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While access to ICT has been seen as beneficial to local communities mainly in terms of their own economic advancement, world development agendas have come to recognize the value of local knowledge as an asset for global survival at least since the Rio Declaration in 1992. Can ICT play a role in facilitating the *synthesis of global **and** local knowledge* and thus contribute to sustainable development? Synthesis of both requires a bi-directional process of exchange based on communicative equality across cultural and linguistic boundaries.

The paper presents a model of *cross-cultural research tele-cooperation* developed as part of the African languages e-learning program at the University of Zurich and field-tested in West Africa:

- (a) multilingual ICT technology as a means of providing local resource persons with the opportunity to share their expertise without fear of alienation due to linguistic inequality;
- (b) cost-sensitive language-engineering for overcoming the digital divide starting "from the far end";
- (c) an interdisciplinary plea for a "linguistic turn" in development research;
- (d) an analogy between the rediscovery of the source text principle in the Renaissance and local language epistemology in today's Third World Studies.

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