



**Call for Papers**

**Special Issue on**

# **Information Systems in Developing Countries**

The developing countries account for the majority of the world's population, and are important for this reason alone. In addition, they contain many people who do not have access to resources for satisfying basic human needs such as clean water, adequate housing, and education; and some freedom to make choices in their lives, as articulated by the development theorist Amartya Sen. This presents a moral issue with which we should all be concerned. A further reason to take seriously the "majority world," from a business and policy perspective, is that the world is becoming increasingly interconnected in economic, social, and cultural terms. Whatever view one takes of trends toward globalization, global business, or global outsourcing, there is much agreement that these present important issues and problems, even if one lives in the richer countries.

There was at one time some debate as to whether information and communication technologies (ICTs) were relevant to the developing countries, but this debate has been resolved with a clear yes answer. The question has become not whether, but how ICTs can be beneficial. ICTs have high potential value across all sectors, in both public and private enterprises, and at multiple levels, from software businesses in urban areas, for example, to health delivery in rural villages. The application of ICTs has not always been successful to date, and indeed there are many examples of failure or partial failure, but the challenge remains to tackle these difficulties and to resolve them. A further challenge with respect to ICTs is to address issues of the "digital divide" between those people with access to technologies and the ability to use them effectively and those without.

It is perhaps surprising, therefore, given the importance of the topic area of IS in developing countries, that the literature to date is relatively sparse. Even if one takes a very broad view of what can be classed as a developing country,<sup>1</sup> few papers have been published in premier IS journals such

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<sup>1</sup>For this special issue, we wish to automatically exclude only papers that deal exclusively with North America, Western Europe, and the rich countries of Asia such as Japan, Korea, and Singapore. If authors submit papers about other countries with relatively high per capita income, such as Malaysia or Kuwait, the onus will be on the authors to show

as *MIS Quarterly* and *Information Systems Research*. Extending the journal scope more widely to all mainstream IS journals, the proportion of papers on IS in developing countries is very low. One exception to this lack of literature involves working group 9.4, Social Implications of Computers in Developing Countries, of the International Federation for Information Processing.<sup>2</sup> The working group was established in 1988 with an inaugural conference in India, and has published the proceedings of seven further conferences since then. It is interesting to note that the most recent 9.4 conference was held in Athens jointly with the long-established Working Group 8.2 (Interaction of Information Systems and the Organization) of IFIP, an indication of a coming together of IS researchers with interests in all of the countries of the world.

The purpose of this special issue is to raise the profile of this important area of research by publishing a set of exemplary papers concerned with IS in developing countries. This will act as a stimulus to increasing future work in the area, and will provide models of how such research should be designed, conducted, and written about. The longer-term aim, as with all good IS research, is to contribute to improved education and practice on how to use ICTs effectively in the developing countries. More generally, the special issue can be considered as a response to the question: “How can we make a better world with ICTs?”

Subject to the broad focus outlined above, we would not wish to exclude any specific topic or question in this call for papers, but below are some broad research questions and areas of interest which would fall within the remit of the special issue:

- What do we understand by the term *development* and how can ICTs contribute to it?
- How can ICTs be used effectively in developing country environments?
- What is an appropriate balance between global approaches and local adaptation?
- How can improved institutional networks be created to support ICTs in developing countries?
- How can ICTs be valuable in helping the poorest of the poor?
- What methods and approaches can be used to help bridge digital divides?
- How can governments utilize ICTs more effectively, both internally and externally, to create benefit for the common citizen?
- How can ICTs be used to broaden participation and promote increased equity, rather than to reinforce or widen existing inequalities?

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that their paper has a developmental emphasis.

<sup>2</sup>For more information on the International Federation for Information Processing and its working groups, go to <http://www.ifip.or.at/>.

- What human resources are needed for effective ICT creation and use, and how can these resources be strengthened?

We wish to encourage the submission of papers that fall into any methodological category, whether interpretive, positivist, or critical. We would welcome submissions that utilize any relevant methods, such as action research, participant observation, ethnography, case studies, or surveys. The existing literature on IS in developing countries shows that a range of theories are relevant to examination of specific topics. Some examples include actor-network theory; institutional theory; theories about globalization and power; and theories drawn from the development studies literature. The main criteria for acceptance of any paper are the usual ones of research rigor, appropriate theoretical content, and the novelty and relevance of the conclusions.

Manuscripts must be electronically submitted for the special issue no later than **30 April 2005**. Prospective authors are welcome to contact guest editors if they wish concerning the appropriateness of their submission to the special issue. Submitted papers will receive an initial screening from the guest editors before they are entered into the review process. Important screening criteria include fit with the theme of the special issue, significance of the research, and likelihood of moving forward to acceptance within two rounds of review. Papers that do not pass the initial screening will not be considered further for the special issue.

All manuscripts will be subject to the high standards of peer review at *MIS Quarterly*. A maximum of three reviews will be undertaken on submitted papers. The first round of reviews will be provided within three months of the initial submission deadline. The first revision will be due within three months of the receipt of the first review of the paper. The second round of reviews will be provided within two months of the receipt of the first revision of the paper. The second revision of the paper will be due within two months of the receipt of the second round of reviews. Papers not found satisfactory to the reviewers and editors will be rejected at this point.

Authors are expected to adhere to the schedule of submission and revision. Unless special circumstances arise, accepted papers will appear in a single issue of the *Quarterly*. Manuscripts must follow the *MISQ* guidelines for submission. Further details regarding the format of the submission can be found on the *MISQ* web page <http://www.misq.org>.

## Submission of Manuscript

Please indicate that the submission is for the **Special Issue on IS in Developing Countries** and send a Word document to

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