper discusses empirical work that strongly indicates that this only happens when voice is appropriately valued in the development process. Having a voice in development processes are less effective when participation is limited. Open ICT allows for more and more voices to be heard, but it is open ICT4D that has the obligation to ensure voices are listened to. In the paper I first explore participatory development and the idea of open ICT4D before elaborating on issues of voice and thinking about voice as process, and voice as value. Research findings are presented from research that experimented with participatory (or open) content creation, discussed in relation to notions of openness and voice. I then consider the challenges of listening, before drawing some conclusions about opening up ICT4D research.

Introduction

When thinking about ICT for development, it is important to be clear about what we mean by 'development' (Unwin 2009). The concept of development has a long history, and certainly in European Enlightenment traditions, it is closely linked with ideas of 'progress', aligned to technological advances and targeted at economic growth for the alleviation of poverty. However, there are many alternative paradigms of development, including 'post-development' (Rahnema, 1997); and alternative ways to think about poverty. Amartya Sen has been highly influential with his focus on agency, capabilities and freedoms (1999; 2002), and a well established body of work argues for a more human-centred approach to development, taking into account material, subjective and relational wellbeing (McGregor & Sumner 2009; the work of the Wellbeing in Developing Countries Research Group, University of Bath). A shift in understanding around the role of economics in determining the health of nations and communities has the idea of wellbeing at its heart.

This is evident, for example, in the report by the Sarkozy appointed Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress, led by world renowned economist Joseph Stiglitz with Amartya Sen and Jean-Paul Fitoussi. The report states that among the multiple dimensions of wellbeing are 'political voice and governance; and, social connections and relationships'. It recommends a shift in attention from economic production to human wellbeing, and suggests we should be paying particular attention to developing and implementing measures of social connections, political voice and insecurity - since valuing quality of life involves both perceptions, functionings and freedoms 'what really matters are the capabilities of people, that is, the extent of their opportunity set and of their freedom to choose among this set, the life they value' (Stiglitz, Sen & Fitoussi, 2009, p. 15).

Traditional and new ICTs have a role to play in such notions of development. However, as Tim Unwin (2009, p.33) reminds us,

Unlike IT and ICT, where the main focus is on what *is* and what *can* be achieved, ICT4D is about what *should* be done and *how* we should do it. ICT4D therefore has a profoundly moral agenda. It is not primarily about the technologies themselves, but is instead concerned with how they can be used to enable the empowerment of poor and marginalised communities.

The idea of ‘open ICT4D’ is presented by Smith, Engler, Christian, Diga, Rashid & Flynn-Dapaah (2008, p.5) as a working hypothesis, and is defined as ‘the use of new ICTs to engage in “open” processes to achieve development gains’. The intention is clear, to build on wider work in development towards democratic and participatory goals, to work towards transparency and accountability. This suggests a two way, horizontal process of development, that includes development agencies and institutions alongside those who are their focus. It fits well with the changing communication environment (Deane, 2004, p.23), made possible through newer ICTs, which allows for horizontal patterns of communication, from people to people, and people to government as well as the more traditional government to people. It relates to the opening up and proliferation of information sources, and the ability of those traditionally only positioned as receivers of development messages, to engage, to ask questions, and conceivably to create messages themselves. However, and to return to Unwin’s reminder above, we must be aware that while ‘open ICT’ might well focus on what *is* and *can* be achieved, ‘open ICT4D’ is about what *should* be done and *how*, and has a profoundly moral agenda.

This paper examines the proposition that increased ability to have a voice and be listened to, through ‘open ICT4D’ and ‘open content creation’ can be an effective mechanism for development - economic, political, cultural and social. The paper discusses empirical work that strongly indicates that this only happens when voice is appropriately valued in the development process. Having a voice in development processes are less effective when participation is limited. It is largely pointless when not grounded in the local aspirations of those speaking, or if no one is listening. And, if what is communicated is not articulated by government into wider economic, political and

social change, then voices have been heard but not ‘listened’ to. The important thing is not so much to have a voice, but to have a ‘voice that matters’ (Couldry, forthcoming 2010). Open ICT allows for more and more voices to be heard, but it is open ICT4D that has the obligation to ensure voices are listened to. This speaks directly to the idea of participation in development.

