

What are the key lessons of ICT4D partnerships for poverty reduction?

Review protocol

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Contents

Contents	2
List of Abbreviations.....	3
1 Background.....	4
1.1 Relevance for DFID	4
1.2 Definition of Key Terms	4
1.3 The Role of Partnerships in Delivering ICT4D Initiatives	5
2 Review Objectives	7
3 Methods.....	7
3.1 Search Strategy.....	7
3.1.1 Search Sources	8
3.1.2 Search Terms	9
3.2 Inclusion criteria.....	10
3.3 Data Analysis.....	12
3.3.1 Content Analysis.....	12
3.3.2 Personal Reading and Quality Assessment	12
3.3.3 Synthesis	13
4 Timeline	13
5 Plans for Updating	14
6 Sources of Funding.....	14
7 Statement of Conflict of Interest	14
8 Review Team.....	14
9 References	17
Annex A: Resources to be searched.....	18
Annex B: Proposed search terms.....	20
Annex C: Suggested external review panel.....	21

List of Abbreviations

DFID	Department for International Development
EPPI	Evidence for Policy and Practice Information
HDI	Human Development Index
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ICT4D	ICT for Development
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IICD	International Institute of Communication and Development
infoDev	Information for Development Program
IT	Information Technology
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MSP	Multi-Stakeholder Partnership
PPP	Public-Private Partnership
R4D	Research for Development

1 Background

1.1 Relevance for DFID

This protocol has been prepared in response to the Department for International Development (DFID) program to develop and disseminate systematic reviews in international development that will attempt to map, quality grade and synthesise the evidence in international development in a transparent and open-ended process. 'There is increasing focus on evidence-informed decision making with the recognition that better informed decisions increase impact and value for money. An important step in strengthening the international development community's capacity for evidence-informed decision making is the production and dissemination of systematic reviews' (R4D, 2010).

Currently DFID funds research on Information and Communication Technologies for Development (ICT4D) with two major multilateral initiatives: infoDev and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). Both of these programmes recognise the importance of the private sector in building sustainable initiatives. Within the Research and Evidence Division at DFID in London there are several teams that have an interest in the application of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), these include research uptake, low carbon technologies, and climate change. This systematic review will address the twin challenges of evaluating the evidence about the role of partnerships in ICT4D and pioneering an appropriate, replicable, transparent methodology that will command the respect of social scientists and practitioners.

1.2 Definition of Key Terms

The field of ICT4D is a multidisciplinary one, with researchers coming from computer science and engineering departments as well as management, information systems, sociology, geography, and media departments. Arguably, within the ICT4D field, 'ICT' has been far more extensively discussed than the 'D', in other words the intended development outcomes. It has been suggested by several scholars, including Mansell (2002), Madon (2004) and Kleine (2009), that the contribution of ICTs to development should not be seen as limited to a narrow understanding of development as economic growth, but to consider well-being, increased freedom or realising rights as more appropriate development paradigms. While this specific protocol is not the place to rehearse debates over appropriate development paradigms, it is good practice in ICT4D research to state upfront what the authors understand by development.

This protocol follows DFID's remit in its understanding of development, focusing particularly on delivery of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to reduce extreme poverty, as well as ensuring that good governance can enable economic growth. The development goal is thus 'poverty reduction' and the focus is on low- to middle-income countries. The selection of countries points to an understanding of development that focuses on economic development (measured as per capita income). In the light of the 'poverty reduction' goal, we extend this to mean poverty reduction through social and economic development, usually related with a broader set of indicators, such as participation in education and improved life expectancy. This is broadly in line with the Human Development Index (HDI), the most commonly used development ranking beyond GDP per capita. While we recognise the complex and multi-dimensional nature of poverty, we are broadly focusing on mainstream social and economic indicators.

One of the reasons ICT4D has been put forward in the context of a variety of development agendas is the holistic and systemic nature of how new technologies affect people's lives. This goes beyond their role as economic actors and indeed affects the social structures they operate in beyond the economic dimension. Due to the extensive and systemic nature of ICTs in economically more advanced countries, hopes of being able to prove their impact on a particular indicator have proven challenging (Souter, 2004). For example, higher per capita income correlates with increased ICT usage, yet the nature or the direction of this causality is complex. As a result, this protocol will focus on what is doable and what is more immediately useful, rather than necessarily suggesting how ICTs deliver on particular development indicators. Partnerships are by far the most common method of delivery of ICT4D interventions and poverty reduction, and formed an integral part of the 8th Millennium Development Goal. Thus, we will be reviewing the literature on partnerships in ICT4D and their effectiveness in helping to deliver poverty reduction.

