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BOOK REVIEW

DIGITAL ECONOMIES AT GLOBAL MARGINS, EDITED BY MARK GRAHAM, THE MIT PRESS, CAMBRIDGE, 2019. ISBN: 978-0-262-53589-2 (HARD COPY); ISBN: 978-1-55250-600-4 (E-BOOK), 378PP

Reviewer
Mangasini Katundu
Moshi Co-operative University (MoCU)
mangasini.katundu@mocu.ac.tz; atanasi.mangasini@gmail.com

ABSTRACT
Developed economies in the Global North have been digitally connected long time ago, while the poorest and economically marginalized ones in the Global South have not joined the digital networks until recently. Consequently, contribution of the new technologies to poverty reduction especially within poor countries in the Global South remains relatively unknown. This book is a nice piece of work, it has contributed new knowledge on understanding of the digital technologies and digitized modes of communication both in the Global North and in the Global South. The main weakness of this book is its failure to discuss negative consequences of the new digital technology. Issues ranging from spread of terrorist activities and cyber-crime incidences to xenophobic violence in South Africa and racist attacks in football. This book review is very important as it helps readers decide whether or not to read the book. This review identifies the main theme of the book and highlights on author's style, approach and then offers an overall evaluation.

Key Words: *Digital economies, digital technologies, digitized modes of communication, poverty, global south*
Paper type: *Book Review*
Type of Review: *Peer Review*

1. CONTEXT AND THE MAIN THEME OF THE BOOK

This book is a product of the American Association of Geographers Conference and the 2015 Global Conference on Economic Geography**.** Editors were motivated by ideas from groups of scholars at the Oxford Internet Institute: the "Geonet" and "Digital Inequality" research clusters. It was put together not just to understand the digital transformations taking place at the world's economic margins, but also to help shape them. The book emerges in a moment of changing connectivity at the world's economic margins. In Manila, Manchester, Mogadishu, the banlieues of Marseille and everywhere in between, the world is becoming digital, digitized, and digitally mediated at an astonishing pace. Most of the world's wealthy have long been digitally connected, but the world's poor and economically marginal have not been enrolled in digital networks until relatively recently.

As ever more people and places join this globe-spanning digital network, this book asks what digitalization and digital production can mean for the world's economic margins. Places that were once economic peripheries can potentially transcend their spatial, organizational, social, and political constraints. An Indian weaver, a Chinese merchant, and a Kenyan transcriber all have opportunities to instantly interact with markets outside their local contexts. In other words, possibilities now exist for fundamentally transformed economic geographies. Likewise, digital technologies, and digitized modes of communication, have driven hugely transformative changes in the

global economy. However, most of the available evidence on digital economies remains focused on high-income economies, with relatively little known about the implications of the digital for those at the global margins.

2. CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF THE BOOK ON ITS CONTRIBUTION TO NEW KNOWLEDGE

Technology enthusiasts have long pronounced that connectivity via mobile phones and Internet-connected devices will bring massive development gains which will be a "game changer in the field of education for example," "the best thing anyone can do to improve quality of life around the world," and "the most transformative technology of economic development in our time," and that it will "help lift people out of poverty and give them a freedom from want." Authors of this book argue differently; they maintain that, it is not known how much new technologies have contributed to poverty reduction globally (p.21). There are indeed some examples of poor farmers and small-scale entrepreneurs using technology to raise their incomes. But, as argued in the World Bank's World Development Report 2016: Digital Dividends, those benefits are few and unevenly distributed such that poor people at the global margins have not benefited at all (p.22) while often majority of those at the "Centre" have taken advantage of new opportunities.

It is important to note that, poverty reduction is more than just, technological transformation it has many components which all need to be carefully addressed. In this book it is argued that, policy makers need to realize that technology is not a shortcut to high-income status, even if it can be an enabler and perhaps an accelerator of development. Technology by itself can become a placebo, making us feel better in the short term, while delaying the deeper changes required to solve the real underlying problems (p.23). Digital Dividends focuses on three areas where complementary improvements are necessary: (1) strengthening the business environment, especially competition policies to curb excessive concentration of market power in a handful of digital platforms but also in other ICT-enabled sectors; (2) improving skills development not just ICT skills but, equally important, the "soft skills" that will not be easily replaced by computers; and (3) improving accountability in the public sector, so technology is deployed to empower the poor, not to strengthen control (p.24). These are the foundations of economic development the business climate, human capital, and governance and though the Internet and mobile phones can help improve these foundations in many ways, new technologies are not a substitute.

In this review it is emphasized that, global producers of technologies should make technologies more universal and affordable to all people in the world and should not use technology as an arm for exploitation, it is a basic right to everyone. Moreover, producers of technology ought to aim at improving farming techniques. Improvement of farming sector is key to poverty reduction; this is because, about 1.4 billion people globally who live on less than US $ 1.25 per day rely on agriculture for their livelihood (Nelson, 2014). Technological advancement in agriculture, from better ploughing technologies to rice adapted from saltier water, has the potential to reduce hunger for millions of poor people. Arguing along the similar line Figuères (2013), argues that technological advancement increases access to market and price information which in turn strengthens the bargaining position of individual producers, and of producer and entrepreneurial organizations such as cooperatives, unions and federations.

Prodi (2015) argues that not only does technology have a direct impact on poverty alleviation, but it also tends to mobilize people and help to improve social inclusion. In doing so, technology underpins the role of the citizenry to help itself out of poverty without being dependent on government. Governments have also resorted to e-Governance, to better offer their services to clients. Others have also adopted e-Democracy especially in democratic states where governments would want to allow participatory majority through dialogues and chats as a means of communication at government and public forum (Mogotlhwane, Talib and Mokwena, 2011). Gatune (2015) insists that increasing use of ICT opens up new opportunities for governments to subsidize more wisely, for example, Nigeria's introduction of smart cards to deliver fertilizer subsidies to subsistence farmers. Studies have indicated that a farmer can raise incomes by 29% through ICT-enabled access to better information, even raising the question of whether subsidizing mobile phone towers would be a better use of public money (Ibid).

According to FAO (2018) the new digital technologies and innovative use of ICTs creates enormous opportunities and poses daunting challenges to ending poverty and hunger. On one hand, there is potential to increase productivity and wealth, generate new activities, products and services, and improve livelihoods. On the other hand, such opportunities can lead to further alienation of marginalized communities and an exacerbation of existing socio-economic inequalities. In fact, not all communities benefit from emerging technology and ICT-driven innovation.

3. ENDORSEMENTS, STRENGTH AND WEAKNESSES OF THE BOOK

The main weakness of the book is its failure to openly show negative consequences of the new digital technology. Issues ranging from spread of terrorist activities, Children's development and health, cyber-crime incidences to xenophobic violence as in South Africa and racist attacks as in football (Mustafaoğlu, 2018; Gök, 2015). Nevertheless, the book is still valid and a good resource for university lecturers and students especially those pursuing ICT, economic development, development economics and poverty alleviation studies. It is an important resource book for researchers on underdeveloped economies and policy makers. Technology developers may also benefit from this book in the sense that, examples provided have opened up areas for further research in digital technologies.

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