In the paper I first explore participatory development and the idea of open ICT4D in a little more detail before elaborating on issues of voice and thinking about voice as process, and voice as value. Research findings are presented from research that experimented with participatory (or open) content creation, discussed in relation to notions of openness and voice. I then consider the challenges of listening, before drawing some conclusions about opening up ICT4D research.

Participatory development and open ICT4D

The international development agenda is normatively connected to economics and markets, despite the important and highly influential inroads made by rights based approaches, and concepts like capabilities and freedom and social justice. Nevertheless, notions of participation, inclusion and engagement have penetrated deeply into development discourse. For example, when it comes to ICT4D, many have sought to shift the focus from a ‘digital divide’ to a focus on digital inclusion entitlement, and engagement (Mansell 2002, Selwyn 2004, Warschauer 2003). However, much of the uses of such apparently guiding principles of participation are severely limited in practice.

Cornwall’s history of ‘participation’ as an orthodoxy and a trope in mainstream development paints a gloomy picture in which current concerns about participation and empowerment, democratic governance, and rights-based approaches to development are simply re-castings of earlier ideas of participation, all of which lack close attention to the underlying causes and power effects of poverty and inequality (2006:78). Cornwall insists that the ideal of ‘participation’ needs to be closely scrutinized to understand whether it can ever be used to enable the poor to participate meaningfully in the decisions that effect them (ibid.) Evidence shows that participation that works can give people a sense of belonging and control over their lives, as well as strengthening the legitimacy of

the government, yet it is extremely hard to achieve - the focus needs to be on inclusion and social justice (Cornwall 2008; see also Cornwall & Coelho 2007). 'Participation' in practice has been critiqued as, among other things 'top down', 'passive', a means to development rather than an end (Bailur 2007; Michener 1998; White 1996). The mainstreaming and abuses of participation in development, where it can be considered a buzzword (Leal 2007), part of formulaic development rhetoric, 'used and abused' and even 'tyrannical' (Cooke & Kothari 2001; Rahnema 1992), can regain something of its transformative power when rights and issues of power are brought back into the frame and issues of agency, citizenship and governance take centre stage (Hickey & Mohan 2004).

Participation and the related notion of voice are evidently key concerns in development, however limited in practice. It is widely recognized that development needs to be designed by 'the poor' and that 'poverty' as defined by the poor reaches beyond income and expenditure (see <http://go.worldbank.org/H1N8746X10>). At the same time, there is much written about the affordances and potentials of new and traditional media technologies, for participation, voice and development (cf. Currie 2007; Deane 2004; ITU 2005; the Rome Consensus), along with work that explores the possibilities of political transformation coming from networked social production (Benkler 2006; Castells 2009). The claims for open ICT ecosystems suggest that technologies can enable and empower positive change in policies, processes, information, applications and people (Open ePolicy Group 2005). Openness is described in the ePolicy Group's roadmap as a combination of 'connectivity, collaboration, access and transparency' (ibid., p. i), and 'collaborative creativity' (ibid., p.3). When applied to ICT ecosystems it can empower and re-engineer government and business relationships with citizens and customers, leading to government reform and market success (ibid.). The ecosystem metaphor and the suggestion that ICT ecosystems are 'evolving' in terms of their openness, suggests a view of technological change as part of a natural process, somewhat reminiscent of ideas of development that equate to progress towards greater good.

