

ICTD in Corporate Social Responsibility: Changing priorities in international development funding?

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Abstract: The study of technology and development has, since the mid-1990s, generated significant query into the impacts and adoption of technology within resource-deprived communities and geographies. Yet, there has been comparatively less query into the overall changes in development thinking that this “era of ICTD (Information and Communication Technologies for Development)” has brought along. In this paper, we examine ICTD from a funding perspective and find that technology-related giving plays an increasingly central role in the international social investments of several major firms. While an interest in spending on technology is indeed central to the interests of corporations in the technology sector, we find that a sizeable number of companies that do not make their money from technology are nonetheless including what one may consider “ICTD” projects in their corporate social responsibility (CSR) funding profiles. In our examination of this trend, we find that companies with profiles as diverse as banking (Citigroup), energy (ExxonMobil), and retail (Walmart) feature on this list of supporters for the technology and development cause. We explore the extent to which this can be considered a serious trend, and start a discussion on its broader implications, both in the reframing of ICTD and for the redistribution of sectoral composition of private aid flows towards international development as a whole.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility (CSR), information and communication technologies for development (ICTD), multinational enterprises, sustainability, international development, millennium development goals

1. Introduction

Information and Communication technologies (ICTs) have long had the distinction of being perceived as both being a great divide between the haves and the have-nots as well as one the greatest enablers of economic and social development. Taken literally, ICTs can include

everything from the printing press to West African talking drums; but in the context of its applications towards development goals, we use ICT as a connotation of modern electronic technology— primarily the PC, the mobile phone, and the Internet play central roles [Toyama et al., 2008]. Together, these have come to be called ICTD (Information and Communication Technologies for Development).

In the context of international development, the intersection of ICT and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has been considered a critical nexus for the future of sustainable human development and poverty eradication [Gilhooly, 2005]. The MDGs, a set of eight development goals adopted by the United Nations in 2000, have since become a pivotal framework for meeting the needs of the world's poor. In 2003, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the International Business Leaders Forum (IBLF) put forward a framework for business contributions towards achieving the MDGs [Nelson et al., 2003]. This framework clearly established ICT as one of the targets drivers for bridging the “digital divide” and proposed that efforts be focused on delivering five key constituents: access to equipment and appropriate software; telecommunications links with Internet connections; technical assistance and training; access to relevant content; and access to affordable equipment. The importance and critical role of the private sector in realizing the success of these initiatives has also been repeatedly stressed by those proposing these policies [Gilhooly, 2005].

Looking at CSR from a development perspective, Michael Hopkins categorizes multinational enterprises (MNE) involvement in development work into three types [Hopkins, 2007]:

Type 1: Charitable donation for purposes of philanthropy

Type 2: Development projects initiated for their monetary value i.e. those which directly have a positive impact on the company bottom line

Type 3: Development projects that do not immediately impact the bottom line but serve to enhance the company's reputation and contribute to wider development objectives

Historically, MNEs have focused development projects in sectors directly related to their business objectives. This had resulted in a trend of ICTD projects being largely driven by

companies operating in core technology areas of hardware and software. However, our research finds that in recent years, investment into what we could think of as ICTD projects have penetrated into the CSR agendas of a number of non-technology companies.

To the best of our knowledge, this paper is the first to document this increasing focus on ICTD projects as a conduit for CSR activities among non-tech firms. We base our results on a study of CSR reports of ten large American companies, with the largest CSR budgets, as reported in 2008 by Fortune magazine. In the second part of this paper, we attempt to identify the genesis of this trend and its implications for international development. In this pursuit, we use existing literature on ICTD and CSR and current events and data to shed some light and start the discussion on what we think is an important trend in the history of public-private partnerships in development.

The results of the study, the methodology used and the conclusions of the research are described in the following five sections. Section two describes the data and the methodology, section three showcases the results obtained, section four is dedicated to analysis of the findings, section five provides direction for future research and section six summarizes the conclusions from the study.

