

Interview Questions for Sidney Ochieng

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? How did you find out about iHub Research and why did you want to work for iHubR?

I am Sidney Omondi Ochieng. I am the Chief Data Scientist at Intelipro and a consulting data scientist. By the time I was leaving iHub I was the Project Coordinator and Lead Data Scientist for the Umati project. I worked on several other project while there as well. I've been following iHub since its launch, still bitter I couldn't get an invite for that btw, and had been receiving the iHub weekly emails. One of them mentioned one of the iHub Quarterly report that I downloaded and that's when I explicitly became interested in iHubR. I wanted to work there specifically because at the time it was probably the only place in Kenya at the time that was publicly talking about ML and I wanted to start a career in it. You can read more about this here: <http://sidneyochieng.co.ke/?s=iHub>

- 2) Reflecting back now, 8 years later, what do you think was unique about the type of work that iHub Research conducted?

It was driven by the needs of our community and our own personal interests, and this was across the team from the Research Lead all the way down. I've always got the feeling from other research groups that their work was very top down driven.

It was open. There was a real effort to disseminate the information we had in a way that made sense for a lot of audiences. It's something that I've not seen with any other research group or project really.

We tried to involve the community in our research from the beginning to the end through various meetings.

- 3) In your own opinion, what were the core aspects that made iHub Research what it was?

Open culture. In several facets.

Independent. We weren't really influenced too much by internal politics or external either.

Interactivity. This may be one of the facets of openness above. We made efforts to be approachable to the community. Anyone could come talk and interact with us.

Connections. We had a broad view of all the sectors we researched and were interested in but also through the fellows we had access to people who had more specialised knowledge.

Diversity. We had team that curiously skewed female(I've always wondered how this came about) but also we had a team that was not all typically tech.

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- 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?

- 5) Can you explain a bit more about what iHubR data science was? How were you involved?

The Datalab was the data processing arm of iHubR. It was started to begin take advantage of big data technology to do research and provide solutions in that vein. It was also helped build data science skills and promote the use of the tech in Kenya. It also highlighted pioneers of data science locally.

- 6) What kinds of groups did the data lab engage with? Who was/is interested in data science in Africa? What kinds of projects were you working on?

The data lab worked with researchers, NGO and for profits. These days everyone is interested in DS in Africa.

7) How did your initial work with iHub R as well as your experience building out the data science lab help to bring you to where you are today? What were important lessons or values that you picked up along the way?

I owe everything about where I am today to iHub R. It gave me an internship and then allowed me to stay on and work on some many cool projects. I met the connections that have allowed me to continue to grow my career. Because of iHub I could be said to be one of the early people to actually call themselves a data scientist in Kenya.

I learnt the value of smart work, the importance of relationship, how to pitch and talk to people about what I do, writing reports (did not enjoy this), confidence writing in my own voice, so much. Lessons: giving your people flexibility allows them to do their best work, protect it. Anyone can have important input even an intern.

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

Currently I'm the Chief Data Scientist at Intelipro and a consulting data scientist. At Intelipro I build credit scoring and do consumer analytics. As a consultant I currently work with an NGO as the technical data lead on a project helping them build their data pipelines and analytics.

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?

The main thing was that there was not really any researchers that could be said to be representing the Kenyan tech scene. I don't know if there really are. I think maybe the scene is big enough that there's no need for such centrality anymore. Maybe. I'm not sure. I worry about this sometimes

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

All over.

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

I do think there has been a shift. There are startups doing and releasing information, a few research groups like FSDke and even bigger companies. I think there's a recognition about the importance of research when it comes to product development.

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?

So much blockchain, this is very much still in the hype stage I'm still not sure of the practical uses. Lending is huge but it's very focused on personal small loans, but movement to other sectors. There's farmtech. There is a lot of excitement around big data.