The idea of an ICT ecosystem might be examined a little more carefully - it productively suggests a combination of people and things, the social and the technological. It is in danger however, of being overly technologically determinist, and technology-centric. As the ePolicy Group seeks to influence policies at a high level, through setting out a roadmap for achieving open ICT ecosystems, this is perhaps understandable. In terms however, of how we understand structure and agency for development, it can be limiting. Can technologies be understood outside of their embeddings in messy local realities? Of course larger scale political and policy contexts are important to our understandings, and these may well provide enabling environments, but it is in the dissolving of a social: technological dualism that things actually happen - we might usefully think of practices of ICT for development as a hybrid of the human and material, following Latour (1999). Certainly we cannot ignore long standing work on the social shaping of technologies (cf. MacKenzie & Wajcman, 1985) balanced perhaps by more recent work such as by Tenhunen (2008) who argues through close study of mobile use in rural India, that technologies not only amplify ongoing processes of cultural change which we might consider to be a form of local appropriation of technology, but also influence social, cultural and political processes. The idea of an ICT ecosystem to think about the relationships and intermingling of the social and technological then seems promising (see also Hearn, Tacchi, Foth and Lennie 2009, on the concept of 'communicative ecologies').

Smith and Elder (forthcoming, 2010), in bringing the idea of open ICT ecosystems into the realm of ICT for development, are careful to point out that the very great positive benefits of openness in ICT ecosystems as set out in the ePolicy Group's roadmap in terms of efficiency, innovation and growth, must be countered by negative aspects such as online crime, surveillance and the threat to personal privacy. The great benefits Smith and Elder identify in the idea of open ICT ecosystems, in relation to development, are related to the ways in which ICTs can enable 'open social arrangements', which in turn can make the impacts of ICTs for development more effective. In defining what they mean by open social arrangements, they privilege universal access and

participation, and collaborative production. They also consider accountability and transparency as important aspects. This points to a fundamental concern with universal access to knowledge and information, and the ability of all, even the poorest and most marginalized, to participate in the creation of knowledge and information exchange. In thinking about the ability to actively take part in networks and decision making fora, aided by ICTs, we can link this to a concern with voice. In this paper, and drawing on the work of Couldry (forthcoming, 2010), I use the term ‘voice’ in a way that interconnects two dimensions: voice as a process and voice as a value. We may be able to extend this discussion to ideas about open development, and in particular open content creation (what Smith and Elder might call collaborative production).

Valuing voice

By voice as a process, I mean the process of giving an account of one’s life and its conditions; it is about the agency to represent oneself and the right to express an opinion. To deny value to another’s capacity for narrative – to deny her potential for voice – is to deny a basic dimension of human life. Ruth Lister (2004) defines ‘voice’ as the right to participate in decision making across social, economic, cultural and political spheres, and as a crucial human and citizenship right, and a critical component in our understanding of what constitutes poverty. Arjun Appadurai (2004) draws on Albert Hirschman’s (1970) ideas on voice to show how voice engages the question of ‘dissensus’. One of the poor’s gravest lacks is the ‘lack of resources with which to give “voice,”’ by which Appadurai means the opportunity to not only express their views but also to get results ‘skewed to their own welfare in the political debates that surround wealth and welfare in all societies’ (2004, p.63). Voice has been used in various ways to support a general consensus that participatory development is the only way to proceed, but often with specific reference to voice as process, rather than voice as value (for example, the multi-country Voices of the Poor and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers) and so far its considerations have been limited to an interest in the basic act of voice, not the wider reasons for valuing voice. This connects with acknowledged problems with the notion of participation in development.

When participation is considered an end rather than a means, it can also be understood as a value rather than a process. If we start to think about ‘voice’ not just as a means, but as one of the ends of development (cf Sen 1999), then we can become clearer about the wider context in which the process of voice must take place, and so, the possible conditions for voice working more effectively in development. By voice as a value, I refer to the act of valuing, and choosing to value, those frameworks for organizing human life and resources that themselves value voice (as a process) - which might otherwise be thought about as ‘open social arrangements’ (Smith and Elder, forthcoming, 2010).

