

## The Politics of Technology in Africa

As more Africans get online, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are increasingly hailed for their transformative potential. Yet, the fascination for the possibilities of promoting more inclusive forms of development in the information age have obfuscated the reality of the complex negotiations among political and economic actors who are seeking to use technology in their competition for power. Building on over ten years of research in Ethiopia, Iginio Gagliardone investigates the relationship between politics, development, and technological adoption in Africa's second-most populous country and its largest recipient of development aid. The emphasis the book places on the 'technopolitics' of ICTs and on their ability to embody and enact political goals, offers a strong, and empirically grounded, counter-argument to prevalent approaches to the study of technology and development, that can be applied to other cases in Africa and beyond.

IGINIO GAGLIARDONE teaches Media and Communication at the University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa, and is Associate Research Fellow in New Media and Human Rights at the University of Oxford, UK. He holds a PhD from the London School of Economics and has spent years living and working in Africa, including for UNESCO. His research focuses on the relationship between new media, political change, and human development, and on the emergence of distinctive models of the information society in the Global South. He has extensively published in communication, development studies, and African studies journals, and his work has been translated into Arabic, Chinese, French, and Italian.

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-17785-7 — The Politics of Technology in Africa  
Iginio Gagliardone  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

---

# The Politics of Technology in Africa

*Communication, Development, and  
Nation-Building in Ethiopia*

---

Iginio Gagliardone

University of the Witwatersrand / University of Oxford



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

## CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107177857](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107177857)

© Iginio Gagliardone 2016

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2016

*A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data*

Names: Gagliardone, Iginio, author.

Title: The politics of technology in Africa : communication, development, and nation-building in Ethiopia / Iginio Gagliardone.

Description: New York : Cambridge University Press, 2016. | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016021107 | ISBN 9781107177857 (hardback)

Subjects: LCSH: Telecommunication—Political aspects—Ethiopia. |

Telecommunication—Government policy—Ethiopia. |

Information technology—Political aspects—Ethiopia. |

Information technology—Government policy—Ethiopia. | Ethiopia—Politics and government—1974–1991. | Ethiopia—Politics and government—1991–

Classification: LCC HE8479.Z5 G34 2016 | DDC 384.30963—dc23 LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016021107>

ISBN 978-1-107-17785-7 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-17785-7 — The Politics of Technology in Africa  
Iginio Gagliardone  
Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

---

*To Nicole*

Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	<i>page viii</i>
1 Introduction	1
2 Technopolitics, Communication Technologies, and Development	13
3 Avoiding Politics: International and Local Discourses on ICTs	23
4 A Quest for Hegemony: The Use of ICTs in Support of the Ethiopian National Project	50
5 Ethiopia’s Developmental and Sovereign Technopolitical Regimes	79
6 Resisting Alternative Technopolitical Regimes	114
7 ICT for Development, Human Rights, and the Changing Geopolitical Order	134
8 Conclusion	155
<i>Bibliography</i>	165
<i>Index</i>	178

## Acknowledgments

---

I have always been fascinated by how technology evolves and, throughout its evolution, opens new opportunities for us to understand the individuals, groups, and societies who designed and made use of it.

When I first stumbled upon one of Schoolnet's plasma TV screens in a secondary school in Addis Ababa, I could not resist but start asking questions about how that apparently costly and complex system came about, who designed it, and what else it was connected to. At the time – it was March 2005 – I did not know this book would have emerged from that first encounter, but I am still deeply fascinated by how much technology – if properly asked – can tell us about how a society thinks of itself and its future.

Along this ten-year journey I have hugely benefited from the time, advice, and wisdom of numerous people. Firstly, I want to thank the many individuals who generously agreed to sit with me and patiently explain why they did what they did, what influenced them, and what they envisioned through their activity. Especially in its initial phases, this book required collecting and trying to piece together many pieces of a puzzle only a few people were trying to solve. This meant I often had to come back to the same individuals and ask more, test with them whether an apparently promising connection was pointing in the right direction, or other avenues should be pursued instead. Some of these individuals are named throughout the book, and their words are reported as often as possible, also to offer the reader a glimpse of our meetings and conversations. Others asked to remain anonymous, but I am deeply thankful for their generosity and willingness to share their views and information with me, often in trying circumstances.

This book is also the result of many revisions and transformations and I am indebted to the people who contributed to shaping it, in one form or another. I am grateful to Robin Mansell, who offered continuous and precious feedback when this book was still a PhD thesis in the making. I also want to thank the many colleagues and readers who accessed various sections and versions of the book and provided precious

## Acknowledgments

ix

comments: Christopher Clapham, Monroe Price, Emanuele Fantini, Matti Pohjonen, Sharath Srinivasan, Marco DiNunzio. I was very fortunate to be able to regularly visit Ethiopia until the very last stages of writing and to engage in numerous conversations with colleagues at Addis Ababa University and other research institutions in Ethiopia. I am particularly grateful to Zenebe Beyene and Abdissa Zerai, with whom I had the pleasure to collaborate on numerous research projects and develop a rich intellectual partnership.

Finally, I want to thank Nicole Stremlau, my partner and fellow researcher. Without her support, ideas, and encouragement, this book would probably not exist.