DEVELOPMENT, SECURITY, AND THE ROLE OF ICT IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

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In the Global South, private corporations and development aid programs are widely implementing information and communication technology (ICT). Stakeholders export infrastructure (including satellites, drones, and white spaces technology) as well as mobile and internet services (mobile money services, zero-rating), following the proclaimed goal to close the global digital divide. They particularly target under-connected regions in Africa, as Africa shows the lowest levels of internet connectivity (cf. International Telecommunications Union 2017). According to companies and development aid programs, these digitalization efforts in the Global South are

key to development and security. However, an ethical perspective points to concerns about the practice of digitalization in the Global South. One central concern is that certain values are inscribed in ICT, and that they may be indirectly implemented through technology in the importing countries. Thus, the export of ICT by Western companies and development aid programs to the Global South may have a "neo-colonial" character. This raises ethical questions about global justice.

ICT are believed to have mostly positive effects for development in the Global South. Potential benefits of ICT implementation allegedly include better economic performance, better access to health care, more opportunities for expression and political participation, and higher levels of education. For instance, the US-based non-profit organization Worldreader uses technology to increase literacy among children and their families in the Global South. Making books available on mobile devices and distributing e-readers, the organization hopes to contribute to key development goals (Worldreader 2017). Another example is the practice of "zero-rating", through which Facebook, Google, Wikipedia and other corporations offer free access to a selected set of websites and services to increase access to information. Free Basics, Facebook's zero-rating initiative, advertises its benefits as follows: "Imagine the difference an accurate weather report could make for a farmer planting crops, or the power of an encyclopaedia for a child without textbooks" (Facebook Free Basics 2017).

Stakeholders also hope to improve security by using ICT. During the 2017 elections in Kenya, the Nairobi-based organization Ushahidi collected and published real-time data about protests, violence, and voting irregularities. Kenyans texted information to the number 20166 or used Facebook, Twitter, and email. The data that was coming in from diverse areas in Kenya was displayed on a website and visualized in an interactive map of the country (Uchaguzi 2017). Also aiming at improving access to information about security, the World Food Programme has tested the use of chatbots, for example in the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya (Bauer, Casarin, and Clough 2017). Chatbots send out critical real-time information via applications. In a humanitarian context, access to real-time information, e.g. about food delivery or security threats, may be crucial to assisting hard-to-reach populations.

While these efforts to foster development and increase security by technology may have the potential to improve individuals' quality of life, ethical implications of ICT export to the Global South must be considered. After all, the question about closing the global digital divide is a question of global justice (cf. van den Hoven and Rooksby 2010).

At the International Centre for Ethics in the Sciences and Humanities, University of Tübingen, an interdisciplinary project investigates the export of ICT by Western private corporations and development aid programs to Kenya. This

project focuses on values in technologies, building on research in the fields of intercultural information ethics and technology ethics (see also research on "values in design"). Much of this research argues that ICT are not neutral tools but transport values which are consciously or unconsciously inscribed into them, e.g. by the technology developers or the initiators (Brey 2010; Grunwald 2016; Nissenbaum 2005). Hence, actors exporting ICT to the Global South – intentionally or unintentionally – implement certain values in the target society. This gives rise to the important question how the adoption of value-laden technology interacts with the conceptualisation of values in the Global South.

As indicated, ICT export to the Global South is ethically highly ambivalent. Therefore, it is crucial to observe digitalization efforts in the Global South, not only from an international relations, development, or political economy perspective, but also from a philosophical perspective. Values inherent in technologies should be identified, and interculturally sensitive conceptualisations of core values (such as privacy and access to information) should be developed. Furthermore, the effects of ICT export to the Global South should be analysed and compared to the goals expressed by Western companies and development aid programs. By investigating such questions, we can move towards a comprehensive (ethical) assessment of digitalization efforts in the Global South. Thereby, we can begin to understand what ICT implementation in the Global South really means for global justice.

You can follow the project on ethical implications of ICT export to Africa on Twitter: @EthicsICTAfrica. For further information, please contact PD Dr. Jessica Heesen at jessica.heesen (at) uni-tuebingen.de or consult the project website

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