

Preface

“WISDOM, like an inheritance, is a good thing and benefits its possessor ... Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: That wisdom preserves the life of its possessor ... Wisdom makes one wise person more powerful than ten rulers in a city ... Whatever wisdom may be, it is far off and most profound—who can discover it? So [we turn our] mind to understand, to investigate and search out wisdom and the scheme of things ... Adding one thing to discover the scheme of things. ... Who is like the wise person? Who knows the explanation of things? Wisdom brightens a person’s face and changes its hard appearance.” (Ecclesiastes 7:11– 8:1)

PRELUDE

For the fact that so many initiatives exist at the highest levels of global diplomacy that seek to employ the tools of the most powerful technological innovations in ensuring prosperity and security of the weakest communities of human civilizations, and for the fact that that there are fledgling outcomes in the impact communities, some may pose the question: ‘When will you be satisfied?’ The answer could be deduced from the visions, intelligence, and eloquence associated with similar circumstances prior. King Jr. for example would have drawn attention to the global ‘pledge to honour the sacred obligation of equity for all’ and reminded the audience that the communities of the developing world ‘live on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of vast oceans of material prosperity;’ in view of ‘the fierce urgency of now,’ he would have advocated for immediate, concrete, and sustainable measures because ‘this is no time to take the tranquilizing drug of gradualism’ dismissing the oft-repeated problems of ‘insufficient funds,’ as the bank of development was not bankrupt or for the fact that there are sufficient funds in the great vaults of global opportunity (King Jr., 1963).

In the light of existing initiatives, who can say with certainty the proportion of Africa’s 700 million people, in 54 countries and low *per capita* income and productivity, that would become users of information from global sources to generate enhanced knowledge solutions in their livelihoods attainment in the next decade or so?

Building a knowledge community necessitates that talents and ideas are identified; creativity is nourished, capitalized, and translated into tangible services and products for the primary impact zone; and lessons learned are shared among global partners in development. Current schemes emphasize access to information, but there should be a systematic manner in which individuals, institutions, and communities integrate knowledge generation, utilization, and dissemination and ensure that the lessons learned are fed back into the system in a perpetual growth mode. The existing initiatives appear to be discrete and lack scientific standards to measure the impact of programs and to project the stages of growth within the local impact areas. The idea of knowledge networks in development philosophy may have resulted in an increase in the concentration of power and resources within the traditional development agencies instead of seeding the option of knowledge utilization in the impact communities through effective support of locally grown networks. Networks that are not the result of the direct activities of the traditional development agency, or of those related to people and groups of influence, face a glass ceiling even if they were ingenious. But the transparency afforded by the digital tools of the information society implies that each group that is responsible for aspects of constructing digital bridges can be evaluated by future generations as to their thoughts and deeds when their imagination would have mitigated human tragedies and contributed to global prosperity and security. The digital imprints therefore become the oversight, which conscientious institutions and networks would revere and ensure that they reach the innermost parts of their imaginations in the conceptualization, capitalization, implementation, and supervision in orchestrating the digital bridges into modern knowledge-starved communities under their mandates. The need for ingenuity and sincerity in nurturing the transition of such communities into knowledge-based communities is a burden on both local and external actors.

The analytical tools that are employed in this book derive from mechanisms that enable access to information, the assessment and characterization of information, the splicing of information from external domains with the local knowledge in line with the strategic positions of the community, infrastructure, and capitalization of the ideas emanating to generate prototypes of enhanced knowledge outcomes for the local impact areas. Generating knowledge solutions is therefore considered as a factor of tools (technologies, resources, and a nourishing environment), themes (ideas and content), and teams (networks and partnerships). The tools aspect, though inadequate and often of poor standards, has been the principal focus of some groups, especially in the private sector; the content aspect and that of thematic networks lag behind or are not clearly defined. The International Telecommunication Union's 'Telecom Africa 2001' exhibition in Johannesburg was clear evidence of the abundance of technological solutions relevant to these com-

munities, but the value added to tools due to themes and teams are less advanced or robust, hence the networks resulting are hollow; even if doctors at an advanced research centre in an advanced community can be connected to patients in a rural area of a developing nation, how are the drug prescriptions going to be honoured? For this and other cases, the aspects of seeding the notion of seeking information and knowledge and their applications through innovative schemes in the local area may be hard to find in the impact regions. This is a result of both gradualism and genuine challenges such as the existing intellectual gaps and lack of access to resources.

