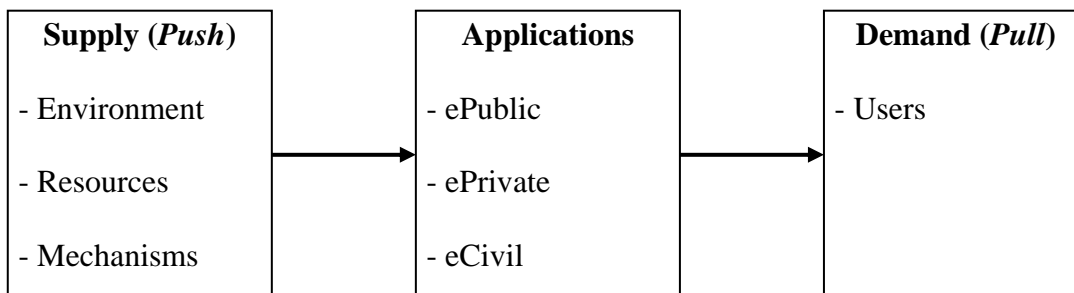


Foundations of ICTs in Development: *Pushing and Pulling*

First week in Economics 101 class, you learn about supply (push) and demand (pull). Unfortunately, many in the e-development community seem to have skipped that class. The result in relation to ICTs and development is a whole lot of pushing, and very little pulling. We'll start with a push-and-pull model:



As one instance, let's examine the WSIS Action Plan from this perspective. In it, we find lots written about:

- supply environment (policies, strategies, laws, etc.)
- supply of resources (network infrastructure, building skills and other capacities, finding money, building knowledge, building confidence, etc.)
- supply mechanisms (public-private or multi-sector partnerships, etc.) and
- applications (digital libraries, e-commerce, e-government, e-health, etc.)

But demand? Gone AWOL. No acknowledgement of demand. No attempt to assess demand. No attempt to meet demand. No attempt to stimulate demand.

We see much the same at the level of many individual e-development projects. Lots of action around the supply issues that will help create an application: arranging the finance, putting in the hardware, developing the software, training up the skills. But little or nothing on the demand side: proper market research beforehand, demand assessment via prototyping during implementation, professional assistance with marketing the application afterwards.

Some think they are ticking the demand box by conducting a needs analysis. But "needs" tend to be a top-down, long-view determination of what users should demand. Where is the "wants analysis" that determines, bottom-up, short-term what users actually demand?

Par excellence, then, this is the "build it and they will come" mentality. We see its impact in many ways:

- The telecentres planned around providing information to poor consumers (addressing a supposed need: imagined demand) that survive only by turning themselves into ICT training, email and chat rooms for the more-wealthy (a want: true demand).
- The e-development community's widespread failure to spot an area of true demand: the explosive growth of mobile telephony.
- More generally, all those e-development projects that fail to sustain because they find no demand.

So, by focusing on supply and application, e-development practitioners are doing something relevant, necessary ... but partial. They need to give equal attention to demand: and not just the vision of needs but the right-now of wants.

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