1.3 The Role of Partnerships in Delivering ICT4D Initiatives

The concept of partnership has been central to much work in the field of ICT4D, but it is one that has all too often been insufficiently understood. During the 1990s, the rhetoric of a Third Way, involving the private sector in delivering goods and services previously considered to be the responsibility of the state, gained increasing credence, particularly in Europe and North America. Consequently, the concept of social or collective goods, which are public goods that are usually delivered by governments from public funds but can be delivered by the private sector, also gained wider acceptance. This led to an expansion in the number of

Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), which were used increasingly to deliver an extensive range of services that had previously generally been considered to have been the remit of the state. Against this background, the rapid expansion of the Information Technology (IT) sector in the 1990s, and its significant impact on the set of processes collectively simplified into the notion of 'globalisation', led many to believe that ICTs could be used to provide profound development impacts that would enable poor people and states to 'bridge the digital divide'. Most governments, and indeed aid agencies, did not have the expertise to grapple with the complexities of such ICT initiatives, and therefore turned increasingly to partnerships as a way in which knowledge could be transferred across different partners and their mutual objectives could be delivered. From a private sector perspective, such engagement provided an excellent opportunity to expand their markets, and gain an increasingly influential position in global dialogues on development agendas (Martens, 2007; Unwin, 2009). The World Summit on the Information Society (2003 and 2005) was thus the first UN summit where the private sector had such a significant presence.

During the 2000s, the failure of many PPPs in the field of ICT4D to deliver their expected benefits was attributed in part to the fact that there was insufficient involvement of civil society, international agencies and other types of stakeholder in their composition. This gave rise to a shift in emphasis, both conceptually and practically, to the notion of Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships (MSPs), the structure of which sought to ensure that a wider range of partners was engaged in delivering ICT4D initiatives (Unwin, 2005). This reflected both the complexity of the types of ICT-based development interventions, and thus the need to involve people and organisations with a wide diversity of expertise, but also a more realistic appraisal that such partnerships should take into greater consideration the needs of user communities. Optimistically, they also sought to encourage a shift away from the top-down, supply-led, externally-driven emphasis of many previous PPPs in ICT4D, towards more demand-driven and locally initiated initiatives.

Given the enormous global emphasis on development partnerships in general, it is very important to understand the factors that can contribute to their success or failure as well as how success and failure are understood. As the above account has indicated, such partnerships have been particularly prominent in the field of ICT4D, and this therefore provides an ideal case study for examination. To date, a significant failing of many ICT4D projects has been the absence of rigorous monitoring and evaluation studies, and this therefore adds to the timeliness and importance of this systematic review.

2 Review Objectives

Against this background and the motivations outlined in the previous section, the main aim of this study is to review systematically and understand the evidence that is available on the effects of ICT4D partnerships on poverty reduction. The following research question is guiding the review towards this aim:

What are the key lessons of ICT4D partnerships for poverty reduction?

The review will focus on lessons from both successes and failures of such partnerships and in particular on the role of governments, private sector and civil society in delivering ICT4D partnerships. It will explore existing models of ICT4D partnerships, and will pay particular attention to those studies that have used rigorous approaches to understand case studies of partnership implementation across different regions of the world.

3 Methods

A crucial element of a systematic review is a systematic methodology that uses explicit and rigorous methods to aggregate and interpret the evidence on the topic area under review. Furthermore, specifying the methodology in advance is meant to reduce bias from the review. This review is particularly inspired by the methodologies used and developed at the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating (EPPI) Centre. This section discusses the methodology that will be used for this review, and addresses the following four main steps:

- A search strategy to find the available publications, such as journals, grey literature and unpublished studies
- Inclusion and exclusion criteria to select publications for review
- Quality assessment strategy of the publications under review that is relevant to the review question; and
- Methods for analysing the publications under review

3.1 Search Strategy

The first step in this review will be to develop a search strategy to deliver as many relevant publications as possible that address the research question. However, at the same time there is need for a balance between the sensitivity of the search (Kahn *et al.*, 2001) to identify as many publications as possible, but also to exclude irrelevant publications so as to keep the number of retrieved publications manageable. Although this search strategy is mostly defined before any literature is retrieved, if necessary, there will be room for

refinements of or amendments to the strategy. Particularly because of the interdisciplinary nature of ICT4D and the range of terminologies used in different disciplines, some flexibility of the search strategy will be required. This section introduces the different resources that will be considered and the terms that will be used in the search.