2. Data and Methodology

We examined the CSR reports for the most philanthropic American MNEs (per cash donations) as reported in Forbes' 2008 report [Kirdahy, 2008] for the years 2006 to 2009. The Forbes report had separate rankings for organizations that were generous in terms of total cash donations and those who donated the largest percentage of their operating income. In our study, we restrict ourselves to the former as we wished to study the shift in giving patterns of the largest and most influential contributors in the CSR space. It is noteworthy that the cash contributions used to compile the rankings excluded in-kind contributions i.e. free product and service offerings.¹

Of the 10 largest corporate givers, 8 had large international operations and 2 had primarily domestic operations (Bank of America and Wachovia). In order to examine CSR operations of

¹ The data used in the Forbes report was compiled by *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, a bi-weekly publication for the nonprofit community, which performs an annual survey of companies of America's largest companies about their giving habits. 78 corporations were tracked in the survey in 2007.

companies that had significant presence in emerging markets, we restricted our analysis to the remaining eight. These eight companies represented diverse sectors and included retail (Walmart), energy (ExxonMobil, Chevron), banking (Citigroup), pharmaceuticals (Johnson and Johnson), global infrastructure, finance and media (General Electric) and technology & communications (Microsoft, AT&T).

3. Findings

In our study of CSR reports of large multinational organizations, we find strong anecdotal evidence of the increasing focus on ICTD projects, especially after 2007. A tangible shift in interest towards projects supporting ICT for development is perceptible in seven out of the eight companies we surveyed from the Forbes list. The exception was Johnson and Johnson which appeared to have maintained its focus on health and environment as the primary conduit for its corporate giving.

Wal-Mart Stores topped the Forbes 2008 rankings for the most generous company, having donated \$301 million in 2007, which included cash contributions from the company foundation. The company's CSR policy shows a marked shift in focus from 2006, up to which time the company issued "Ethical Sourcing" reports, focusing on its supply chain management standards. The 2007-08 report broadened its scope to become the "Sustainability Report" and mentioned two programs imparting computer skills to deprived communities in Brazil and Guatemala. Wal-Mart was the only company among the ones surveyed which had already released its 2009 CSR report at the time of writing. The 2009 report indicated a marked scaling up of the trend towards supporting ICTD projects already seen in the 2007-2008 report, and mentioned five such projects being supported across different emerging markets.

ExxonMobil ranked third in the rankings, having contributed \$173 million in cash donations in 2007. On comparing the company's "Corporate Citizenship" reports for the years 2006, 2007 and 2008, we found that while the company demonstrated no direct involvement in ICTD related CSR projects in 2006, the company's 2007 report mentions one project offering computer training to women in rural China. The 2008 report, in contrast, cited three project examples in this space. In addition, Exxon Mobil supported important recent conferences on ICTD research such as ICTD 2009.

Citigroup, ranked fourth in the rankings, donated \$146 million in cash in 2007. One of the largest beneficiaries of this 2007 grant was Citigroup's own Financial Information Technology Education Program in China. This grant, worth US\$1.24 million, will be made across 2007 through 2009, and supports education in the areas of finance, management, software, and computer science in more than 30 universities in China [Citigroup, 2007]. The program consists of three main elements: scholarships and fellowships for students and teachers, a mainframe-training program and a software competition. In contrast to no overt ICTD investments being mentioned in the 2006 report, the 2007 report cites IT training programs for women in Turkey and the 2008 report mentions a pilot program for expanding digital infrastructure and communication capability for partnering non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the United States.

Chevron donated \$122 million in cash in 2007, and ranked sixth in the Forbes rankings. Since 2003, the company has partnered with Discovery Channel Global Education Partnership to support the creation of 55 Learning Centers in Angola, Venezuela, South Africa and Nigeria. These centers are designed for community learning programs and include relevant educational programming and technology for both children and adults. The company's CSR reports during the period clearly reflect the increase in scale of the program and also indicate the increasing use of ICT tools to support the educational programs in the centers. The 2008 CSR report also indicated expansion of programs imparting technical education and vocational training programs in Indonesia.

AT&T's CSR report largely focused on its domestic CSR initiatives rather than those in international markets. The company, which donated \$119 million in cash, clearly has a number of initiatives and programs focused on improving access to technology; like providing telemedicine, and supporting projects like "Smartcrop" aimed at helping farmers save money on water bills using ICT tools. Recent press reports suggest that the company is also focusing on improving access to education among disadvantaged communities in emerging markets that it serves [Reuters, Dec 22nd, Dec 23rd 2008]. However, there was no clear evidence to indicate that the projects being supported were favored for their ICT component.

