

Liberation Technology

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Hello I'm Larry Diamond. I'm Director of the Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law here at Stanford University. Many people ask, we have a programme here at Stanford on liberation technology, and they ask "liberation technology, what is that?"

Well, this has to do with information and communication technology that is in some way liberating of the human spirit and the human potential. And it has two big dimensions, one is political and the other is economic. Many forms of information and communication technology are empowering people to become more effective agents of their own economic improvement and well-being, and their own health and education as well. There are a lot of exciting tools and social media networks that are being developed that enable farmers to understand and know better what kinds of inputs they need for effectively producing and protecting their crops; enable them to better anticipate weather conditions and enable them to know better the market conditions so they can sometimes bypass exploitative middlemen in the marketing process and market their crops more directly and get a fairer price for them.

The same goes in the fishing industry, the handicraft industry and other small-scale industries. Mobile technologies being used to enable people who live far away from a clinic to get access to doctors and nurses and perhaps simple diagnoses of common illnesses or advice on different ailments from professionals. And there are a wide variety of means as well that these kinds of information and communication technologies and platforms – particularly mobile platforms – are being used for disaster relief, to coordinate disaster relief, to track and crowd-source where the most serious problems are in natural disasters.

Or in human disasters including political crises and violent conflicts. they enable us to better monitor the functioning of government and elections by deploying large numbers of human rights monitors or poll watchers who have mobile phones that

can be used to take photographs, send back text messages with the results of an election from a local station, that can then be aggregated across the country.

Or to report on police abuse or other human rights problems in an area, and all of these are ways in which the mobile phone – often in interaction with internet technology – can be used to enable people to take development more effectively into their own hands.

To take their health, their education, their human improvement, their safety, and the organization of better, more connected communities into their own hands to foster broad-based development with transparency, good-governance and more distributed resourcefulness and political and economic capacity. It is often said that knowledge is power, and there has probably been no invention in human history that has more rapidly transformed the capacity of people to acquire knowledge rapidly, and particularly of relatively poor people to get access to vast troves of knowledge, and even real-time information that can empower them, than the mobile phone.

And so, we're very excited about the ways in which these technologies can serve the cause of just, sustainable, human development.

In India, we see the power of civil society to mobilize against corruption, using very innovatively social media to crowd-source reporting against corruption, reporting of corruption and use it to pressure and even embarrass public officials to do better. And here I would know and strongly commend and celebrate the work of the Indian civil society organization Janaagraha, which developed a very innovative website called "I paid a bribe" where citizens can go when a bribe is demanded of them by a public official in India and report that a bribe was demanded, even report if they felt compelled to pay the bribe. And then when you get large numbers of these reports, the information technology of crowdsourcing can know where the hot-spots, where the high incidences of bribe-demanding are coming from in a government bureaucracy and put intense pressure on them to get serious about reining in this corruption and giving citizens the services they are entitled to without demanding a bribe in advance for performance of the service.

And of course, in the world we live in, this kind of technology diffuses very rapidly, so now the "I paid a bribe" platform has diffused to a number of other developing countries in the post-communist world, in countries like Kenya in Africa. And I think it shows a great promise of an energized, resourceful, technologically learning civil society to work with the public sector and not just always in opposition to it, to improve the functioning of government and thereby deliver more effective, just and sustained development. So we are seeing a number of very inspiring and

illuminating efforts by civil society actors to improve their own democracies, and there's much that we can learn from. I spoke about the work of the Indian civil society organization Janaagraha to crowd-source against corruption.

More generally, social media tools including the mass-messaging platform "Frontline SMS" have made a big difference in facilitating and enlarging election monitoring, where civil society networks come together in a very systematic way to monitor elections and produce what's called a parallel vote-tabulation, where they place enough monitors around the country, in at least a random sample of the polling stations and watch the voting and report the results to a central counting station that's independent. And if this is done systematically and technologically reasonably well, it can generate an autonomous, independent check on the vote count, its own separate parallel vote-tabulation that can be a big deterrence against fraud and a tool to reverse electoral fraud if it happens. I'm a very strong believer in the value and necessity of free, fair, competitive democratic elections.