3.1.1 Search Sources

The aim of this review is to draw on a wide range of different materials, such as journal articles, books, grey literature and unpublished studies. It particularly seeks to draw on materials produced by three main types of author: academics, policy makers and practitioners. However, given the vastness of electronic resources available, a blended selection of search sources most relevant to the research question has been made, to ensure the diversity of the retrieved materials (for a complete and detailed list of the sources, see Annex A):

1. *Search engines*

A first starting point for the search is online search engines such as Google and Google scholar. As these search engines can produce numerous results, only the results from the first 10 pages of any search will be considered.

2. *Electronic databases and library catalogues*

A small selection of key library catalogues, mainly those that merge catalogues from different institutions, will be searched, particularly to find relevant books. Typical of these are the University of London on-line bibliographical catalogues and search engines. Furthermore electronic databases such as SCOPUS and the Web of Knowledge will be used.

3. *Relevant academic journals*

Based on the 'ICT4D Journal Impact Table' and the 'Development Studies Journal Ranking Table' proposed by Richard Heeks on his blog (<http://ict4dblog.wordpress.com/>), the 10 most relevant academic journals for both ICT4D as well as Development Studies have been identified. Furthermore, another 10 academic journals relevant to the management of information systems have been identified, based on the MIS Journal Rankings from the Association for Information Systems (see Annex A). The table of contents and abstracts of these 30 journals will be searched individually for relevant publications.

4. *Websites of relevant organisations*

The websites of a number of relevant organisations active in the field of ICT4D and partnerships, such as infoDev, IDRC, Eldis and the ICT4D Collective (see Annex A), will be searched for relevant materials.

5. *References from already retrieved publications*

References cited in materials already retrieved will be checked to identify further relevant publications that were not yet found through the other searches.

6. *Participatory input*

Further advice will be sought from experts active in the field of ICT4D to suggest key materials relevant to the research question. In particular, the following communities will be approached for their advice:

- the members of the ICT4D Collective
- the ICT4D group on Facebook, which currently has over 1,200 members

During the search process, a record will be kept of each of the searches and the number of results it has produced. Furthermore, each of the materials retrieved for the review will be tagged with the source of where and with which search terms it was found. This will enable a quantitative analysis of where most of reviewed materials were found and through which search terms.

It is estimated, from our specialist knowledge, that the combined processes of literature search and literature selection will generate some 50 key publications for detailed systematic review.¹ However, as part of the review, we will also generate a wider bibliography of relevant materials that will support this review, and be available for readers to gain further information should they wish.

3.1.2 Search Terms

The main focus of this review revolves around ICT4D and partnerships, and in order to narrow down the search strategy to these themes, only a small number of relevant search terms has been identified (for a complete and detailed list of the sources, see Annex B). These search terms will be used both on their own as well as combined with the use of the 'and' operator to further narrow down the search. The number of results for an individual search term will indicate whether there is a need to search further with this search term in

¹ This Figure largely reflects the amount of time available to undertake the review.

combination with another one or not (e.g. when a search term does not give any or very few results, combining it with another term will not result in any additional material that was not already found). This approach is already expected to result in a wide variety of relevant materials, but if this is not the case or if it becomes evident that important material is missed out, the current list of proposed search terms can be extended.

A particular challenge already encountered is the diversity of terms that are used to refer to the use of information and communication technologies in development practices. Thus, ICT4D, ICTD, TIC4D, ITD and various other permutations are used. The review will take note of these differing terms, and will seek to identify publications that do indeed explore partnerships that involve information and communication technologies regardless of the precise terms used to describe them.

3.2 Inclusion criteria

Once the literature has been identified, the potentially large number of resulting materials will be assessed for inclusion in the review against predetermined inclusion criteria and only a small proportion of this might eventually be included in the review. It is important that these criteria are not defined too narrowly, as this would increase the risk of missing out on potentially relevant materials, but at the same if the criteria are too broad this might result in information that is hard to compare and synthesise. This section discusses the inclusion criteria that were chosen for this review.

