

Interview Questions for Nanjira Sambuli

June 26, 2018

The purpose of this interview is to contribute towards pluralizing understandings of what science and technology work around the world is. Feel free to answer this based on the scale you feel most comfortable - your own community of practice; network of scholars; at the level of the city / country / region / continent; etc.

The first section of the interview will focus on your engagement and lessons learned from iHub Research. The second half of the interview will focus on your current role and your thoughts on the general trajectory of science and technology research in the region. I will edit the interview and share it back with you to review. Once you okay it (and agree to its release), we will upload to PECE platform to be part of the iHub Research exhibit for 4S 2018 conference (and beyond).

- 1) Can you please explain who you are including your name, current title, and organization. In what capacity did you work with iHub Research?
 - [Nanjira Sambuli, Digital Equality Advocacy Manager, Web Foundation. I worked as a Research Manager at iHub Research.](#)
- 2) Reflecting back now, 8 years later, what do you think was unique about the type of work that iHub Research conducted?
 - [iHub Research truly breathed life into its mission, to catalyse research in the budding tech ecosystem in Kenya, and over time, East Africa. Amidst the excitement of technology innovation, it was imperative that an actor like iHub Research existed within the ecosystem, to unearth insights that informed the innovation cycle, and in turn enriching the ecosystem with quantitative/qualitative data on the drivers of technology adoption.](#)
- 3) In your own opinion, what were the core aspects that made iHub Research what it was?
 - [Existing within one key node of the tech ecosystem in Kenya – the iHub- was a strong value proposition for iHub Research. Direct, constant and consistent engagement with the innovators, as well as building links with communities of would be users of the emerging innovations, coupled with a passionate team of local and visiting researchers with various academic/subject matter strengths was another core aspect. Further, conducting research around key themes, such as edtech, governance and technology ensured that iHub Research was truly a market leader. Collaboration was a core aspect/principle embodied at the department as well.](#)
- 4) Can you give a few concrete examples of how iHub Research embodied those principles (experimentality, open sharing of research, diverse forms of knowledge)? What was the modality of the experiment? Why was it pursued? Who was the intended audience?
 - [All research outputs, with very few exceptions, were availed in an open access format.](#)
 - [Collaboration was embodied, by iHub Research engaging in multidisciplinary research and action networks – particularly with our governance and technology work in East Africa.](#)
- 5) Can you explain a bit more about the projects you worked on at iHubR? How was this work taken up and used by broad audiences?
 - [Projects I worked on included developing a framework for assessing the Viability, Verification, and Validity of Crowdsourcing, one of the first in-depth research assessments into the impact of social media on the 2013 Kenyan election.](#)
 - [I also worked on the second phase of an online dangerous speech monitoring project, Umati, that ran in Kenya, Nigeria and South Sudan. I oversaw development of automation tools for data collection and analysis within the context of analyzing speech with a potential of catalyzing mass violence. Apart from scaling to the aforementioned countries through projects we either oversaw or partnered with for technical support, this work continues to be useful to better understanding how online content can be monitored not only for dangerous speech but to unearth trends and insights, early warning systems etc.](#)
 - [Also oversaw research on ICT and Governance \(Civic Tech Landscape\) in East Africa that was useful not only to the research community, but also other governance actors in the region who were interested in the potential of technologies in improving governance and citizen participation.](#)
- 6) What kinds of groups did you engage with? Who was/is interested in technology research in Africa?

- Engaged with academia, entrepreneurs, civil society actors and even government officials who were interested in more nuanced insights on how technology was advancing in terms of access in the hands of potential beneficiaries as end users, as well as on the impacts (good and potentially bad) that they needed to better understand, especially in Kenya, and over time in other regions to which our work and partnerships advanced.

7) How did your initial work with iHub R help to bring you to where you are today? What were important lessons or values did you picked up along the way?

- My work at iHub Research was instrumental in building my expertise and understanding of the unfolding impacts of ICT adoption and how those impact governance, innovation, entrepreneurship and societal culture. Having the space and mandate to explore these topics, steeped in local contexts' knowledge was truly a strong foundation for my professional work today.

8) Can you explain a bit more about your current work? What kinds of issues are you working on?

- I currently work as the Digital Equality Advocacy Manager at the World Wide Web Foundation, where I lead advocacy efforts to promote digital equality in access to and use of the Web, with a particular focus on the Foundation's Women's Rights Online work. In this, I shape research that helps us better understand affordable access and meaningful use of the web, particularly in Africa, Southeast Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, to inform policy advocacy on how to address the barriers keeping people offline.

9) What factors do you believe were important to give rise to iHub Research? Are there other groups doing work similar to iHub Research? If yes, who? If not, why not?

- iHub existing as a space to catalyse tech innovation in Kenya – and in a sense, operating in uncharted territories meant that all ideas were valid- so that by 2013, the visionaries within iHub who thought of setting up iHub Research were housed in the right space to build it out as it eventually was.
- Institutions like CIPIT at Strathmore University play at a similar space as iHub Research did, instead being housed in an academic institution but surfacing insights relevant to the tech innovation space in Kenya.
- In Nigeria, ccHub, in my view, has largely followed a similar approach, and has built within itself functions that operate within the ecosystem to surface insights relevant for their market.
- Outside the tech innovation ecosystem, digital rights organisations such as Paradigm Initiative and CIPESA (with whom iHub Research had partnered) have been working on and producing research insights that resonate with the Governance and Technology pillar that was instituted at iHub Research (under my docket).
- Overall, my observation is that research within the tech innovation space may have dwindled, primarily because the interest in the tech space is skewed towards investing time and resources in the innovations themselves, and not necessarily understanding the underlying trends in adoption of enabling devices to create ready markets for said innovations.

10) Related question - Where else has critical work on science and technology been happening in the Kenyan/African research context? Who is doing it?

- As mentioned above, actors like CIPIT, Paradigm Initiative and CIPESA have been interesting to observe insofar as their feeding into the understanding of technology impacts, and the policy space within which African markets are developing.

11) Are there shifts in who is doing this work? If so, why do you think that is?

- I don't believe that there are many actors left situated within the tech innovation systems, as iHub Research was, who are driving a multiplicity of science/tech research as we set out to. The research and experimentation work is now distributed more within academia, civil society (for digital rights work), and private sector actors (who set out to conduct such work to address their specific interests). Multidisciplinary actors who convene and converge knowledge repositories and actors, seem, in my view, to be missing.
- I suppose iHub Research's unique value proposition has not been easy to replicate. More generally, the space innovation hubs occupied in the attention economy of tech innovation has waned and redistributed to various quarters (academia,

private sector, civil society), each of which is conducting work based on their interests and the resources then available to them...

12) What themes/topics/ideas/concepts are garnering interest for future directions of science and technology studies in Kenya/East Africa/ Africa at large? Why do you think that is?

- There seems to be growing interest in researching innovation within STS, in academic institutions, as well as by multinational tech companies like Google (setting up an AI lab in Ghana), IBM Research (and their first Africa research centre in Nairobi), Microsoft (setting up a policy innovation centre at the Strathmore University in Kenya), USIU (setting up a social media lab within the university), Facebook (setting up a hub in Nigeria) etc...
- I think there's an appreciation that technology innovation needs to be underpinned by micro, nuanced, qualitative insights about the markets within which they unfold, as well as the sustained excitement about the potential of technology innovation and entrepreneurship in Kenya, and the continent at large. The 'next billion' adopters are situated in the continent, and it's a rush to capture that market for various actors.