Social development schemes are usually not subjected to the rigorous examinations of the performance of investment capital in the major financial exchanges, which effectively determine the expectations of dividends on investments; the businesses that meet or exceed the expectations are rewarded with increased availability of capital and the overall business worth. Yet the promises and expectations of global prosperity and security, and the activities of the groups so mandated, demand even greater scrutiny. Connectivity and knowledge flows for development in the communities of interest here are also expected to create wealth among the stakeholders, which now includes the impact communities; hence, such schemes could be evaluated with the same free-market notions and features that these communities are obliged to operationalize. Of course, this does not imply that the operators and capitalists of these schemes would demonstrate the greed that some private-sector actors display, for example the cases involving failed businesses such as Enron and WorldCom (others have paid fines without accepting wrong-doing), and so on. The ‘markets’ are not rigid; they respond to policy and even ‘stimulus packages’ during crises, such as economic recessions and the post-September 11 attacks against the United States. Therefore this socio-economic philosophy of connectivity and knowledge flows for global prosperity and security should be operationalized with human aspects of capital and investment.

Indeed, the human, technological, and financial resources that are at the disposition of the major institutions, which are active in the development community, are greater than what it took some ingenious investors in the private sector to generate dividends to the possessors of ideas and capitalists: KFC (Kentucky Fried Chicken) began at a petrol station and grew to the trans-national corporation that it is today. But as free-market features of the West begin to be expressed in African urban centres, petrol or gas stations in that region are looking cleaner, sometimes similar to cases in the West, where people dine though remain squalid, with consequences in health, for example the spread of typhoid and cholera. Therefore, what knowledge is flowing through the system, or is it due to gradualism—first petroleum, then human? The ideas behind the various schemes and their stages of growth have often been discussed with the public in order to broaden participa-

tion, but invariably, the ideas from outside the ‘institution’ receive little consideration, or when used have little return to the contributors in the form of capitalizing the translation of ideas into products for their benefit; the more endowed ‘stakeholders’ may therefore ‘consult’ the less-resourced groups but without remuneration to the latter? Therefore, it would be inhumane to expect market-rate returns on investments in such schemes when the actors and environments are not equitably equipped.

A major challenge in contemplating knowledge communities in the developing world is how to relearn, and this is an issue that is relevant to all the stakeholders that may be involved. Some of the architects of the fledgling connectivity and knowledge systems of the developing world conceptualize the transformation of the traditional international development agencies into a global development community through knowledge and investment partnerships; their challenge may be that cells within the institution would perceive this as a process to self-destruction by the institution writing itself out of existence, therefore people and groups hold fast onto the kingdoms they have created in order to protect their relevance. Thus teams as artificial matrices arise and are of little relevance to the impact communities; the counter notion of an organic nature of networks in which groups evolve by each realizing its role and contribution to the pool, and which may not have originated from the traditional actors, is a threat to some interests and positions. Currently, small, self-evolving, and grounded organizations that arise from local needs and potentials are not supported to a significant extent by the groups that are mandated to do so; instead the new networks must originate and be supervised from within the establishment. This position is not supported by the theories and practices of free-market that are sounded to the impact communities by the external bodies of capital and resources; free-market systems realise that small- and medium-size enterprises, often self-business, are the engines of economic growth.

Communities in the developing world are making some efforts toward their knowledge economies: the policy environments are improving for investments in information and telecommunications, market forces are intensifying, tools are being deployed, and children, adults, institutions, businesses, and communities are increasingly curious about the Information Age tools and functions; much of the success is due to the interventions of the emerging atmosphere of development partnerships. But more is required.

Issues remain in several aspects, notably generation of content that is pertinent to realization of opportunities in the primary impact communities, severe gaps in ingenuity, human resources, reliable infrastructure, investment capital, and prototypes of the ideal partnerships, services, and products that meet people’s needs.