1. ICT4D partnerships

As the main focus of this review is ICT4D partnerships, only materials that address such partnerships will be considered for review. A balance will be sought in the type of involved stakeholders, such as private sector, civil society and international agencies, and the type of partnerships in the study. It should be emphasised here that this is *not* a review of all ICT4D initiatives, but is rather an analysis of the factors that contribute to the success or failure of partnership-based ICT4D programmes.

2. Language

This review will primarily search for and include materials written in English. However, based on the language competencies among the research team, highly relevant materials in Spanish, Portuguese, French, Dutch and German will potentially also be considered.

3. *Low- and middle-income countries*

Because of the explicit focus on poverty reduction, the review will only include studies that focus on low- and middle-income countries (as defined by the World Bank). The review will be sensitive to the geographical coverage of the retrieved materials that is informative about the geographical areas where evidence on ICT4D partnerships is lacking. At the same time, the selected materials will be chosen in such a way that they as much as possible have a widespread geographical coverage. Nevertheless, where valuable lessons can be learnt from studies of ICT4D partnerships in higher-income countries these will be explicitly referred to in our analysis.

4. *Publication date*

Given the rapidly changing nature of ICT4D, only studies that have been published since 1990 will be included and priority will be given those with the more recent publication dates.

5. *Type of research*

Studies based on qualitative, quantitative and mixed research will all be considered for review. Our focus is on identifying as diverse a series of publications as is consistent with our quality criteria, and to seek to draw conclusions about the types of evidence and arguments that varying approaches contribute to our understanding of ICT4D partnerships.

6. *Type of material*

The primary focus of the review will be on empirical studies, both research with largely quantitative data and qualitative data, including case studies and to a lesser degree, accounts of actual involvement in ICT4D partnerships.

7. *Type of authors*

Ceteris paribus, the selected materials will be chosen to represent diverse types of authors, so that academics, policy makers and practitioners are all represented in the final selection.

8. *Relevance and Quality*

In practice there is an inevitable trade-off between relevance and quality. The quality of the evidence will be paramount in our review but we will draw attention to evidence that is relevant where further research may be required.

A bibliography of these references will then be circulated to an international advisory panel to make recommendations about which references should be excluded or given low priority and which new references should possibly be included. This wide advisory panel of about 25 people will consist of a balanced representation of academics, practitioners and people from high income countries as well as low and middle income countries.

3.3 Data Analysis

Once the materials for review have been selected, their content will be analysed to answer the key research question: *What are the key lessons of ICT4D partnerships for poverty reduction?* This will be done in two stages:

- Formal content analysis by the searching for and coding of keywords in Nvivo or Atlas ti (quantitative).
- Personal reading and quality assessment by the members of the review team (qualitative).

3.3.1 Content Analysis

The selected materials that are available digitally will be loaded into Nvivo or Atlas ti, so that their content can be coded and searched for particular keywords, such as ‘success’, ‘failure’, ‘lesson’, ‘impact’, ‘civil society’ and ‘private sector’. The quantitative outcomes of these searches will be analysed and presented in a tabular overview.

3.3.2 Personal Reading and Quality Assessment

Each member of the team will do a personal reading of an equal share of the selected studies and provide a brief account of their analysis of each study. This analysis will include the following table to identify whether the success or failure in a study is explicitly or implicitly related to the partnership or the ICT intervention itself.

	Success partnership	Failure partnership	Success ICT intervention	Failure ICT intervention
Publication 1				
Publication 2				
Publication 3				

Table 1: Factors that contributed to success

Furthermore, the analysis will include a quality assessment in which each study will be scored on a scale from 1 to 5 on the following criteria:

- The aims and objectives were clearly reported
- There was an adequate description and justification for the methods
- The data was rigorously conducted
- The research was conducted ethically
- The data analysis was rigorous
- Demonstrated awareness of the wider literature and conceptual issues
- Number of times the piece was cited, although the research team is aware of the problematic nature of using this as a criterion

A matrix with the scores for each of these criteria per study will be used to compare the quality of the different studies.

3.3.3 Synthesis

Finally, the different materials will be synthesised and analysed to provide the best possible evidence to inform policy and practice.

