Book Review

Chib, May, & Barrantes. (2015). Impact of Information Society Research in the Global South. Singapore: Springer Singapore: Imprint: Springer.

Jaime A. Manalo IV

jamanalo4@email.philrice.gov.ph
Development Communication Division
Philippines Rice Research Institute

While the issue of impact of ICTs in international development seems well explored, it is, at some point, poorly understood. Impact means different things to different people. This book interrogates the impacts of ICTs in international development by exploring the intersections between research, practice, and policy. The book revolves around two important questions: (1) "How is the research on ICTs in the Global South playing a role in achieving an information society, through implementation in practice, influence on policy formulation, and media coverage for shaping public opinion?" and (2) "What is the evidence of the impact of ICTs on society (i.e. the end objectives of socio-economic development)?" (Chib, 2015, p. 4).

The book is divided into two parts: the first is composed of theoretical discussions on how to gauge ICT impacts and literature reviews on how ICT research can impact policies towards creating information societies. The second reports different cases of ICT applications and initiatives in different sectors such as in agriculture and in education.

There are several benefits from reading this book. First, ICTD scholars from the Global South will find this book refreshing as the chapters are authored by scholars from the region featuring thinkers from Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Surely, any ICTD scholar will not miss the works of commonly cited scholars such as Heeks, Unwin, and Mansel. This book is refreshing in the sense that it gives Global South scholars the chance to significantly contribute to the ICTD discourse. The scholarship from the Global South presented in this book makes scrutiny of cases from the region to be more contextual and—rightly so—homegrown. In saying this, it does not mean that the insights do not have applications outside the region. The quality of the scholarly work presented can surely inform policies and practices relating to ICTs in development.

The book also opens doors towards uncharted research territories on the impacts of ICTs in development (see Ordoñez, 2015). The book offers directions for inquiry particularly among novice researchers in the area. In the second part of the book, the reader is presented with several cases showing varying impacts of ICT initiatives. These cases bring to light several researchable areas. A case in point is the m (mobile)-health application in India (Chandwani & De, 2015). While it is innovative and well-intentioned, the authors argue that it is fraught with ethical issues such as disclosing medical history to people (e.g., technicians who assist during the consultation) other than the physician.

For theory-savvy readers, this book offers quite a number of theoretical lenses (e.g. Flor's and Dodel's chapters) in measuring ICTs' impact on development—away from the commonly used theories such as Amartya Sen's Capability Approach. The theoretical discussions are highly engaging; some discussions focus on how to establish causation i.e., trying to attribute development or at least a part of it to ICT interventions.

Readers who are into exploring the research-policy jungle will also find this book useful. Harris (2015) offers several practical insights on how ICT studies can inform policies. It problematizes what constrains ICTD researchers from making solid impact in the policy arena. Among the factors cited is that it is not the cup of tea of most researchers to go out of their way to promote their work or to communicate in a language other than that used in the academia.

Methodologically, all throughout the book, there is a recognition of the relevance of participatory methods and approaches to research on ICTD (e.g., May & Diga, 2015; Olivera, Ale, & Chib, 2015). The authors put premium on strong contextual reference and the value of giving voice to the primary stakeholders of ICTs that will be developed. This, to me, is a very important point in highlighting the user perspective in ICTs.

This book could have enhanced its readability if more photos were added particularly in its second part where several ICTD cases are presented. The photos could have established the context of the case studies, which could have helped the reader to better imagine the scenarios being described. The tables and graphs could have been presented in a more engaging and visually appealing manner. Infographics could have done the trick in this case in making the book easy to read, which is an important point given that the contents are quite difficult to digest. This, however, is a minor point—only to help the authors to more strongly convey their points. In part 2, while it is supposed to focus on actual cases, a few were based on literature reviews. Hence, it would have been better if more cases were added given that the first part is already heavy in theories and literature reviews. Adding more cases could have further reinforced the uniqueness of ICTD cases in the Global South

Overall, this is an excellent book for ICTD researchers—budding and established professionals alike. The book has sparked conversations on how to explore impacts of ICTs in development. It provides good reflections on how to bring ICT research and relevance beyond the confines of academia.

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