Voice requires recognition (Couldry, forthcoming 2010, Honneth, 1995). It is through the process of ‘listening’ that the value of voice can be mutually registered. Susan Bickford bemoans a neglect of listening in contemporary democratic theory, despite an emphasis on ‘shared speech as a practice of citizenship’ (1996, p.1.). She argues that political theory has consistently focused on the politics of speaking, but that politics is a communicative engagement, it is indeed itself constituted by communication, and that listening allows us to ‘give democratic shape to our being together in the world’ (ibid. 19). This is, in fact, the route to participatory democracy. The notion of voice as valued merely than simply facilitated, has many implications for the analysis of communications and development, focusing us on issues of attention and response as questions of communicative justice. In the context of open ICT4D, justice becomes a question not simply of access and participation, but also the quality of relationships between speakers and listeners mediated by technologies and institutions. To put it another way, valuing voice suggests that a redistribution of material resources for participating or speaking is inadequate unless there is also a shift in the hierarchies of value and attention accorded different actors and communities. Likewise, the idea of open ICT4D as a process must be clearly linked to ‘open social arrangements’ as a value in and of itself, and an end for open ICT4D to be working towards.

We might say that participation is often largely a rhetorical device, and in fact, even when it is a clearly articulated goal, because of the structures of aid and development, it is extremely hard to

achieve. Models or paradigms of development, and ICT4D, still tend to position people living in poverty - overwhelmingly, and in practice - as potential 'listeners', receivers of information and aid. This needs to be turned on its head.

Finding a Voice: Open Content Creation

Finding a Voice¹ was a research project that experimented with participatory (or open) content creation activities in 15 sites across India, Indonesia, Nepal and Sri Lanka (see findingavoice.org). In each site we partnered with a local community-based ICT, media or information centre. These ranged from telecentres in Indonesia, community multimedia centres in Sri Lanka and Nepal, ICT gender and resource centres in India, community libraries in Nepal, and community radio and TV initiatives in Nepal and India. The focus was on how new digital and traditional ICTs can be used to promote participation in content creation (especially among the most marginalised), and the consequences of such experiences of voice. We defined voice broadly as inclusion and participation in social, political and economic processes, meaning making, autonomy and expression, and so the idea was to test whether actively working towards participation in content creation using ICTs led to greater engagement in broader processes and decision and meaning making. We worked with a notion of voice as a right to communication, and participation in processes that affect ones life. The definition of participatory content creation that emerged from workshops held with the 15 collaborating local organisations reflected an acute awareness of issues of active and meaningful participation: 'content created after extensive discussions, conversations and decision-making with the target community; and where community group members take on content creation responsibilities according to their capacities and interests'. What was less clear from the research itself was, when this level of participation was achieved in practice in content creation, how this might then lead to our broader goals concerning voice.

¹ The full title of the project is Finding a Voice: Making Technological Change Socially Effective and Culturally Empowering. It was funded by the Australian Research Council (www.arc.gov.au) through their Linkage Grant scheme, with strong collaboration and further funds and in-kind support coming from UNESCO and UNDP. www.findingavoice.org.

The majority of our efforts (the team of researchers, facilitators, local community organisation workers and participants) were expended on developing, practicing, researching and rethinking a range of strategies for participatory content creation. In practice, in Finding a Voice, the relevance of voice and the ways in which ICT might enable it, was linked to issues of access to modes of expression and more generally to freedom of expression. It was about opportunity and agency to promote self expression and advocacy, about access and the skills to use technologies and platforms for the distribution of a range of different voices. Each partner community organisation developed its own strategies, depending on their local context, what they were trying to achieve, whom they wanted to work with, and the resources available to them. In effect, they were developing location specific processes for voice.

