Telecentres in the Age of Mobiles

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'Communities need to to be the architects of their own sustainability rather than just rely on the words of benevolent guardians.'

Wiseman Nkuhlu

Keynote address to the CIRN 2005, 2nd annual conference of the Community Informatics Research Network, Cape Peninsula, University of Technology, Cape Town, 24-26 August 2005

Telecentre History

- What is a telecentre?
  - Public places that enable people to experience shared use of modern ICTs, and often the Internet

- Earliest accounts of telecentres…
  - earliest examples found in accounts of the first telecottages in the Swedish town of Faergelanda in 1987 (Fuchs, 1998)

- Patterns of development have been diverse
  - e- education, e- health, e-politics, e-commerce

Telecentres are not just about the Internet

- Telecentres provide access to a range of technologies – not just the Internet
  - Computers, printers scanners, cameras, fax machines
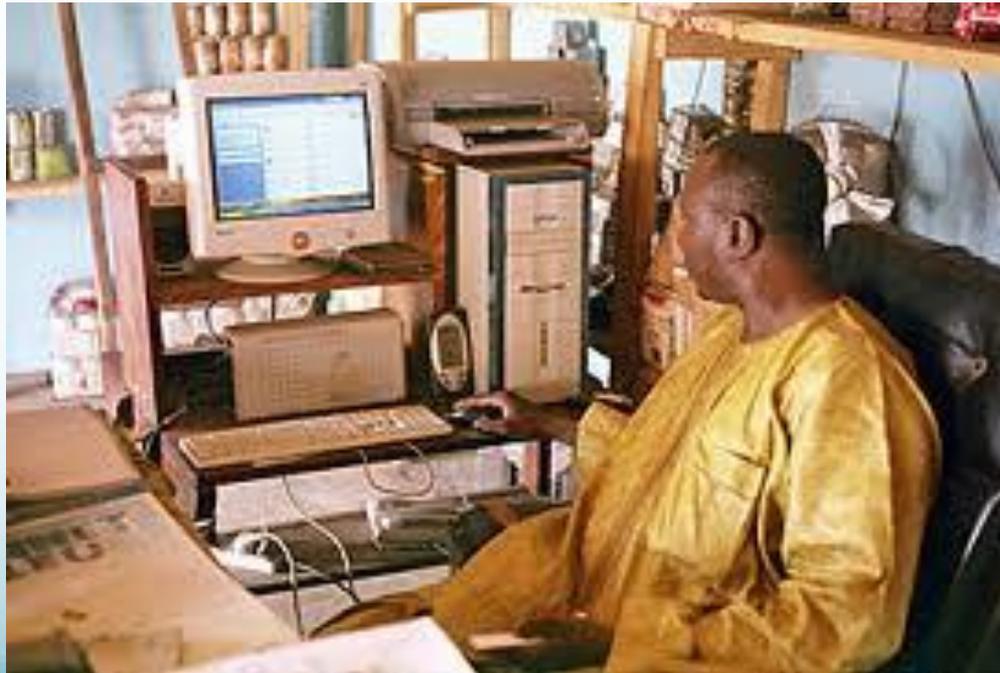
Telecentres are all about community

- Telecentres work very well in communities because telecentres are about shared access

- They provide a place where people can learn from each other

- The social connections that telecentre provide enable community members to work together to develop initiatives

Telecentres and sustainability

- Greater focus on economic outcomes has led to attention on sustainability
  - The theme of sustainability has **not** always been an issue

- In response, people have broadened the definition of sustainability to highlight social benefits
  - The term social capital is used to highlight improved social relationships and action

Telecentres in the Age of Mobiles

- Mobile technologies provide accessibility to the Internet

- Some ask…

Are telecentres still an appropriate way to provide access to ICTs and the Internet?

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YES!

Telecentres are more then access point to the Internet

- Telecentres provide access to a range of technologies
  - Computers, printers scanners, cameras, fax machines

- Telecentres are a place where people meet making it a social hub as much a technical hub.

Telecentres mediate access

- Telecentres are involved in a range of initiatives

- Some examples from my research into Community Technology Centres (CTCs) in NSW are following

Government

National		State	
Australian Taxation Office	20	Access NSW	17
Centrelink	18	Department of Fair Trading	2
Medicare	6	Health centres	2
Community engagement program (indigenous)	2	Other (housing, car pooling scheme, Countrylink agency)	3
Others (environmental, crime prevention, rehabilitation service)	3		
Local			
Tourism office	4		
Library	2		
Collect rates	1		
Community meetings	1		

Training services

Use of ICTs by seniors	21	Computer repair (unemployment program)	3
Use of ICTs by youth	12	Office admin (unemployment program)	3
Use of ICTs by small business	3	Hiring of facilities to employment services organisations	2
Use of ICTs by the unemployed	2	Hiring of facilities to private adult education providers	2
Use of ICTs by all ages	9	Learner Driver Scheme	1
Training in specialist software (e.g. Adobe photoshop)	5	Information Service (business, grants, local etc)	4

Hosting of groups

Seniors	5	Business	1
Youth (Games LAN party)	6	Women, mothers, playgroups	4
Youth (homework)	2	Other e.g. chess, music, car poolers, genealogy, not specified	13
Indigenous	4		

Multimedia production

Community Newsletters/Newspapers	7	Website hosting and ecommerce	9
Publishing and Printing	3	Art/photo exhibition	2
CD-ROM Tourism	1	Narrowcast radio	1

Business Support

Secretarial services	4	Post Office	1
Small business advice	2	Video Conference	zx

Other commercial activities

Wireless Broadband		Part lease of premises	1
Partnership with computer repair business		Post Office	1

Telecentres mediate access

- Mobile technologies allow direct access to the Internet

- We all know about the dangers that the Internet poses to vulnerable groups
  - Loss of: privacy, money, identity

- Telecentres can mediate access
  - supervise
  - filter
  - educate

Telecentres connect the local to the global

- The clashes between the local and the global

- Globalisation has both benefits and dangers

- Telecentres provide ways to manage this connection between the local and the global.

- Check out openentry.com

- Youtube clip on Open Entry

TELECENTRE WOMEN:
Digital Literacy Campaign

Empowerment through Technology

Network effects

- Telecentres seem to work better if they belong to a telecentre network or a group of telecentres

- A telecentre umbrella organisation can reduce the overheads of dealing with large customers such as government or small finance providers

- The umbrella organisation can negotiate collective contracts on behalf of a number of CTCs

Should government support telecentres?

- There is a strong evidence that telecentres are a low cost service delivery point for government and the private sector

- Governments generally are sceptical of telecentres – "Are they sustainable?" they will often ask

- Strategies to reduce negative perceptions

Should government support telecentres?

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Should government support telecentres?

- Strategies to reduce negative perceptions
  - Well managed operation (accounts, business plan)
  - commercial services
  - evidence of community support

Qs?