Institution: University of Brighton
Unit of Assessment: D36 Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management
Title of case study: Community Engagement: ICTs and Empowerment ICS [2]

1. Summary of the impact

This impact case study focuses on the effects of digital technologies on rural communities, including networks of inter-tribal relationships in Kenya. It emanates from a social model of user needs that, having transcultural applications, enabled rural communities across Kenya to document their suppressed histories, identify their community needs and become empowered agents in a process of peace and reconciliation. Parallel research on digital activism in rural and urban communities has helped citizens to understand their democratic place in a wider society in order to enhance their political participation. International policy-makers and campaigners in voluntary associations and NGOs have adopted the model.

2. Underpinning research

User needs have been a major concern of researchers in the information sciences where, from the late 1990s, research in University of Brighton (UoB) emphasised this in the context of the expanding world of ICTs. Based in UoB's then Department of Library and Information Studies GILL's early work on the information society and foundations of human-centred systems design developed a model that placed users firmly at the centre an emergent digital world, and proposed the bringing together of researchers, practitioners, entrepreneurs, and social and cultural actors in the application of digital technologies in social and cultural development. His work emphasised individual creativity and personal empowerment alongside changes being brought to social and community values in a networked society. Over the next decade GILL's pioneering work [3.1] was built upon by DAY (with Schuler), developing approaches to community needs analysis and information technologies, and HENWOOD et al., exploring dimensions of the digital divide in relation to everyday life [3.2].

This progressive mapping of an emerging network society led to a concern with the dynamics of provision and use of the new technologies at community and individual levels, and with the potential of ICTs to transform the quality of everyday life. This, in turn, laid the foundations for building a revised public sphere that would stimulate the reinvigoration of civil society. DAY's work synthesized perspectives, in the international context, and called for the further development of models of participatory research into a collaborative model of democratic design — a form of research with, in, and for, communities [3.3]. His edited volume *Community practice in the network society: Local action/global interactions* (2004) confirmed the translational potential of the model, and was described as 'unique in the field' by Frank Webster (in a review in the *European Journal of Communication* 20 (2), 2005). The research at Brighton progressed to further studies into the role of ICTs in community development through digital-aided networking in rural settings.

The CNAA/ICT (Community Network Analysis & Information and Communication Technologies) project was one of 17 national case-studies in the ESRC's PACCIT (People at the Centre of Communication and Information Technologies) programme. The pilot study in Brighton/Hove found that community learning with, and through, network technologies — when situated within meaningful contexts that promote reflective dialogue — will result in the development of relationships of trust and friendship. This can be seen as contributing to processes that stimulate the growth of social capital [3.4]. If communities are to utilise effectively digital technologies then these must be appropriate to the needs of the community ecology. The impact evaluation report of the project concluded that: 'The number of successes afforded, particularly by the 17 later Phase, LINK and LINK-like projects represent a successful portfolio…with a range of impacts' (p.52). The UoB work has been mobilised further within the local community, and applied in Kenya by, for example, *Community Media 4 Kenya* (CM4K) with non-academic stakeholders and partners.

This accumulative research demonstrated that policy assumptions about digital technologies routinely misunderstand everyday needs, making it imperative to develop forms of sustainable

connectivity between researchers and providers in meeting the needs of users. Parallel participatory studies related to issues of local planning and design needs grew out of work by GANT and CHAPMAN [3.5] on sustainability and design, leading to GANT's generation of the planning and networking tool, *Community21* (Toolbox for Sustainable Communities), described in 'Community21: Digital toolbox for sustainable communities' (GANT, N. and GITTINS, T., (2010) *Gateways: International Journal of Community Research and Engagement* 3, pp. 155–170). The *Community21* project was generated in the context of new and emerging localism, deploying a range of digital interface, participation and content management methods to foster the use by communities of agile technologies [3.6]. Established in partnership with the former *Rural Community Council Network* (Sussex), AiRS (Action in Rural Sussex), it has engaged communities in self-reflection, participation, and collaborative design of their neighbourhoods, generating new roles for people as lay architects and planners of their own community futures and neighbourhoods, and including digital activism workshops for children and young people.