Despite the heralded participatory nature of new ICTs, hardware and software, issues of access are hugely complicated when those you want to participate are multiply disadvantaged. There were all sorts of access issues, reinforcing Rice & Atkin's (2001) claims that access is highly consequential and multidimensional, not simply about the physical, but also the cognitive, affective, political, economic and cultural. Those who are widely excluded cannot simply 'access' a computer if sat in front of one, 'Access lurks in the social and cultural contexts of information seeking... which are tied to the degree to which an individual is an insider to a given information system's culture... and therefore to the rules required to gain access to the information potentially available through it' (Rice & Atkin, 2001, p.26).

Nevertheless a wide range of content creation activities took place and were researched through a network consisting of academic researchers, practitioners and local people trained in a form of participatory action research (see ear.findingavoice.org). Overall, and acknowledging that local context cannot be ignored (Tacchi & Kiran 2008, pp.25-45), we were able to develop some general principles around participatory content creation for development, illustrated by the practices we had observed (Watkins & Tacchi 2008). To summarize some of our key findings in relation to participatory content creation, we found that:

1. Participatory content creation can provide a useful mechanism for participatory development more broadly;
2. It is necessary to reach out to and creatively engage with marginalised communities to encourage a diversity of voices;
3. Locally produced and participatory digital content can usefully create local debate around local issues; and,
4. Local content produced in this way can have relevance outside of the locality and can utilise networks for distribution.

I will briefly discuss each of these in turn, before thinking about limitations in the research as well as implications for the ideas presented above around valuing voice.

Firstly, we found that as a development activity, participatory content creation can be a really useful mechanism for achieving levels of participation that are seemingly hard to achieve in wider development practices (Tacchi, 2009). Just as with ICTs themselves, we found that participatory content creation can contribute to wider development agendas, but like ICT, needs to be introduced in ways that recognise local social networks and cultural contexts, and adapted accordingly. When this is done, participatory content creation presents a really interesting and tangible mechanism for ensuring levels of participation in wider development initiatives. For example, in a rural community library in Nepal, making digital stories² about local women's enterprise activities, or encouraging local women to make their own digital stories about their lives and experiences of learning to read in the library, led to increased interest and participation in the general library activities. Producing such tangible (and entertaining) outcomes from participatory activities makes them sharable and extremely useful in generating further participation.

Secondly, it was clear that the most marginalized or excluded groups need to be actively engaged in ways that suit their needs and circumstances. Simply providing the technologies and opportunities

² Digital stories here refer to short multimedia narratives made using a combination of digital photographs (or scanned images) and a voiceover, created through a workshop process that in itself is often community-building (see Hartley & McWilliam 2009).

to participate is not enough. The use of a mobile telecentre in Sri Lanka as a means to engage with Tamil youth provides a good example of why and how special effort needs to be expended to achieve participation (Grubb & Tacchi 2008; Tacchi & Grubb 2007). These young people lived in settlements very close to the fixed media centre, but their engagement was almost nil. Access for them was not limited because of geographical distance, rather it was ethnic and linguistic marginalization and other burdens of extreme poverty that kept them away. The mobile unit went to them, clearly indicating to them that the activities of the centre were for them as much as anyone else. This increased their participation overall.

Thirdly, there were many examples of how participatory content, screened locally, led to debates about important local issues. Indeed, it is where local debate happened that it was felt the content was 'activated' (Kiran 2008) and more likely to lead to some kind of social change, if only in terms of raised awareness. An example of this comes from an ICT centre in a Moslem slum in India. Young women learn various content creation skills as part of a vocational media development course designed following local research that revealed job opportunities available for those with creative design skills, and indeed identified a skills shortage in this area. The content produced by the young women was, however, also geared towards generating a sense of community responsibility in the participants, and assignments were given to create content that explores local issues. One major theme that emerged in such content was of domestic violence, and screenings of such content to local communities led to discussion and debate that otherwise simply would not happen. The fact that the issue was raised through content and stories created by local young women, in their own voice as it were, made the issue easier to discuss, overcoming taboos, and opening up a space for sharing of differing viewpoints and opinions (Kiran 2008).