4 Timeline

Task	Start date	End date
DFID and External Review of protocol	30 June 2010	21 July 2010
Study search	01 June 2010	30 July 2010
Assessment of study relevance	01 June 2010	30 July 2010
Extraction of data	30 June 2010	12 Sept 2010
Synthesis and/or statistical analysis	12 Sept 2010	10 Oct 2010
Preparation of draft report	01 Oct 2010	04 Nov 2010
DFID review of draft report	04 Nov 2010	18 Nov 2010
Dissemination of draft report	04 Nov 2010	18 Nov 2010
External review of draft report	04 Nov 2010	25 Nov 2010
Revision of draft report	18 Nov 2010	15 Dec 2010

Deliverable	Due date
Draft report	04 Nov 2010
Final report	15 Dec 2010
Policy brief and short summary	15 Dec 2010

5 Plans for Updating

If resources permit, the review will be updated after 12 months. Furthermore, a separate website or Wiki will be created for this project, where, apart from the review report, links to the reviewed literature will be kept up-to-date. This will be delivered by the UNESCO Chair in ICT4D and the ICT4D Collective based at Royal Holloway, University of London.

6 Sources of Funding

This systematic review is funded by DFID as part of their pilot for systematic reviews in international development, which aims to strengthen evidence-informed decision making.

7 Statement of Conflict of Interest

None of the members of the review team has any financial or other personal interest in the results of this review. Nevertheless, as members of the research team have published extensively in the field, a potential conflict of interest could arise when their publications happen to be selected as part of the review. In case this would indeed occur, we will ensure that none of the members of our team will be involved in the evaluation or review of their own publications. In particular, two of the publications that Google searches regularly highlight are written by a member of the review team as noted below:

- Unwin, T. (ed.) (2009) *ICT4D*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Unwin, T. (2005) *Partnerships in Development Practice: Evidence from Multi-Stakeholder ICT4D Partnership Practice in Africa*, Paris: UNESCO for the World Summit on the Information Society.

Furthermore, it should be noted that David Grimshaw is employed by Practical Action, but is also currently seconded to the funder of this review DFID for 60% of his time.

8 Review Team

Name	Role	Email
Dr Marije Geldof	Research Fellow	m.geldof@rhul.ac.uk
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Dr Dorothea Kleine	Principal Investigator	dorothea.kleine@rhul.ac.uk
Prof. Tim Unwin	Principal Investigator	tim.unwin@rhul.ac.uk

Marije Geldof has a multidisciplinary background of a PhD in Human Geography, specialising in Information and Communication Technologies for Development (ICT4D), combined with a MSc. in Artificial Intelligence. Her PhD explored the role of ICTs in the lives of low-literate youth in Ethiopia and Malawi. Furthermore, Marije has over 6 years experience with the project management and implementation of European Union funded projects. She has been a trainee at the European Commission's Directorate General Information Society and worked for the project management of an EU funded project with 26 partners called SIMDAT.

David J. Grimshaw is Head of International Programme: New Technologies at the Schumacher Centre for Technology and Development, Practical Action and Senior Research Fellow with the Department for International Development. Previously at Warwick Business School, University of Warwick, University of Leeds, and Cranfield School of Management. David has published many papers in academic journals, international conferences and the professional press. His main expertise is in the areas of geographical information systems, ICTs for development and the role of new technologies in development. He led a research project on knowledge sharing with the 'First Mile' and recently completed work on podcasting in Peru, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Zimbabwe.

Dorothea Kleine is Lecturer in Geography at Royal Holloway, University of London. After a PhD at the London School of Economics she was a Research Associate at Cambridge University before coming to Royal Holloway. Her research interests are in ICT4D, well-being and the capability approach; technology, Fair Trade and ethical consumption; e-business and e-procurement. She has worked in extensive action research partnerships for the EU Met@Logo project (2003-2006) for e-government in Latin America (11 different partners) and was Project Manager for the EPSRC Fairtracing project (2006-2009, 5 partners). She has been consultant/advisor to EuropeAid, the German Federal Development Agency (GTZ), InWent, as well as to private companies, community groups and NGOs. She teaches social science research methods and research ethics at postgraduate level. 2004-2007 she served as Managing Editor to the *Journal Information Technologies and International Development*.