General Electric (GE)'s cash donations for 2007 amounted to \$114 million and it ranked eighth in the Forbes list of most generous companies. GE showed a strong commitment to engage in ICT-infrastructure building activities like the "India Rural Electrification Program" in as early as 2006. Since then, besides expanding its commitment to building ICT-infrastructure in other emerging markets, GE has also integrated services like internet and telecom as a part of the enterprise solution for "Developing Health Globally", a long-running program providing healthcare facilities in parts of Africa, Latin America and Asia.

Microsoft Corporation, ranked 9th in the Forbes list, contributed cash donations of \$110 million in 2007. Microsoft has a long history in working in the ICTD space. In 2007, Microsoft launched the Unlimited Potential program aimed at promoting digital inclusion, helping people access affordable technology and building up the technology capacity of NGOs. This is done through financial grants, software donations, curriculum donations and employee volunteering. In terms of both scope and value, Unlimited Potential is among the most extensive community investment programs globally. In 2007, Microsoft donated \$68 million in cash and \$331 million in software to non-profits around the world in 2007. As of Nov 2008, Microsoft supported 40,000 community technology centers in cooperation with more than 1,000 community partners, and has reached 117 million people to date [Maanavilja, 2008].²

To summarize, our findings show strong anecdotal evidence of a subtle but growing interest in ICTD as an avenue for directing community giving efforts among MNEs. This concerted interest seems to have manifested itself primarily in the years after 2006 and is seen to be a growing trend. Out of the eight companies studied, seven showed a definite interest in making ICTD investments in 2008. Six of these seven directed these efforts into emerging markets, indicating an interest in supporting wider development goals. A listing of some of the main projects being run by these companies, per their CSR reports, is compiled in the following table:

² Microsoft's involvement in this space is further expanded by the existence of a research group "Technology in Emerging Markets" at the Microsoft Research Lab in Bangalore.

Table: A compilation of ICTD related CSR projects for the seven companies under review

Company	Position in Forbes list	Year of CSR report	ICTD project examples cited
Walmart	1	2009	Hope Worldwide (Kenya, India), Fundación Omar Dengo (Central America), Computer center for disabled (El Salvador), Com.Domínio (Brazil)
Exxonmobil	3	2008	Programa Mais (Brazil), school computer training programs (Kazakhstan), women's computer training (Indonesia), Supporting ICTD research (Gold sponsor for ICTD 2009 conference)
Citigroup	4	2008	Citi-CSTS Financial Information Technology Education (China) ³ , providing information technology capacity building support to NGOs (United States)
Chevron Energy	6	2008	Politeknik Aceh (Indonesia), Community learning centers across Angola , Venezuela, South Africa, Brazil and Nigeria
AT&T	7	2008	SmartCrop, Telemedicine, AccessAll (United States)
GE	8	2008	Developing Health Globally™ (includes providing telecom and internet connectivity and project sites in Africa, Latin America, and Asia)
Microsoft	9	2008	Microsoft's Community Technology Skills Program (Global) ³ , POETA(Latin America), NGO Connection

4. Analysis

"...High tech companies aren't the only ones who should be interested in closing the global digital divide; encouraging the spread of low-cost digital networks at the bottom of the pyramid is a priority for virtually all companies that want to enter and engage with these markets"

- Prahalad and Hammond, "Serving the World's Poor, Profitably"

This excerpt from Prahalad and Hammond's influential work on "Bottom of the Pyramid" markets [Prahalad and Hammond, 2002] offers a useful framework to analyze our findings here.

³ Please see associated press reports mentioned in the findings section

Despite Prahalad's work being more oriented towards profit-making enterprises within MNEs, it is an example of an extremely important strand of thinking on investing in technology and human development in "emerging markets" in academia and CSR alike through the early 2000s [Husted and Allen, 2006].

To understand the expanding interest in ICTD within the broader evolution of international social spending, we must first situate the phenomenon within the definition of CSR. According to the World Bank, Corporate Social Responsibility is "the commitment of business to contribute to sustainable economic development, working with employees, their families, the local community, and society at large to improve their quality of life, in ways that are both good for business and good for development" [Idowu et al., 2009]. Within the realm of this definition, we discuss the investment of businesses not directly selling technology products, since the trend of increasing technology-focus for such non-tech companies indicates a conviction that investing in such projects significantly meets the CSR objectives of these companies. What makes this trend especially interesting is that academic research over the past decade or so has been consistently skeptical about the impact of such technology projects in bringing about social and economic development. One could argue that a Microsoft or any other technology company continuing to invest in projects such as technology donations, computer training centers, and other similar projects is still within the definition of how CSR should serve those companies' broader business interests. However, understanding why other companies' CSR initiatives seem to see a spurt in ICTD projects needs a deeper examination of the historical causes for the recent mainstreaming of technology projects within development.