Finally, distribution networks can facilitate the wider circulation of appropriate local content. In many cases the content was not easily made accessible to wider audiences, because the issues were very local, or more often, the language limited its reach. Some of the content created in the early phase of this project was subtitled in English and circulated by UNESCO on a DVD, showing how

local stories can be used to share different perspectives around development themes. This is both interesting and useful, but in terms of day to day activities at the various community centres, preparing their content for wider audiences, even given the existence of digital distribution platforms, is often not a feasible regular activity. However, when it does happen, there is a sense that this is a positive outcome. An example, again from a rural community Library in Nepal, is of a digital story that was created by a local woman about a specific health issue that she was made aware of after learning to read 'big letter books' (basic texts for literacy learning). The story was screened at an event in Kathmandu. This event was reported on in a national newspaper, making specific reference to the story and its message. The story was picked up by a community radio station in a nearby region to the community library, and a listener who knew someone at the library called her to let the story creator know that they'd heard about their story on the radio.

As mentioned above, the Finding a Voice project was interested in the ways in which practices of voice (through ICT) are articulated into wider practices of social and/or political action and change, but in practice our efforts were fully engaged in setting up processes for voice, with far less opportunity to examine and promote the valuing of voice. This is not so much a failing of the project as a clear indication of the amount of work needed to make such processes accessible in the first place, despite the apparent affordances of ICTs, new ICTs in particular. It also and urgently indicates the need to think beyond this, to what Smith & Elder (forthcoming, 2010) call 'open social arrangements' and Couldry calls 'voice that matters' (forthcoming, 2010). While the above brief presentation of findings from Finding a Voice indicate some interesting and promising opportunities for effecting wider social change, we need to question the usefulness of working towards 'participation' and 'voice' if due concern is not given to the articulation through listening of actual social change. Debate and dialogue can clearly be seen to have happened in many of our research examples, but how is this translated into action, and by whom? As is the limitation of many funded research initiatives, the project ended as it raised this important question.

This is an important question for social networking sites as well as for development more broadly. The encouragement and opportunity to participate is not always matched by the attention of listeners. This implies a devaluation of voice, and what Nick Couldry (2009) describes as the contemporary 'crisis of voice' in economic, political and cultural domains. Couldry is focussing on the UK, but the point holds where there are mechanisms for voice, and yet voices are not listened to, minimizing the notion of voice as implying mutual recognition, to voice as isolated act. Listening means focusing on processes and acts of paying attention, giving due recognition to what people have to say, and acknowledging that they should be afforded the opportunity to speak and be heard. Notions of voice and listening are further complicated in the new communication environment afforded by digital networks which demands certain literacies. While ICT has the potential to provide effective access to communication channels that can work in horizontal rather than vertical ways, it is the job of ICT4D to make sure it delivers. The idea of open ICT4D could further contribute to development practices based on egalitarianism and sharing, indicating promising pathways towards open development.

Listening

While the communication for social change agenda (see communicationforsocialchange.org; Gray-Felder & Deane, 1999), and the alternative development paradigm more broadly places dialogue at the centre of development, meaning a participatory engaged relationship which involves valuing voice, recognition and respect, we are still fundamentally lacking an understanding of the information and communication needs and aspirations of people living in poverty. We need to more effectively listen to them. For O'Donnell, Lloyd & Dreher (2009, p.423), in the editorial to a special issue on listening in the journal *Continuum*,

In our view, attention to the politics of listening provides a means of moving beyond questions of speaking and voice to canvass issues of dialogue and meaningful interaction across difference and inequality. Research on media-related listening proves richly rewarding: silence and silencing take on new meanings; misinterpretation and

dissonance move to the forefront of our concerns, and the topographies of disparities in the social distribution of media resources reveals itself as more vertiginous than previously imagined.

