Psychosocial wellbeing of individuals in a society in transition
Exploring the role of new technologies in Myanmar

RESEARCH MOTIVATION

Given the UNU-CS focus on Peace, and inspired by the positive psychosocial impacts reported in various studies (Breslau & Engel, 2015; Cifre et al., 2004; Danielsson & Öberg, 2010; Kleine, 2013; Poveda, 2016; Thomée, Eklöf, Gustafsson, Nilsson, & Hagberg, 2007), the motivation of this research is to find out whether ICTs can be used specifically to improve psychosocial wellbeing (PSWB) of individuals as an alternative way of supporting peace-building efforts. ICTs are already being used for peace-building, for instance to improve health services affected by conflict, to enable online education to distant or poorly served locations, to motivate public engagement, to monitor behaviour and crisis outbreak, and to support reconciliation activities (Brantmeier & Richardson, 2009; Kelly & Souter, 2013).

Authors argue that addressing and transforming trauma is imperative for peace-building (Clancy & Hamber, 2008; Kalayjian & Paloutzian, 2009; Zehr, 2008), and in this area, an initial literature review indicates there are only a few studies in which ICTs are directly used for peace-building by addressing psychosocial wellbeing (Best, Long, Etherton, & Smyth, 2011). This research aims to contribute to this growing literature, together with our research partners, and contribute to policy.

THE CONTEXT

This research project focuses in Myanmar, a country that is undergoing an explosion of ICTs, along with deep political, economic and social transformations. Myanmar's election on November 8th, 2015, brought great hope of stabilizing a country that has suffered internal ethnic, political and religious conflict for more than 65 years, since its independence from the United Kingdom. In terms of ICTs, in 2012, only 7% of the population had access to a mobile phone, growing to 76% in 2015 (ITU, 2015). This research project works with two partners in Myanmar, and aims to analyse

how ICTs are being perceived and used, and how these could possibly aid peace-building efforts. The first partner is the Myanmar Book Aid and Preservation Foundation (MBAPF), which started their work supporting libraries across their country. Currently, the MBAPF is offering Mobile Information Literacy (MIL) courses to a wide variety of audiences, from librarians to government officers. Their MIL course was developed by the MBAPF in collaboration with The Technology & Social Change Group (TASCHA) at the University of Washington Information School. How this course is being implemented and its impact upon their beneficiaries is the first case study of this research.

The second partner is UNDP Myanmar's iWomen App project. This app aims to inspire women to improve their self-confidence, vision and courage. It was developed using human-centred design, in partnership with the May Doe Kabar National Network of Rural Women. This is a peer support structure connecting over 2000 Self-Reliant Groups, and their township federations in 31 townships across Myanmar, with a membership of 22,000 women. How this app was developed, how it is being disseminated, how its being used and its impact on its users, is the second case study of this research.

Leveraging these two case studies allows this research to have different perspectives of how ICTs are being used in Myanmar, but also allows the comparison of two cases where only one was designed to impact the psychosocial wellbeing of the users (iWomen app).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research draws on the Capability Approach (Sen, 1999) and Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 1970) to understand development practice and social change. This perspective of development considers the need for social arrangements not only to focus on the social wellbeing of individuals, but also on their psychological wellbeing. Individuals' agency is necessary for the

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sustainability of development, as changing the root causes of their disadvantage is only possible with their active engagement. The term psychosocial has been widely used in humanitarian work and social psychology studies, and it is increasingly being used in development studies (Taylor, 2011). For this research, a critical psychosocial perspective is used, which is understood as a perspective that focuses both on the bodily (social) and emotional (psychological) wellbeing.

To limit the scope of this research, psychosocial wellbeing was operationalised using the portfolio of resources from the Choice Framework (Kleine, 2013). From the 11 resources defined in this portfolio, 5 were prioritised for this research after discussing with the research partners, and were operationalised as follows:

- Material Resources: Mobile and desktop ownership and usage, and reasons for non-usage.
- Financial Resources: Income level.
- Education Resources: Digital skills as defined by the Internet Skills Scale(van Deursen, Helsper, & Eynon, 2015; van Deursen, van Dijk, & Peters, 2012).
- Psychological Resources: Autonomy, personal growth, purpose in life, self-acceptance and positive relations with others, as defined by the Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-being (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Singer, 1996).
- Cultural Resources: Gender, Ethnicity and Religion.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

a) Previous research has shown that even if PSWB is not considered as a goal, individuals do feel an impact. What are the most common impacts on PSWB on projects, which did not aimed for this kind of impact?

b) What role do ICT have or could they have in supporting PSWB as defined for this research?

c) What methods of implementation need to be considered to effectively incorporate ICT into initiatives aimed at the improvement of PSWB?

d) How can ICT initiatives focusing on PSWB, supplement the effort of those working on the ground, who usually lack both human and financial resources to attend all the populations?

RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

This research uses Action Research and Participatory methodologies, aiming to level power relations among the local organisations in Myanmar and UNU-CS. Partners agreed on research objectives, project design, data collection and analysis, and all activities and results have to benefit both partners equally.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research occurs in three phases. The first phase explores current practices; the second identifies best practices and shortcomings in order to propose a new methodology based on Freire's critical pedagogy; and the third phase implements and analyses the effectiveness of the aforementioned methodology and the overall relationship of ICTs and psychosocial wellbeing.

The research applies a longitudinal methodology: data is collected, qualitatively and quantitatively, pre and post each intervention (in phases 1 and 3). Data from phase 1 will be used as a base line of the study and compared with data from phase 3, in order to explore the impact of the pedagogical intervention. In terms of quantitative methods, a survey was designed to both collect data for this research and serve as a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) tool for the digital literacy course. In terms of qualitative methods, focus groups, in-depth interviews, participant observation and immersion walks were conducted to get a better understanding of the challenges participants and teachers face daily. Data will be compared within each intervention and between interventions. The same methodology was used with both research partners, enabling also comparison among partners.

PROGRESS UPDATE

- Phase 1: Data collection completed. Five villages and two cities in four different regions in Myanmar were visited. Ninety pre and 25 post in-depth interviews, 90 pre and 90 post surveys, 9 pre and 5 post focus groups, and 7 participant observation field-notes were conducted.
- Phase 2: Initial findings from data collected were analyzed and a workshop was designed and proposed to local research partners. Five in-depth

interviews were conducted. After discussions and negotiations with the MBAPF, a participatory workshop was conducted in Yangon, where pedagogical suggestions were incorporated on the different modules of the MIL course.

- Phase 3: The MBAPF instructed a course applying the proposed changes. Participant observation was conducted to observe how suggestions were implemented. Four in-depth interviews were conducted post training.
- Next steps: Analysis of data and writing up.

PROPOSED OUTCOMES *(work in progress)*

Academic papers:

Initial data analysis shows great potential and various papers are being planned:

- Unintended participatory design: the iWomen App case study.
  Main idea: Critical reflection of the participatory process and the role of the developers on the success of the App.
- Participation in a non-participatory environment.
  Main idea: Critical reflection on how the historic circumstances of Myanmar have limited its citizens knowledge and experience of participatory processes. Accordingly, when asked to get involved, big enthusiasm, fear and misunderstandings occur.
- The affordances of a mobile app to inspire and motivate women.
  Main idea: iWomen app was designed to inspire women. How is it trying to achieve this? What does the evidence gathered says? What is being achieved?
- Can ICTs improve psychosocial wellbeing? The challenge of changing behaviours.
  Main idea: Two case studies are analysed in terms of psychosocial wellbeing. Achievements and limitations are studied.
- Psychosocial wellbeing for peace-building: Can ICTs help reconciliation in Myanmar? Initial reflections on the potential and current status.

Reports:

In order to inform local research partners and their different stakeholders of the work being done, reports will be produced, indicating findings related to the impact of their practices. Two reports will be produced. The first, "How efficient is the MIL?", aims to share with the MBAPF, the results of the evaluation performed in October, and share insights with their partner TASCHA, University of Washington, with whom they developed this course. As the survey was developed to be both a data collection tool for this research and an M&E tool for the MBAPF, this data will be analysed to evaluate the effectiveness of the MIL course. The second, "Inspiration and mobile Apps. The iWomen App case study", will be a report written with UNDP Myanmar to highlight the participatory and innovative process taken by UNDP Myanmar, lessons learned and potential developments for the future. This report aims to share findings of this research with other UNDP offices, UN agencies, and NGOs working in similar projects.

Policy briefs:

Working with two different ICT4D projects in Myanmar, and having had the opportunity to engage with other actors in the sector, a policy brief (white paper) will be prepared to share reflections: "Working with ICT for Development in Myanmar: Opportunities and challenges for the implementation of development projects".

Toolkit:

The participatory workshop conducted as part of phase 2 of this research was extremely useful for the MBAPF staff and they would like to have the content used on that day available to them to be used in their own trainings. After discussions, it was agreed that the content will be further developed in partnership with the MBAPF staff and transformed into a "toolkit" designed to help trainers to think how to train others and what activities they can use, why use different activities, and what outcomes could be expected. This toolkit could also become available to wider audiences through TASCHA's website, together with the open source MIL content, already widely available.

TEAM

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LABS
This project is part of the Gender Tech Lab.

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