Arlene Bailey, "Issues Affecting the Social Sustainability of Telecentres in Developing Contexts: A Field Study of Sixteen Telecentres in Jamaica," *The Electronic Journal of Information Systems in Developing Countries* 36 (2009), pp 1-18.

Summary | Emily Puckett | SI 657 | March 8, 2010

This piece, well balanced with our readings for the week, highlights the importance of content analysis research on the effects and use of ICTs in developing contexts. Bailey argues that it is necessary to conduct this research in order to determine and support **telecentre sustainability** (p. 1) and, generally, her research concludes that telecetres must continually evolve "if they are to provide appropriate support for social and economic development and to meet the changing needs of citizens" (p. 1). This statement remains an important benchmark perspective that is not necessarily echoed in concurrent readings, including Heeks and Khalil, in the respect that these papers are written from the perspective of creating and developing technologies rather than solving social, political and economic issues. Bailey interviewed a range of stakeholders for her research, from users to multilateral agencies and the private sector as well as the infomediaries that staff the telecentres. Several themes of activities emerged from Bailey's research including telecentres use for: **education** ("involving computer and digital literacy programs," p. 5), **skills training** ("for self employment, … to find out about training opportunities and establish partners with national training organizations," p. 7), **social networking** (to form and strengthen bonds and, in some cases "participating in exchange visits" and sharing resources, p. 9), and **addressing socio-economic issues**. Relationships among the themes emerged, mostly based on the use of telecentres to promote social networks that lead to violence and crime prevention and entrepreneurial activities (p. 11).

Based on these findings, Bailey emphasizes the need to focus on "a) the social context of telecentres use; b) participatory methods for needs assessment and knowledge sharing among stakeholders, especially those stakeholders who are involved in day-to-day telecentres activities, and c) the continued development of core capabilities of the telecentres" (p. 12) in order to sustain telecentre use and development in these contexts. She also emphasizes a "formal process for *continual feedback* from telecentre users" and states that "additional consideration should be given to the use of *participatory methods in the development of community technologies*" (emphasis added p. 12). In this respect, Bailey's approach incorporates a per-poor strategy for the development of telecentres (Heeks, 30). Bailey continues to emphasize a contextual-approach to developing telecentres that are relevant to the interests and needs of the community in which they are situated, an approach that is glossed over in Heeks in his assumption that Development Studies is a culturally cognizant theory from which to begin supporting ICT4D 2.0 efforts and in Gurumurthy's piece on gender equality, that ignores the "reverse" gender bias that can occur in telecentres as discussed briefly by Bailey on page 7. Due to the evolving and complex community needs-derived nature of telecentres, Bailey argues that "telecentre management and staff need to have a set of core competencies in order to effectively manage telecentre operations to enable the attainment of objectives" and that "the costs associated with training telecentre staff in areas related to education and business activities are generally under budgeted" (p. 13). These core competencies, she states, need to evolve as the social context and relevance of the telecentres in use evolve (p. 13). She ends by suggesting that "the **dynamic capabilities theory** and **resource based-view** present a useful perspective with which to examine the roles, resources and activities of telecentres" (p. 15). While not situated in the same social context as the Bailey article, Rashid and Elder also call for more research on the actual impact of ICT4D activities as they are used by their intended audience and warn against creating a "'white elephant,' like so many other technological applications before it" (p. 14).