

'ICTs for participatory local development

– Exploring a systemic approach'

Call for Research Proposals

[IT for Change](#) is undertaking a collaborative research project with support from the United Nations Development Programme ([UNDP](#)) - New York to understand the possibilities and implications of employing ICTs in a systemic way for local development. The goal of this study is to examine how such an application of ICTs across development domains and processes can have a transformative impact with respect to citizen- and community-centric dimensions of local development in a manner that prioritises the interests of disadvantaged sections. It will also look at the enabling conditions supporting such systemic application of ICTs. The outcomes of the project will feed into a roadmap and toolkit for UNDP that facilitates a system integrator approach to ICTs in development contexts.

As a part of this, we are seeking researchers from the global South to study existing examples of such systemic ICT deployment in the South, especially where such initiatives play a transformative role in enhancing local development. We would like to collaborate with researchers or organisations who have engaged in a critical analysis of information society opportunities and challenges for local development.

Rationale for the project

The mainstream ICTD discourse is dominated by a 'technical' approach to ICT deployment that is limited to isolated or ad hoc integration of new ICTs with service delivery platforms. Such an understanding, while obscuring the social, political and cultural dynamics of ICTD, also eschews the imperative of systemic design and application of ICTs that can effectively encompass the whole range of development activities and processes. There is hence a need for a new approach to ICTD that facilitates the transformative reorganisation of both delivery and participation systems to meet local development needs.

The proposed project attempts to study a largely unexplored dimension of the transformative potential of ICTs – how the holistic and systemic application of technologies can enhance local development and reform governance systems. Mapping 'good practices' of local development initiatives that have demonstrated impacts and weaving the possibilities demonstrated by these initiatives into a comprehensive roadmap for moving towards the adoption of effectively integrated ICT-enabled systems and processes – that are participatory and citizen-centric– are central activities of the research study. Through the roadmap, it is expected that the broad and specific possibilities of ICTs to transform various areas of local development are clearly demonstrated to both policy makers as well as practitioners.

Methodology and timeline

The project, preliminary work of which is currently underway, will run till October 2008. Four partners will be selected from among the responses to this call who will work alongside IT for Change for the duration of the project. To the extent possible, the selection will be geographically diverse. Each partner will be required to undertake two to three in-depth case studies of ICT systems of a transformative nature (as opposed to mainstream 'technical' ICTD initiatives) applied in the area of local development in their local region. The case studies will specifically look at those interventions where (a) there is a significant level of involvement of local government bodies in the design and implementation; (b) the effects transcend stand-alone technology adaptations and reflect convergent systemic possibilities; (c) technologies have enabled new or strengthened existing processes of citizen-centricity and community participation, particularly those of marginalised groups and women; (d) socio-economic development and governance reform are the central objectives of the intervention; and (e) possibilities for scaling-up exist.

The project will cover researchers' remuneration and fieldwork expenses. In June 2008, project partners will come together at a workshop where the findings will be presented. Based on the workshop discussions, the final case studies and analysis from each region will be written, feeding into a publication that will also include a roadmap and toolkit on the systemic application of ICTs in local development contexts.

Please download IT for Change's [Project Proposal](#) for more information. **At this stage we urgently seek short descriptions of potential candidate initiatives from prospective partners (independent researchers or organisations). The most relevant among the initiatives will be selected for in-depth study. Please send a maximum one page description at the earliest to ITfC@ITforChange.net**