We learned through Finding a Voice that the listening end of the equation is not a straightforward activity that will simply fall into place if engaging content is produced. The very institutions which excluded communities might usefully try to engage with through ICT, are often structurally unsuited for listening, and indeed development itself generally positions the poor as the listeners rather than vice versa. The Listening Project, conducted within the CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, have held ‘listening conversations’ with more than 4,500 people since 2005 in aid recipient societies across the globe. These people include ordinary people, community leaders, government officials, civil society and religious leaders, people from education, business, health and NGO sectors. They have found that the aid agenda and its systems might be far more effective if ‘listening’ happened with people on the ground, building relationships at that level. They found that the ‘systems of international assistance bias the ways that agencies and aid workers listen and do not listen, what they listen to, where and when they listen, and to whom they listen’ (The Listening Project, 2009).

This should be understood not only as a need for the valuing of voice and prioritizing effective listening, but also as about acknowledging and respecting alternative forms of knowledge; something which perhaps presents us with one of our biggest challenges in open ICT4D. Being prepared to accept and respect alternative knowledge and knowledge practices, which may be contradictory to dominant knowledge practices and beliefs is challenging, especially to development. To present this challenge in concrete terms, we can look at the example of a project in Nepal called ‘Assessing Communication for Social Change: a New Agenda in Impact Assessment’ (AC4SC)³. Underpinning this project is a recognition of the importance of listening and responding to different knowledges. It is being conducted in collaboration with Equal Access Nepal (EAN), and

³ This is a research project funded by an Australian Research Council Linkage Grant, in collaboration with Equal Access Nepal., see ac4sc.org/en/wiki/about for details.

involves designing and implementing a participatory methodology for evaluating the impacts of the radio programs for development produced by EAN. It incorporates ethnographic principles of long term engagement and immersion with communities, and combines them with many of the features of participatory action research (see Lennie & Tacchi, 2007). Essentially the research is about assessing the impact of EAN's work, by producing data through qualitative engagements with local communities. The bulk of the data is generated by people from those communities, trained in appropriate data collection methods. This produces qualitative data in a way that aims to not only 'prove' impact to donor organisations, but also allow the organisation to 'improve' its practices (Lennie, Skyse, Tacchi & Wilmore, 2008).

However, in attempting to move away from an information delivery (top down) model of communication for development, and to work closer to the ground in terms of generating research data, EAN is meeting with a level of complexity and uncertainty in its data, which makes it difficult to tick the required donor boxes. Real life is messy, and complex, shifting and diverse. While it is clearly increasing the organisation's capacity to be responsive as it starts to develop more nuanced understandings of its target audiences, helping EAN to be a learning organisation, one that is making real attempts to listen to its target audiences, the data is not easily translatable into donor reports. Chambers & Pettit (2004, p.137) write about the way that development rhetoric has changed in recent years, to include new words like partnership, participation and transparency, that imply 'changes in power and relationships, but [which] have not been matched in practice', rather, power and relationships are governing dynamics that in practice 'prevent the inclusion of weaker actors and voices in decision-making'. Development rules and procedures are a part of what needs to be changed, to open up to different ways of operating, to allow for different voices and stop the structural stifling of meaningful participation. The logical framework analysis (logframe) is an example of such stifling, as it 'reinforce relationships of power and control... [and] embodies a linear logic associated with things rather than people' (Chambers & Pettit, 2004, p. 145). In this sense, through AC4SC, one could claim that EAN are trying to make their organisation, their

processes and their content 'open' and that the structures, power relationships, and rules and procedures of development are (despite the rhetoric) making this difficult to achieve.