International development agencies like the UN have played a major role in promoting the larger goal of development, away from mere economic development to broader social goals. In 2000, the MDGs were adopted by 189 nations-and signed by 147 heads of state and governments during the UN Millennium Summit. These goals promote poverty reduction, education, maternal health, gender equality, and aim at combating child mortality, AIDS and other diseases. The MDGs set an ambitious target of halving the number of the world's poor by 2015.

When seen against this backdrop, the increasing promotion of CSR and ICTD by international development agencies can be seen from the frame of a larger change in the geopolitics of international development investment. Declining confidence in the role of the state as an agent of development and the potential for change emanating from the enormous resources of many of the leading private sector companies, led agencies like the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, CIDA, the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and the Dutch Ministry of Development Cooperation (MBZ) to underscore the importance of CSR in promoting development [Jenkins, 2005][Hess et al., 2002]. In addition, the promise of innovation, scalability and sustainability associated with ICT projects made them increasingly attractive tools to achieve the ambitious agenda set by the MDG goals. It has been argued that “without this (ICT) laser-like focus and vision, scalable, replicable and sustainable implementation of the MDGs in many instances may well be impossible”[Gilhooly, 2005]. This shift in beliefs has led development agencies to pursue the parallel policy of promoting CSR and ICT with renewed focus at the turn of the century.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, initiatives like the World Bank’s Business Partners for Development program and the UN’s Global compact program were targeted towards improving the dialog between public and private sectors to increase business’ role in increasing social good. In 2003, the UNDP in collaboration with the IBLF proposed a framework for action aimed at greater participation of business in realizing the MDGs through the Business and the Millennium Development Goals. Within Goal 8 (Develop a Global Partnership for Development) of the MDG, this framework proposed Target 18, which stated, "In cooperation with the private sector, make available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communication". It further suggested indicators in terms of telephone, mobile, personal computer and Internet users worldwide to track the progress in achieving this target. This later led to creation of the Task Force on “Science, Technology, and Innovation” within the United Nations Millennium Project, aimed to harness the power of science and technology into achieving the MDGs. In addition, the UN, in collaboration with the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) also organized “The World Summit on the Information Society” (WSIS), held in two phases in Geneva 2003 and Tunis 2005, to “set out a clear vision to harness the vast potential of information and

communication technologies (ICTs) to achieve the development aspirations of all the world's inhabitants" [ITU, 2008]. The Geneva Phase of WSIS attracted 11,000 participants from 175 countries and the Tunis Phase was attended by 19,000 participants from 174 countries, including high-ranking Government officials, representatives from international organizations, as well as the private sector and civil society [ITU, 2006].

However, in spite of the support accorded to it by the international development agencies, the role of business in promoting larger development goals like poverty alleviation has been a subject of much scrutiny and controversy [Hopkins, 2007]. Arguments have been raised that contend that businesses are fundamentally unsuited to address poverty because of some features inherent to them. First, it is difficult to make a "business case" for poverty reduction, which makes it an unlikely candidate to motivate CSR activity. It is argued that CSR prioritizes the "business case" which is particularly difficult to make in relation to poverty reduction. Second, the current CSR movement originated as a response to criticism of the environmental and social impacts of MNEs. This led to the impression that CSR would continue to be perceived as a largely defensive tactic that is designed to protect companies against potential damage to their reputations that may result from media exposure of corporate malpractice. Tackling global poverty seems to call for a much more positive commitment from companies, like discriminating in favor of the poor in employment, or providing goods to the poor at discounted prices etc., and it is contended that the current CSR movement is unlikely to match that. Finally, the central importance of stakeholders within CSR also limits its usefulness in approaching poverty. Almost by definition, the poor are those who do not have a stake and this limits the importance they will hold for companies who typically design CSR programs to support stakeholder interests, thus diluting the importance of CSR as a tool for bringing about international development [Jenkins, 2005].

