

# Inclusive ICT

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ICT has always been a powerful change agent. Many have turned to ICT to help resolve the growing concern over social exclusion, and the care of old people and those with disability. It is true that ICT can provide a number of new opportunities for improvement in people's daily lives including work, education, travel, entertainment, healthcare, and independent living. However there is a risk that, despite its many benefits, ICT could set people apart, create new barriers, and increase social exclusion. Specific attention needs to be given to those groups in society which are at high risk of being excluded, due to a wide variety of reasons such as age, gender, disability, literacy and culture. How ICT strategy is developed and implemented can mean for disadvantaged people the difference between dependency and autonomous living.

New technology often focuses on maintaining and monitoring the health of older people but technologists must take a broader view. The common misunderstanding that looking after the elderly simply means addressing health and welfare issues needs to be rectified. Older people are more physically and mentally active than previous generations and this should be a key consideration in guiding the development of new services and products for them. Indeed, technology can provide a vital link for older people to family and friends through email, instant messaging or video conferencing, but there are many other potential applications. These could include: virtual travel and tourism (virtual tours of museums and art galleries for example); support to enable older people to continue working, should they wish to; and enhanced media, such as books, films and music, which take into account the specific needs of older people, such as poor hearing or eyesight.

Therefore, ICT must be used to not only address health and welfare issues but also for social interaction, life-long learning and work. This is because in the information society we have an ageing population which is increasingly more physically and mentally active and has a younger outlook than in generations past. If ICT is to play a part in supporting the ageing population it must be financially accessible, usable, useful and transparent. Old design and business paradigms must be challenged. That is starting to happen!

Enter the Flip Video - a pocket video camera which is easy to use and cheap. Gone are complex multiple controls, gone are bulky external chargers, gone are multiple wires to connect to computers and televisions, gone are memory card slots and gone are cd-roms

of software to manipulate videos on a computer. In their place are a few simple buttons, two AA batteries, a flip-out USB plug, embedded memory to hold sixty minutes of video, and software in the camera which automatically loads on any computer when the camera is plugged into a USB port. So why is this so special? It is because it could fundamentally change the way we view and interact with people and places around us. It could revolutionise, for example, education, entertainment, reporting and communication. It could enable everyone, including older people, to interact using video, rather than text or voice-only, which is intuitively more natural. Design-for-all is evident in this little camera. Jonathan Kaplan, founder of the Flip Video company, Pure Digital Technologies explained, "We want to have software that helps users feel smarter." It is a great example of technology which puts people first. It shows the direction in which we should be moving so that the development and use ICT is empowering rather debilitating and inclusive rather than exclusive.

At the other end of life what is happening for children? There have been many government initiatives around the world to ensure our children can have the opportunity to access and benefit from ICT. Many of these initiatives have floundered primarily because they focused on ICT provision through institutions such as schools and libraries. But this has changed with the advent of low entry computers. Two examples are the Classmate PC, formerly known as Eduwise, which is Intel's low-cost personal computers for children in the developing world and the One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) trade association's Children's Machine (XO) which is for a similar market. Both will operate Linux and so use the free and open-source software environment thus making these computers so much more affordable. These computers provide great education in a rugged industrial design intended for children but the design is not childish. Such initiatives offer a glimpse of accessible fit-for-purpose ICT for all children of the world.

Technologists have a great opportunity to really make a positive difference to people's lives. With some thoughtful design under a strategy of inclusion ICT could become the instrument of equality of opportunity and sustainable quality of life. Think of the job satisfaction from realising that vision.

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