

Executive Summary: Painting a shared future vision in technology-for-development

A kiwanja.net initiative

Whilst it continues to hold great potential, the ICT4D sector finds itself riddled with problems that many practitioners and commentators have struggled with for well over a decade. Projects rarely optimize for their beneficiaries and the environments in which they operate, and despite what they often claim, many set out as solutions looking for a problem. Too many initiatives lead with technology, and fail to scale into sustainable programs - in part because donors are constantly under pressure to disburse funds to new and 'innovative' projects, rarely giving older projects time to mature. There is no minimum standard for funding development projects, either. As a result, money struggles to find it's way to the projects most likely to succeed, and a vicious cycle ensues. Worse still, despite talk of local capacity building and ownership, the vast majority of ICT4D programs are still conceptualized, executed and funded by outsiders and parachuted in. Ownership rarely transfers. All of this adds up to a cycle of underperformance, perpetuated by the fact that feedback loops between donors, practitioners, policy makers, academia, civil society and program beneficiaries are at best weak.

kiwanja.net is intent on 'doing' our way out of the negative cycle of ICT4D projects through an approach based on the creation of a shared future vision and roadmap for our sector. Our call to action focuses on a group whose actions have largely failed to date - Think Tanks addressing grassroots non-profits, local social actors and innovators. We believe that it is time to disrupt the traditional Think Tank model of outsiders applying a "research it, write it, and they will find it" approach to ICT4D. This approach is not only at odds with creating real change, but new trends are putting pressure on it to change - including localization of super-sized national challenges; a shift in development funding sources from public to a mix of public, private and civic; and increased competition from advocacy organizations, for-profit advisory services and social media.

kiwanja.net believes that, by 2030, the majority of ICT4D efforts should not only be lead by, but should also be anchored in, a strong local civil society, and that local actors should use their own talent to build, pilot, partner and test solutions using appropriate technologies available in their own contexts. kiwanja.net sees its role as a catalyst for action towards this vision. We seek to bring together innovators, development practitioners,

technologists, civil society and academia – all from developing countries where the outsider model currently dominates, and whose voices have been largely ignored among policy makers, to paint a picture of this future vision and map out concrete steps of how we get there.

In short, we aim to:

Convene. We will bring together African technologists, aid workers, educators, civil servants, disrupters and other ‘unusual suspects’

Paint. We will widely consult and collaboratively paint a picture of a future vision of technology-for-development on the African continent.

Map. We will work with experts and other partners to build a roadmap and a set of policy recommendations that execute on that vision.

Execute. We will work with donors, government agencies and local civil society groups to implement and monitor those policy recommendations.

