

## News

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# 15 years of IFIP WG9.4

No doubt the importance of the topic of IT and Development has increased in many areas of policy-making, academic study and professional activity. One has only to consider the increasing popularity of this theme in international events such as the forthcoming World Information Technology Forum launched by IFIP, UNESCO and ITU, and in the policy briefs of all major international agencies. This high-level discourse no doubt influences practice and signals issues of concern for researchers. Given this rising interest in the theme of IT and Development, the role of IFIP WG9.4 is perhaps more important than ever in steering the agenda of research in this area towards the societal impact of IT in low-income and transitional economies. As we celebrate the 15th anniversary of IFIP WG9.4, it is perhaps appropriate to take stock of its past achievements and turn our attention to current concerns of the Group.

The working group was set up in November 1988 as a forum devoted to the study of the social implications of computers in developing countries. In the early days, the conferences and events organised by the working group aimed to collect, exchange and disseminate experiences of IT usage in developing countries through case studies. Reporting and discussions around case material was useful in raising awareness among professionals, policy-makers and academics on critical issues related to the deployment of IT in developing countries. Over the years, the working group has consciously aimed to develop more sophistication in terms of conceptual analysis of these issues and their broader implications to questions of development. One way in which this has been encouraged is through explicit calls for papers at conferences which aim to strengthen the theoretical and methodological foundations of this study area through immersion in a wider range of social science literature spanning development studies, globalisation and organisational change literature. In recent years, IFIP WG9.4 has earned an identity as a forum for high quality and current research in IT & Development. This has resulted in an increasing interest in professionals and researchers from industrialised countries to focus on issues of special relevance to developing countries through participation in WG9.4 events and through joint activities. A recent manifestation of this was the joint WG8.2/9.4 conference in Athens in June of this year.

Indeed, the working group should be pleased with its achievements to date. At the same time, there is more work to be done. Dr. Abiodun Bada, the incoming Chairperson of IFIP WG9.4, reiterated the need to reach out to a wider audience of researchers and practitioners working on and interested in issues related to IT & Development at the recent business meeting of IFIP WG9.4 held in Athens in June. For several years, representation from Latin America and China at IFIP WG9.4 conferences has been poor and we desperately need people to come forward and act as regional Vice-chairpersons in these areas, as well as in the African continent. With growing interest in the activities of the Group from researchers and professionals in industrialised countries, we also need representation in North America and Europe.

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