In formulating their CSR policy, companies are largely seen to have concerned themselves with issues and projects that would directly benefit the company's stakeholders or promote the company's business objectives. This corporate movement involving charitable giving and reflecting the highly competitive environment of the 1990s has been termed "strategic philanthropy." It involves corporate giving that serves dual purposes: contributing needed funds

to charitable causes while simultaneously benefiting the firm's financial bottom line and enhancing business political legitimacy [Hemphill, 1999]. While pure philanthropy is concerned with assistance to education, arts and culture, health and social services, civic and community projects; business-sponsored philanthropy benefits the corporation through cause-related marketing activities as public relations, good will, and political access. Strategic philanthropy combines pure philanthropy and business sponsorship with giving programs that are directly or indirectly linked to business goals and objectives [Wulfson, 2001].

Seen in this light, it comes as no surprise that corporate support for most ICTD projects has traditionally been largely driven by technology companies like Microsoft, Intel, IBM, HP, Cisco etc firm's for whom ICT related projects fell under their overall strategy and core competency [Hess et al., 2002]. Thus the present interest in ICTD projects among non-tech firms breaks the mould in a number of ways. First, the fact that the large majority of these programs are not "give-aways," but involve training and working with community members to allow them to garner greater opportunities to increase their future income, points to the strong role that such projects can potentially play in bringing about development and poverty alleviation in these communities. This fits within a broader paradigm shift in development thinking coinciding with the increase of CSR, of "teaching the man how to fish", and therefore increasing spending on livelihood development spending than other forms of assistance [Lantos, 2001]. Second, the current trend could well be a sign of a larger movement to position the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as lead indicators of the company's actions in the CSR space. And this trend seems to be building. According to the "Global Reporters 2006 Survey of Corporate Sustainability Reporting", conducted by the UNEP, SustainAbility and Standard&Poor's, "over 20% of 2006's 50 Leaders already report — to some degree — with reference to the MDGs"[UNEP et al., 2006].

Besides the role of the international development agencies, another contributing factor leading up to the current trend in CSR investments is the increasing focus on "smart capitalist" philanthropy. According to the Economist, which reported this trend in individual donor funding in 2008, "smart capitalist" philanthropy involves using money for maximum impact by investing in potentially disruptive technologies (in the environmental field, for example) and in social

enterprises that can be scaled up as required [(The) Economist, 2008]. The Economist also predicted that the entrepreneurial model of tackling social and environmental problems is likely to stir up the CSR world and may over time produce transformative technologies and creative new business models. ICTD investments, with their promise of providing “efficient, scalable, affordable and pervasive delivery of goods, services and information flows between people, governments and firms”[Gilhooly, 2005], often appear to fit this cast, and would appear to be attractive avenues for businesses interested in taking on successful social ventures.

Another interesting finding of our study is that the overarching trend in all the ICTD projects being undertaken by the companies (with the exception of AT&T) is imparting computer literacy (as opposed to cell phones or other communications equipment). This may well be the result of both demand and supply mechanisms operating in these markets. On the demand side, the “aspirational” and the symbolic value of computers as a tool to bring access to jobs and respect in society in the rural space could well be fueling a greater demand for computer-skills training from local communities to companies that operate there [Pal et al., 2009][Pal, 2008]. On the supply side, judging from the information provided about the projects in the CSR reports, a large number of the computer-skills training projects seem to culminate in the trained workers being offered jobs by the company. Considering the widespread utility of a computer trained workforce for companies across sectors, computer-based ICTD projects could well be on their way to extending the idea of strategic philanthropy into the ICT space.

The role of ICTD in overcoming the “digital divide” is a much touted argument used to justify its role in international development. This “digital divide” is sometimes construed to mean merely a problem of access to technology. However, as has been indicated through subsequent experiences and research, the true nature of this divide encompasses not only physical access but also usability i.e. issues of education and skills, later described as an issue of *real* access [United Nations, 2004]. Critics of ICTD point to the “bread vs. broadband” debate that questions increasing investments of charitable funds on technology issues, when more basic needs like education and health remain unmet in developing countries [Fife et al., 2007]. Other questions are raised on the sustainability of such projects i.e. are they summarily abandoned once the corporation’s funding priorities change or the “technical specialists” who set up the projects

return home. While such concerns are justified, the authors tend to agree with Hosman and Fife [Hosman et al., 2008] who argue that from a long-term historical perspective, economic development has been a story of technological change – both invention and application, and by serving as an enabling tool, ICT can utilize technology to help meet even basic needs that have been heretofore been unmet.