Conclusion: opening up ICT4D research

In the field of media research, Nick Couldry suggests that we need to 'listen beyond the echoes of the media process' (2006, p.7) in order to figure out where we need to be to get the 'best vantage point on media's contributions (good and bad) to contemporary life' (2006, p.2). Media research has a fine history of studying media texts, and media institutions (including audiences), but now is the time to 'decentre' media research, 'as a way of opening up both wider and different questions about how media fits, or does not fit, into the rest of our lives' (2006, p.30). Couldry suggests that this opening up can come from theorizing media as *practice*. The benefits are (at least) threefold: firstly, it challenges and moves beyond the functionalist approach of some media research; secondly, and following on from this, it acknowledges the complexity and variability of practice; and, thirdly, it explores the relationships between media practices, and between these and non-media practices. Ultimately it aims to widen the focus of media research in order to be able to think about media's consequences on social life more broadly (ibid. pp.33-48). We might usefully call for a similar decentring of ICT research. In effect, the proposal, or hypothesis, that open ICT4D focus on open social arrangements, rather than ICT itself (Smith & Elder forthcoming, 2010), seems to be motivated by similar concerns to move away from functionalist understandings of ICT, recognising complexity and variation, and thinking about ICT's impacts on other broader social and development processes.

New technologies are allowing the development of new communications systems, which both reshape, and are shaped by local contexts - political, social, cultural. This is important as an understanding of the relationship between technology and society, that blurs the boundaries between these two distinct entities and recognises that, in practice, there is no way to understand either in an exclusive way. Thinking about ICT as practice helps to widen the focus of ICT4D, to

consider its consequences on society and development more broadly, and to more appropriately design ICTs for specific contexts and purposes bearing wider development goals in mind.

An interesting example that illustrates why we might think about open ICT4D as practice (if we consider ICT to include older information and communication technologies like video and radio), is the Deccan Development Society's (DDS) work in the Telangana Region of Andhra Pradesh, India with their use of radio and video⁴. This example also helps to highlight how considerations of voice and listening can be thought about in relation to open ICT in and for development. DDS deliberately and effectively turns the more traditional speaker-listener relationship around.

Marginalised women farmers are working together to develop effective and sustainable food systems (The DDS Community Media Trust, Satheesh & Pimbert, 2008). These women operate their own Community Media Trust, as an integral part of their work on food sovereignty. They use media for both outward 'speaking' and sharing of knowledge, and inward 'listening'. Radio Sangham is their community radio station that broadcasts content decided by and made by themselves, in their own local dialect, on issues of local concern. This is a little like a closed loop system, with the intention to share and communicate in a horizontal manner. The level of pride in the radio station expressed by local marginalised women was incredibly high. They recognised that very few communities of marginalised farmers had such a resource, and valued the ways in which it helped them keep in touch with what other women farmers were doing in the area.

The video initiative, on the other hand, follows a more traditional verticle information delivery model – where information that is lacking is delivered through a one-way communication channel. Information and knowledge on sustainable local food systems, agricultural biodiversity and livelihoods are presented in a series of videos, subtitled to reach a wider linguistic audience, with the aim of helping to improve the position of marginal farmers, and promote sustainable farming practices. However, and notably, the information and knowledge is created and delivered by the women themselves, and targets other marginal farmers like themselves, as well as policy makers,

⁴ A close study of this initiative was undertaken as part of an ongoing Intel Funded research project, 'Moving Content: Creative Engagement in Marginal Spaces' led by the author. Contact author for details.

government departments and other relevant organisations. Traditional development ‘receivers’ are delivering knowledge to traditional development ‘providers’. The wealth of local knowledge, built upon a quarter of a century of sustained improvements in local agricultural practices that draw on local farming traditions, are being shared.

This turns the more usual speaker-listener relationship on its head. Their voices are valued, by themselves and others. ICTs are not their primary focus, but a tool for improving their practices and sharing their knowledge. They are an example of the decentring of ICT, focusing on development practices and the open social arrangements that they should facilitate. In considering open social practices, we might usefully think about issues of voice and challenges of listening. While ICTs promise unprecedented ‘openness’, that can be thought about as encapsulating such ideas as the valuing of voice, open ICT4D *should* deliver it.

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