



The "researcher effect" - Day 3 at ICTD 2012

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The 3rd day of the ICTD 2012 conference has not lost any of the energy and psych that it began with! Today was full of interesting (and some controversial) presentations, which were all streamed live at www.ictd2012.org. We started in the morning with a discussion of the important contribution of the anthropologist's perspective when discussing ICT in development research. It was highlighted that anthropologists usually ask: "How can tech enable in the everyday lives of people?" NOT "Can we observe and measure socio-economic impact in that enable-ment?". Later in the morning, an interesting point was made on the "Researcher effect" as something critical to keep in mind, especially for foreign researchers. That is, sometimes "over-researched" populations (such as ones in Kibera, Kenya) may often just be saying what the respondent thinks the researcher wants to hear (this is especially true if the respondent is being paid). In order to try to ameliorate this "researchers' effect", it was suggested that researchers need to collect data for at least 2 – 4 months in the field in order to ensure data reliability. One researcher from the audience pointed out, if you collect data over more extended period of time, often you find the real data becomes clear towards the end of the data collection (and exposes the false data that was being stated by respondents initially). This point about the "researcher effect" emphasizes the need for local research organizations, like iHub Research, that are based in the country where the research is being done and are run by citizens of the country themselves! This of course is not to say that there may not still be the "researcher effect." But, being based in the country over a longer period of time, knowing the cultural context and understanding the languages, can often ameliorate some of the "effect." Researchers collecting data in foreign countries (whether it be a Kenyan researcher in the US or a US researcher in Kenya), should link with local research companies to tap into the local research scene and ensure that it is not just "fly in, fly out, research." After lunch, some of the interesting presentations included Muthoni Masinde's talk on the role of ICTs in integrating indigenous knowledge systems and scientific knowledge systems for farmers in Kenya. The day closed with a presentation on source effects for a voice-based agricultural information service in India. Tomorrow is the last day of the conference! Stay tuned for final notes and thoughts.