

PRESS RELEASE

Impact of ICT in child-related development programmes examined *UNICEF global survey reveals important opportunities and risks*

FLORENCE 23 April 2014 – The spread of internet, social media and wireless communication in developing countries has contributed to rapid growth in efforts to harness the power of information and communication technology (ICT) for development. A new report: *“Children, ICTs and Development: Capturing the potential, meeting the challenges,”* on ICT for development and children, has been released by the UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti.

Numerous countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America are now witnessing significant growth of ICT based efforts to improve maternal health, to register childbirth, to empower youth with knowledge about HIV prevention and much more. Such initiatives are often collectively referred to as ICT for development, or, ICT4D. The new report is one of the first studies to review interactions between ICT4D and children.

“In certain circumstances ICTs can play a critical role in achieving results for the most marginalized communities and the most vulnerable children, mothers, and families,” said Director of UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, Marie-Claude Martin. “This new study highlights many successes as well as key challenges such as inequitable access to technology for women and rural communities.”

Developed in collaboration with the ICT4D Centre at Royal Holloway, University of London and Jigsaw Consult, the study is a global mapping of ICT4D projects and programmes focusing on children. The report also includes a survey of 35 leading experts in the field – development practitioners, academics, and business leaders – who provide important insights on current use of ICTs to improve the situation of vulnerable children.

UNICEF is committed to overcoming barriers affecting the world’s most marginalized children, and is increasingly implementing efforts to harness the potential of ICT to empower disadvantaged communities. UNICEF has announced a year-long focus on “Innovation for equity,” dedicating the 2014 edition of its flagship publication: “State of the World’s Children” to this theme. The equity perspective – on gender, ethnicity, age, education and rural/urban divide – is a consistent theme throughout the new ICT4D report.

Study findings caution that ICTs on their own do not necessarily translate into “quick wins” for child-focused development work. It documents many unintended consequences of efforts to take advantage of rapid technological change for children, when poorly linked with underlying social and cultural realities.

“ICTs are not some sort of a technical fix detached from the complex realities of children’s lives,” said Dorothea Kleine, lead author of the report. “They are increasingly woven into the very fabric of life, in income-rich and increasingly in income-poor countries. Technology itself is only a small part of the overall challenge of social change processes for development.”

The report stresses the critical role that parents, teachers, community health workers, street or social workers should play in the use of ICTs to address children’s issues. It highlights the risks of some efforts that have advocated simple provision of access to technology for children, based on the assumption they will automatically know how to use it in a constructive manner.

According to the study, much like previous waves of interest in the use of telecommunication infrastructure to speed social and economic development, some current ICT4D efforts have been tripped up by failure to adequately plan and continually monitor results. To this end, the study advocates a context-aware, participatory, child-focused and equity-sensitive approach to using ICTs for child-related development goals.

“The report serves as a reminder that innovation efforts should not be thought of as magic bullets. But introduced with the requisite regard for local mores and conditions, they can be important

catalysts for development affecting all areas of children’s lives,” said Marie-Claude Martin. “This brief study represents a contribution towards a culture of openness and learning in identifying and scaling technology for development to support UNICEF programmes and goals for children.”

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To download the full report: <http://www.unicef-irc.org>

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