

EDITORIAL

Since the founding of AIDCOM in 1986 and this journal's first edition in 1989, its articles have reached into Africa and into countries around the globe, including Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Germany, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Israel, India, Nepal, Norway, Netherlands, Malaysia, Philippines, Pakistan Singapore, Taiwan, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Thailand, the USA. Its founding editor Khairul Bashar, who left this earth in 2015, would be happy to see this and future issues of the *Journal* reaching farther around the globe via the internet — and raising its original modest circulation from a few hundred to potentially thousands. We anticipate this broader exposure will attract not only new readers but also new contributors.

The *Journal* is aimed especially towards policy makers, project leaders, government officials, devcom specialists in international organisations, and towards project planners in health, agriculture, governance, and entrepreneurship. The *Journal* invites papers from people in these organisations and from higher education institutions with an interest in communication for development (C4D).

Communication for development has come a long way since AIDCOM's beginnings. Some of us, including colleagues on our *Journal* editorial board, can remember times in the 1980s when several UN people organised an annual "roundtable on development communication" (which included some outside academic people). This roundtable struggled with ways to get communication on the development agenda. Even earlier Erskine Childers, truly a pioneer of embryonic C4D while he lead the Development Support Communication Service in Bangkok, pushed UN organisations to include communication in their interventions. He said "If you want development to be rooted in the human beings who have to become the agents of it as well as the beneficiaries, who will alone decide on the kind of development they can sustain after the foreign aid has done away, then you have to communicate with them, you have got to enable them to communicate with each other and back to the planners in the capital city. You have got to communicate the techniques that they need in order that they will decide on their own development. It's as simple as that."

A major thrust toward Bashar's and Childers's goals came with the digital explosion at the turn of the century. While earlier there had been many communication projects launched by UNESCO, UNICEF, UNFPA and other UN organisations and various national development agencies such as those of Australia, Canada, USA and European nations, in 2000 the eight major industrial nations (the G-8) asserted that information and communication technologies could be one of the most potent forces in shaping the 21st century. The G-8 noted that the revolutionary impact of ICTs affects the way people live, learn and work, and the way government interacts with civil society. Then later a major impetus was the two-phase World Summit on the Information Society in Geneva (December 2003) and Tunis (November 2005) which prompted many international organisations to come forward with ideas, plans, and programmes for using ICTs to meet the Millennium Development Goals. Now the Sustainable Development Goals call for the world to significantly increase access to information and communications technology and strive to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2020.

But there are challenges. The World Development Report 2016 says that “we find ourselves in the midst of the greatest information and communications revolution in human history”. But the Report expresses concern about the millions of people who are not *experiencing* “digital dividends” from this technological revolution. In his recent book on *Reclaiming Information and Communication Technologies for Development* reviewed in this issue, Tim Unwin notes the importance of building partnerships in C4D interventions, and the book’s review herein suggests that universities might play an important partnership role. Recently there has been increased interest in the future of C4D courses in universities. Several articles in this issue of the *Journal* touch on this matter. Related to this, we note that in 2016 there were two important regional events in Asia, one organised by UNESCO in Bangkok and one by the Asia and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development (APCICT) in Incheon that invited action by universities to become more engaged in applying C4D courses beyond the classroom. The UNESCO event focused heavily on the importance of community learning centres (CLC) as instruments in providing lifelong learning opportunities — and on the potential benefits of having digital connectivity in those centres. Its theme was Exploring the New Paradigm of Community Learning Centres through Online Lifelong Learning. The conference’s final report included among its recommendations a reference to universities:

- Engage university students with ICT knowledge and skills for community development.
- Improve the accessibility of CLCs, community cafes, and community colleges to ICTs.
- Equip CLCs with information technology infrastructure.

APCICT’s 2016 Forum on ICT Human Capacity included the following to consider in advancing the Engaged Learning-ICT4D academic strategy in Asia:

- Encourage partnerships between universities and community learning centres, telecentres, and government and non-government agencies that can provide development-oriented partners for engaged learning ICTD university courses.
- Provide resources to Asia-Pacific universities to sustain and *institutionalise* an engaged learning ICTD culture in the academic curriculum that encompasses both teaching and research.

A discussion started in 2017 on the web-based Communication Initiative Network addresses the issue of university C4D courses. *Journal* readers can join the discussion by logging in to <http://www.comminet.com/content/lack-c4d-modules-university-courses>. Some Network participants have observed that C4D courses are disappearing. Others note that C4D courses appear in different guises: SBCC, extension communication, ICT4D, social marketing, computer science, etc. The *Journal* is inclusive. It invites and publishes papers that have a variety of communication linkages. For example, our *Journal* team will continue to look at conferences such as the 2018 International Social and Behavioral Change Summit in Bali for papers to share with our readers.

We note with regret that the *Journal*’s intent to publish a double issue in 2017 did not materialise. The international conference on which this was planned did not take place and that forced a change in this publication’s production. We apologize to our readers.