Tim Unwin is UNESCO Chair in ICT4D and Professor of Geography at Royal Holloway, University of London. He has written extensively on ICT4D, particularly from the perspective of partnerships in an African context, and also has practical experience in delivering partnerships through his role as leader of the UK Prime Minister's Imfundo: Partnership for IT in Education (2001-2004), as Director and then Senior Advisor of the World Economic Forum's Partnerships for Education initiative with UNESCO (2007-2010), and also through

DeLPHE and EDULINK funded partnerships with African higher education institutions. He has particular interests in the ways in which ICTs can be used by people with disabilities and street children to enhance their lives.

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- Unwin, T. (2005) *Partnerships in Development Practice: Evidence from Multi-Stakeholder ICT4D Partnership Practice in Africa*, Paris: UNESCO for the World Summit on the Information Society.

Annex A: Resources to be searched

Google and Google scholar
Electronic databases and library catalogues (particularly for books): <ul style="list-style-type: none">• British library catalogue (http://catalogue.bl.uk)• University of London Research library Services (http://www.ulrls.lon.ac.uk)• Copac National, Academic, and Specialist Library Catalogue (http://copac.ac.uk/)• ISI Web of Knowledge (http://apps.isiknowledge.com)• SCOPUS (http://info.scopus.com/)
ICT4D specific electronic databases: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• ICT For Sustainable Development - A Grey Literature Archive for Development Researchers and Practitioners (http://depts.washington.edu/ict4d/)• World Information Access database (http://www.wiaproject.org/ict4d/)
Website of relevant organisations: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Department for International Development (http://www.dfid.gov.uk/, http://www.research4development.info)• The International Development Research Centre (IDRC) (http://www.idrc.ca)• International Institute of Communication and Development (IICD) (http://www.iicd.org/)• ICT4D Collective (www.ict4d.org.uk)• Eldis (http://www.eldis.org/)• Infodev (http://www.infodev.org)• UNESCO (http://www.unesco.org)
Relevant ICT4D journals, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• ITID• Electronic Journal of Information Systems in Developing Countries• Information Technology for Development• African Journal of Information and Communication• International Journal of Education and Development Using Information and Communication Technology• Asian Journal of Communication• Journal of Health Informatics in Developing Countries• Information Development• International Journal on Advances in ICT for Emerging Regions• African Journal of Information & Communication Technology Source: ICT4D Journal Impact Table from Richard Heeks, http://ict4dblog.wordpress.com/)

Relevant Development Journal, such as:

- World Development
- Journal of Development Studies
- Oxford Development Studies
- Development Policy Review
- Studies in Comparative International Development
- Sustainable Development
- European Journal of Development Research
- Development and Change
- Information Technology for Development
- Information Technologies and International Development

Source: Development Studies Journal Ranking Table from Richard Heeks,
<http://ict4dblog.wordpress.com/>)

Relevant Management of Information Systems Journals

- MIS Quarterly
- Information Systems Research
- Communications of the ACM
- Management Science
- Journal of Management Information Systems
- Decision Sciences
- Harvard Business Review
- Sloan Management Review
- IEEE Transactions
- European Journal of Information Systems
- Journal of Strategic Information Systems

Source: MIS Journal Rankings, Association for Information Systems,
<http://ais.affiniscap.com/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=432>
(Note: journals dealing with Artificial Intelligence have been omitted.)

References from already collected literature

Participatory input from people active in the field proposing relevant references, such as

- the members of the ICT4D Collective
- the ICT4D group on Facebook, which currently has over 12.000 members

Annex B: Proposed search terms

- ICT4D, ICT or ICTD
- Partnership
- Private sector
- Civil Society
- Government
- Stakeholder
- Collaboration
- Success
- Failure
- Poverty reduction
- Key lessons

Annex C: Suggested external review panel

We aim to have a review panel of four people to review the protocol and draft review. This will comprise individuals from the following list.

Name	Organisation	Expertise
Sarah Earl	The International Development Research Centre (IDRC)	Evaluation
Nick Hughes	Vodafone	Private sector, ICT4D
Professor Robin Mansell	London School of Economics	ICT4D
Ros Tennyson	International Business Leaders Forum (IBLF)	Partnerships
Mike Trucano	The World Bank	ICT4D, partnerships
Professor Judy Sebba	School of Education, University of Sussex	Systematic reviews and use of ICT in education