Questions on long-term sustainability, however, remain largely unanswered. Hosman and Fife [Hosman et al., 2008] argue that if ICTD ventures are well thought out and designed with the input and needs of the local communities in mind, they have a higher probability of being sustainable in the long run. Whether these conditions actually play out on the ground for the companies initiating such programs is a question for further research. Indeed, there have been instances where ICT projects initiated by the private sector for public good have taken on a life of their own even after the pilot phase of the project is over. For e.g. Microsoft's "Digital Green" project, a research project that seeks to disseminate targeted agricultural information to small and marginal farmers in India through digital video is being designed to contribute towards the MDGs of sustainable agricultural productivity and the security of food and nutrition [Knies, 2008]. After a successful incubation phase, this project is being spun off as an independent non-profit with a \$2.86 million grant from the Gates foundation [Gates Foundation, 2009]. However, in spite of its potential to affect change, it is critical that the growing focus on ICTD be tempered with an understanding of the socio-economic reality of the population it claims to serve. Many of the small-enterprise clusters and the rural communities in developing regions face far more important day-to-day challenges than lack of technology access: these include inadequate road access, environmental degradation, shortage of capital, shortage of skilled workers, etc. As Microsoft itself acknowledges in a white paper, "technology does not generate development alone. In order to realize their potential, these technologies must be part of a mix of sound government policies, enhanced workforce skills, and infrastructure investments—recipe of interdependent ingredients which promotes initiative and innovation." [Microsoft, n.d.]

A discussion on the increasing focus on ICTD investments within CSR is particularly important within the lens of the social and economic changes that have been sparked off by the onset of the global recession in the period 2007-2009. In a survey of 828 corporate managers, both in

developed markets like the U.S. and Western Europe and emerging markets like Brazil and India, Booz & Company found that the CSR agenda was likely to emerge as a casualty of the economic crisis [Banerji et al., 2009]. Forty percent of respondents said their industries won't be able to accomplish as much as they had expected with respect to the company's internal CSR goals. The pullbacks were found to be especially pronounced among transportation and energy companies, with, respectively, 51 percent and 47 percent of respondents in those industries saying that their CSR agendas will be delayed. Given the fact that both the energy companies included in our study were found to be increasing focus on ICTD investments, this raises questions about diversion of CSR funds from other projects supporting international development to growing areas such as ICTD initiatives. Also given the severity of the economic crisis, it appears unlikely that companies, across sectors, would have increased CSR budgets in this period to support ICTD projects. Thus the possibility of CSR funds being diverted from other areas to support ICTD, across the board, appears not just plausible, but increasingly likely.

5. Statement of Future Work

The wider interest among firms, both tech and non-tech, to participate in ICTD projects and the mainstreaming of computer-based ICTD projects as a CSR activity, point to the coming of age of ICTD and the strong demand among local communities for the provision of these services. However, several important questions remain unanswered. Given the fact that long-term sustainability of ICT interventions have been repeatedly called to question, the importance of business partners understanding the long-term viability of the projects they are undertaking cannot be understated. In addition, in order for ICT to positively foster development goals, it must be employed where relevant, appropriate and effective [Gilhooly, 2005]. And this means not in isolation or sector by sector, but as part of a truly integrated and multi-stakeholder development approach [UN Millennium Project, 2005]. Would these conditions be considered as more and more firms embark on ICTD projects to meet their CSR objectives? Would increasing corporate support for ICTD emerge as a sustainable solution for the larger problem of poverty alleviation? What would such a trend portend for the future of international development funding as a whole?

Besides addressing these larger issues, the evidence we find in our study points to the need for a methodical investigation that involves the voices of stakeholders who shape the direction of CSR funding within major corporations. Further research on the distribution of CSR funds in these organizations is also called for and their implications for international development need to be investigated in greater detail. Scaling up the study to include an even broader range of organizations and sectors is another aspect of the study which would be of considerable interest.

6. Conclusion

Our goal in this paper is to start a much needed conversation within the ICTD community into the funding of technology and development by CSR initiatives. We trace this trend to the parallel promotion of CSR and ICTD as important tools for achieving development objectives by international development agencies, the increasing importance of the MDGs as a metric for CSR contributions, the growth of “smart capitalist” investments, and the increasing popularity of computer-based ICTD projects in both corporate circles and local communities. In conclusion, we argue that the CSR shift towards technology represents an overall positive discourse of viewing technology as a solution for developmental problems and highlight the importance of further research on this subject to understand its deeper ramifications.

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