

ICT as A Tool for sustainable Rural Development

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ABSTRACT

The major population of entire world lives in rural area and earns its live hood by agriculture and allied means. Rural area experiences hunger and poverty. The rural community is isolated from the world. They can't present themselves in front of the world.

Development in 21st century will determine to a large extent by the thought, action and imagination of people. Computers are reshaping human lives. In the rapidly changing scenario, the extensive use of computers advances in ICT making sustainable rural development possible.

The paper introduces the role of ICT for rural development. The paper addresses the issues associated with rural community's isolation. ICT can reduce digital divide between urban and rural community. In order to alleviating poverty in rural areas, ICT can be used.

Keywords ICT, Poverty alleviation, digital divide, empowerment, cultural enrichment, kiosk, procurement.

INTRODUCTION

The villages epitomize the soul of India. With more than 70% of the Indian population living in rural areas, rural India reflects the very essence of Indian culture and tradition. No wonder then that a holistic development of India as a Nation rests on a sustained and holistic development of rural India.

Today ICT is a unique technology, which is used universally in all span of life. ICT plays a predominant role in the creation and development of knowledge. Because of isolation rural communities are remains untouched by the ICT revolution. This study aims at improving the use of ICT for rural development, reducing digital gap, to develop curiosity of rural people and their world. The paper also focuses the issues, considerations and strategies for implementation of ICT in rural development.

DEFINITION OF SCOPE OF ICT

Information and communication technology is the powerful and productive systems that transform all human activities, including rural economy. ICT acts as a catalytic intervention for empowering rural India as it accelerates economic development in rural areas by helping the people in accessing the information in order to bridge the gap. In developing country like India, ICT revolution renders rural population to become an active participant in growth of our country. The purpose of this study is to explore the relevance of ICT on rural development ICTs stand for Information and Communication Technologies. ICTs refer to technologies that provide access to information through telecommunications. It focuses primarily on communication technologies. This includes the Internet, wireless networks, cell phones, and other communication mediums to enhance capabilities of people. The rural development is one of the important factors for the growth of Indian economy. Combining ICT in rural development can speed up the development

process. Access to relevant information and knowledge is crucial and ICTs can be useful in this process to a great extent. . ICT has been seen as major tool for rural development as it has the potential to effectively address issues like health, Education, Agricultural productivity, Agribusinesses- Governance, risk management, access to knowledge, women empowerment etc.

ICT FOR DEVELOPMENT

Information and Communication Technologies are critical for enhancing the productivity of all sectors of the economy. It is an effective tool that can be used for reducing poverty, extending health services, expanding educational opportunities and generally improving the quality of life of the citizens of the region.

The United Nations actively promotes ICT4D as a powerful tool for economic and social development around the world and has designated some organizations to spearhead the development of the global ICT program. ICT for development (ICT4D) or Digital development, as it is now termed, combines the ICT sector and initiatives with the social, environmental, economic and political objectives to fast-track international, regional and national initiatives.

ICT4D covers numerous areas, including ICT applications, cyber security, e-commerce, e-education, e-government, e-health, policy development, statistics, youth and e-waste

ICT for Poverty alleviation

In the Human Development perspective poverty is defined as, “ The denial of opportunities and choices most basic to human needs and forms the core tenet of the rights-based approach to development where Poor people themselves take control and action in their needs.”

ICTs have the potential to be effective instruments in support of poverty reduction. The flexible nature of ICTs allows them to help address problems in health, education and livelihoods. In addition, they can enable people's empowerment and ultimately strengthen human rights.

Appropriately deployed and realized the differential needs of urban and rural people, ICTs can become powerful tools of economic, social and political empowerment.

ICT and economic empowerment and sustainable human development

The world economy is in the midst of profound transformation from an industrial society to a global economy for which ICT is an accelerating force. While globalization has brought opportunities in many places, it has also reinforced previous inequalities and created new ones.

ICT offers the potential for facilitating a diverse, inclusive globalization, with increased opportunities for rural masses. ICT is a social construction that can be remade to serve societal goals - increasing growth, improving social equity and strengthening democracy. The information society holds great promise for the economic empowerment of rural. Countrymen need to know the opportunities that ICT can bring and get beyond the fear of using it.

OPPORTUNITIES

ICT offer economic opportunities at all levels. In developing countries there are growing possibilities for outsourced service-sector jobs. Globally IT-enabled communications businesses offer possibilities of entrepreneurial opportunities for rural. The technology inherently makes possible flexibility in time and place that offers great possibilities. The sector also gives the

possibility for everywhere, despite their location, of connection to the global economy through e-commerce as producers and distributors of goods and services. ICT-enabled information access can break the isolation of rural, giving them the knowledge to make decisions to improve their economic situation. ICT provides linkages that favor small-scale enterprises in rural areas.

Social empowerment through ICT

In the social and cultural arena, the particular opportunities that ICT provides are in education, e-learning, health, e-governance and cultural production.