Key Researchers:

Karamjit Gill:	Principal Lecturer (Jan 1970–July 2003) Professor (Aug 2003–Dec 2003).
Peter Day:	Senior Media Lab Technician (Jan 1994–Mar 1994), Research Assistant (Apr 1994–Aug 1997), Lecturer (Sept 1997–May 2002), Senior Lecturer (June 2002–to date).
Nick Gant:	Senior Lecturer (Sept 2000–July 2006), Principal Lecturer (Aug 2006–November 2012), Assistant Head (Nov 2012–to date).
Flis Henwood:	Senior Research Fellow (Feb 2001–Jan 2002), Senior Lecturer (Feb 2002–Feb 2003), Principal Lecturer (Mar 2003–May 2003), Reader (May 2003–July 2006), Professor of Social Informatics (Aug 2006–to date), Head of School (Dec 2007–May 2008).

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3. References to the research

[3.1]   GILL, K. S. (1996) 'The Foundations of human-centred systems', pp.1-68 in Gill, K. S. (ed) *Human machine symbiosis: The Foundations of human-centred systems design*, London, Springer Verlag. [Quality validation: This peer-reviewed edited collection was supported by the EU FAST programme and RISS (NTT Data, Tokyo).]

[3.2]   HENWOOD, F., HART, A., SMITH, J. and WYATT, S. (2005) The digital divide, health information and everyday life, *New Media and Society* 7 (2): pp. 199–218. [Quality validation: peer-reviewed journal. Submitted to RAE2008: output profile 80% 2* and above.]

[3.3]   DAY, P. and SCHULER, D. (2004) 'Shaping the network society: opportunities and challenges' and 'prospects for a new public sphere', pp. 1–16 and 353–376 in Day, P. and Schuler, D. (eds) *Shaping the network society: the new role of civil society in cyberspace*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press. [Quality validation: the book comprises selected contributions from the 7th DIAC peer-reviewed symposium held in Seattle in 2000. Submitted to RAE2008: output profile 80% 2* and above].

[3.4]   DAY, P. and FARENDEN, C. (2007) Participatory Learning Workshops (PLWs): community learning environments situated in community contexts and content. (CNA project, University of Brighton), *Communities and Action Prato CIRN conference.* [Quality validation: a published peer-reviewed conference paper covering the methodological and theoretical core of the ESRC–funded study.]

[3.5]   GANT, N. and CHAPMAN, J. eds (2007) *Designers, visionaries and other stories: A collection of sustainable design essays*, London: Earthscan. Based on their exhibit at the London Design Festival 2006. [Quality validation: Gant and Chapman's book signalled new design directions for social, environmental and economic change. Submitted to RAE2008: output profile 80% 2* and above].

[3.6]   GANT, N. (2012) 'On Our Doorsteps' exhibition, at '100% Design Eco Design and Build, Earls Court, London, 19th–22nd September 2012. [Quality validation: REF2014].

Key research grants:

DAY, 'Community Network Analysis (CNA) & ICT: Bridging and Building Community Ties'. RES 328–25–0012, ESRC. (2003–2006). Total funding: £227,337. See 'CNA – Community Network Analysis and ICTs: Bridging and Building Community Ties: Full Research Report'. Part of ESRC-DTI-EPSRC People at the Centre of Communication and Information Technologies (PACCIT) LINK Research Programme.

GANT, Funding/projects for work on Community 21: Nominet, Gulbenkian Foundation.

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4. Details of the impact

An impact of this research has been to enable inter-tribal networks across Kenya to document their suppressed histories, identify their community needs, and become empowered agents in a process of peace and reconciliation. *Skills 4 Rural Kenya* is a charity focusing on removing barriers to ICT provision due to inadequate infrastructures and lack of skilled workforce by providing equipment donation, capacity building, skills training and research and development (source 5.1). It has been modelled on the community informatics research of DAY [3.2, 3.3] and his co-researchers. The work of this charity has been welcomed by the UN and Kenyan government, which have asked the organisation to expand on previous initiatives to help overcome the digital divide between urban and rural Kenya. ICT initiatives in Mtandao Viganjani are community-owned rural networks acting as diverse communal information resource mobilisation centres and community advocacy and awareness spaces, providing a converging point of community synergy. Empowerment of marginalised and victim communities in Kenya has been facilitated through the provision of audiovisual filming technology and enhanced access to ICT in the community. The charity has distributed over 500 computers to 17 villages across Kenya; this in addition to the two prototype initiatives in Kibugat and Antubochiu (target total=195 centres, provision of 20,000 computers, reaching potentially two million people across the age-range). Videos, created by young Kenyans, that reflected on post-election violence, demonstrated how rural tribes could employ appropriate technology to raise issues within their local communities. This created a platform from which local voices could be heard (5.4). Focus Youth International said of UoB's work in providing training that facilitated the use of ICT in peace-promotion in the run-up to the 2013 national elections: *'We have used the materials made by Day and his teams in our work on reconciliation and peace-building in relation to inter-tribal relations. It has been most valuable in helping us give a voice to victims and those previously disenfranchised from public debate'* (5.8, 5.3).

