

Chapter 11

The Case of Global Technology in South Africa

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the greatest challenge 21st century globalization is to overcome the technological divide (this includes the digital and non-digital technologies) that exists between developed and developing nations. The uneven global uptake of technology is one of most important gauges of global inequality in the world today. Despite substantive efforts to level the playing field by bringing new opportunities to developing nations, this challenge continues to plague our modern world. It touches every area of human activity in society that depends on technology and change. It is both important in the current context and in future technology development. This raises the question about how it is that technology diffuses at a global level and how should this diffusion be regulated and controlled. For instance, Jeffrey (2001) examines

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the economic characteristics of ICT's to gauge their potential effects on the global economy. Jeffrey (2001) found that ICT's "are associated with a number of powerful cumulative mechanisms causing some countries to grow rapidly and others to become increasingly marginalized from the global economy (p. 147). According to Jeffrey, South Africa is among the most marginalized of developing nations despite substantive investment in their ICT infrastructure from the international development initiatives. Why is this the case and what can be done to improve the situation?

Global technoethics is concerned with the ethical use of technology to promote the aims of globalization. Because of the centrality of information and communication technology in the world economy and its capacity to create worldwide linkages at all levels of globalization processes currently studied (i.e., economic, technological, political, cultural, environmental), global technoethics places globalization within a technological relational system. In order to understand global technoethics and its unique contribution, it is necessary to situate it within the existing globalization literature. This chapter focuses on recent technological transformation current underway in South Africa (SA). Due to the complexity and extent of the ongoing challenges, a multi-perspective examination of key technology innovation development efforts is used to explore possible weaknesses and imbalances blocking efforts to leverage South Africa.

BACKGROUND

What is globalization? How does globalization affect individuals and societies? Does globalization lead to poverty or prosperity? Why are so many debates surrounding globalization and how it is measured? Does globalization diminish cultural diversity or enhance it? Can globalization be controlled and by whom? These are some of the questions at the heart of the globalization debate. But, what is globalization? A variety of different definitions for globalization have been posited over the years with no single definition receiving widespread acceptance. The following are among the most prominent definitions of globalization:

- "The historical transformation constituted by the sum of particular forms and instances of . . . [m]aking or being made global (i) by the active dissemination of practices, values, technology and other human products throughout the globe (ii) when global practices and so on exercise an increasing influence over people's lives (iii) when the globe serves as a focus for, or a premise in shaping, human activities" (Albrow, *The Global Age*, 1996, p. 88).
- "Globalization denotes the expanding scale, growing magnitude, speeding up and deepening impact of interregional flows and patterns of social interaction.

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