E-GOVERNANCE

E-governance offers opportunities for the transformation of governance processes that is the key to rural empowerment and the achievement of gender equality. It can also be a key approach to enhance full and equal participation in public life, particularly for people living in remote areas.

EDUCATION

There is a dearth of information, research and codified knowledge on rural and the educational use of ICT in education worldwide. Furthermore, continuing restricted access to education particularly for rural women, budgetary cuts in education and limited infrastructure contribute towards a proliferating social crisis in education. The introduction of ICT into this context will increase the gender gap of ICT skills and knowledge.

E-LEARNING.

The opportunities provided by Internet-based e-learning in the developed world could undercut the achievements made by rural in their participation in higher education in particular, but with rural being disadvantage in ICT access and skills, this limits their participation in e-learning.

HEALTH

ICTs are being used in developing countries to facilitate remote consultation, diagnosis and treatment. Delivering health care with ICTs enables health care professionals and institutions to address the critical medical needs of rural communities; especially those in remote locations and those that lack qualified medical personnel and services. ICT could also be a critical tool in enhancing rural people access to information on all health-related issues.

Employment opportunities

Poor people in rural localities lack opportunities for employment because they often do not have access to information about them. One use of ICTs is to provide on-line services for job placement through electronic labor exchanges in public employment service.

Defining the digital divide

ICTs threaten to expand the already wide socio-economic gap between urban and rural populations in developing countries whilst simultaneously offering opportunities to reduce it. ICT implementation can be successfully adapted to the development challenges faced by rural communities and such implementations can be evaluated so that the often unexpected and desirable results that emerge can be revealed and accounted for. Novel approaches to system implementation methodologies for rural development and outcome evaluation that challenge traditional wisdom in the implementation of information systems.

But with all these technology adaptation by various developed countries, Digital divide is been created due to unbalanced distribution of resources. The strong commercial interest has pressurized the national resources to invest in infrastructure mainly in urban area, which has further widened the digital divide.

Financial Services and Cash

Management:

Connectivity at the village level will make it possible to develop low cost channels of delivering basic banking services (deposit and withdrawal) to a larger number of people. If banking is understood as comprising of cash management and data base management, any agency or a collaboration of agencies capable of performing these two functions effectively can potentially deliver banking services. In such a scenario, the existing banks that have the capability of database management can collaborate with the emergent kiosk networks to use the latter as a front end for banking. The use of Internet as a transaction channel significantly reduces the cost of transaction. Since a typical kiosk operates for around 8-10 hours a day, it also increases the time available for transactions. This brings banking facilities almost to the doorstep of the villager.

Procurement

The ITC e-Choupal experiment has been able to combine village level connectivity with crop-specific insights to deliver a value proposition to the Soya farmers in Madhya Pradesh. ITC analyzed the value chain of Soya to determine sources of value leakage to the farmer. It then created the e-Choupals as spokes around the hub, which is the procurement center. The e-Choupal provides price information, weather information, soil testing and crop specific extension services. A farmer who supplies through the choupal bypasses the mandi and supplies directly to the procurement center. The 'Sanchalak' provides a transaction slip to the farmer, which can be produced at the procurement hub.

Strategies for ICT in Rural Development:

- Adopt one village one-computer scheme.
- Start Community learning and Information Centers (CLIC) centers.
- Establish Market Information Centers in remote areas.
- Establish Tele Centers in remote areas.
- Encourage the use of computers and Internet in rural areas..
- Establish Information Technology (IT) parks in remote areas.
- Government has to reduce taxation of ICT-related components, products and services.
- Establish partnerships with NGOs engaged in awareness and innovative for ICT4RD.
- Explore the use of Free and Open Source Software (FOSS).
- Promote the benefits of ICTs to private sector and academic institutions, and encourage computerization.
- Begin basic ICT skills workshops for all rural students at tertiary level.

- Promote ICT-related courses at university/college/ school level and expand the base of supportive certificate and diploma level at college level.
- Encourage assessment and promotion of civil servants to include ICT competency.
- Encourage ICT4D research and development and partnership with the private sector and international educational/research centers.
- Encourage the establishment of cyber cafes / telecenters.

CONCLUSION

ICTs can play a significant role in fighting rural and urban poverty and fostering sustainable development through creating information rich societies and supporting livelihoods. If ICTs are appropriately deployed and realized the differential needs of urban and rural people, it can become powerful tools of economic, social and political empowerment.

Efforts are to be applied to strengthen the vision of the need for Information Communication Technology (ICT), towards future achievements in the economies and other strategic areas. But unless we take concrete action to ensure that everyone has a chance to share in the benefits of the Digital Age, information technology could just as easily become another resource that is denied to the people who need it most.

The developing countries, particularly India is coping with the challenge of harnessing the ICT technologies in a very different way. In fact some of the most innovative usage of ICT is one of Internet based technologies in reaching its citizens. Internet is one of the technologies available for global resources and information haring. Internet has become a common resource of the whole mankind. Inquiring and sharing information become easier than ever. With Internet, geographical distance and state borders are eliminated.

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