A further impact of the research has been to help citizens to understand their democratic place in a wider society and polity in order to affect their political participation. Rongo University College, Kenya, has adopted the UoB community informatics research model, following UoBs 'inspiring example' in training communities and marginal groups in communications technologies (5.6). Building on this research, Rongo has taken the decision to establish a modern multi-media centre based on outreach to needy communities and groups, including youth and communities in remote rural areas. The International Youth Council (Kenya Chapter) observes, quoting the direct words of one of its peaceworkers: 'ICT training, particularly film-making, was essential to equip the youths in their numbers, from ethnic diversity, and tell their story and take the message out from here of the need for peace, using technology … the Kibugat and ICT initiative opened a remote village in Kenya, united by ICT and Peace irrespective of their ethnic background, to the windows of the world' (5.7).

The research has generated new practices of participatory, community-led and neighbourhood planning, identifying community needs and using agile technologies with partner agencies, for practical community development, as in the introduction of community media centre models in Kenya, and the adoption of neighbourhood planning models in rural Sussex. The Chairperson of the International Youth Council (Kenya) sees adoption of the UoB model as 'the start of an initiative that will go a long way in exchanging media best practices between UoB and our youth while laying foundations for the media training center and online radio. This will be critical also in promoting citizen journalism and exposing real time stories by the people, for the people and used by the people'.

Action in Rural Sussex (AiRS), working with GANT, has adopted UoB research in its developmental policies. AiRs CEO writes 'Nick Gant's work and the partnership project concept and toolkit Community21 has challenged some of our presumptions about policy needs for small rural communities, and brought back the community itself into processes such as neighbourhood planning'. Following independent and positive evaluation of the *Community21* prototype, AiRS, in its *Business Plan, 2012–14*, states its development objective to 'roll out the community-led planning tool, Community21, in Sussex, the South East, and at least five other counties through a partnership with other rural community councils' (5.2). The CEO confirms that 'the principle of neighbourhood and community planning is now vital to our policy implementation processes' (5.5).

Partnerships between academic researchers and non-academics in participatory research have constituted a form of democratic research design, a radicalisation of the more passive action research model. These partnerships, thriving as forms of knowledge exchange, have been developed in localities, adopted by regional and national agencies, and applied in international settings.

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5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1 IT Skills 4 rural Kenya. Available at: http://www.itskills4ruralkenya.org/index.php. [Accessed: 1 November 2013]. This website provides details of two prototype projects and the effect of the computers for Kenya scheme.

5.2 AiRs Business Plan, available at: http://www.ruralsussex.org.uk/assets/assets/AirSBP20122014SummaryVersion.pdf. [Accessed: 2 November 2013]. This evidences the objective to roll-out the planning tool to the south-east and other counties.

5.3 *Voices of peace – young Kenyans reflecting on post-election violence.* Available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vtlwz6WEHMg [Accessed: 2 November 2013]. Voices of Peace Video in Kenya that shows the effect on young people in the area.

5.4 *Kibugat primary attend Kibugat ICT centre for their first lesson.* Available at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6uDVcz9IEJQ. [Accessed: 2 November 2013]. This video shows how people are being helped in rural Kenya to appropriate technology to raise issues within their local communities.

5.5 Testimonial available from the AiRS CEO, confirming that the principles have become vital to their policy implementation processes.

5.6 Testimonial available from the Dean, Faculty of Media/Communications, Rongo University College Kenya. This testimonial confirms that the university has adopted the community informatics model.

5.7 Testimonial available from the Chair of the International Youth Council Kenya Chapter, confirming that the UoB work with local young people united the local community and enabled them to spread their message.

5.8 Testimonial available from the marketing manager of Focus Youth Initiative confirming the use of media training and expertise in reconciliation and peace-building interventions.