
The Role of ICT in Governing Sustainable Rural Development in Madhubani District

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ABSTRACT:

This paper tried to explain the importance of ICT for the rural sustainable Development in the Indian context through secondary and primary evidence. The paper mainly interpreted the secondary evidence to point out the role and the meaning of ICT in the rural environment as a vehicle of equality and growth. With this background, the paper attempts to analyze the interest of the rural users of ICT and the problems they face in using ICT for their livelihood and what could be their alternative approach for effective use of ICT. To find answer to this question the researcher selected three villages in Madhubani District which is closer to Bihar state for his study. Based on the primary data it is identified that online and offline opportunity should be encourage according to the interest of the local communities and given practice to exchange knowledge on control and creating ICTs in the rural context.

INTRODUCTION

A few years back I was offered to write a paper on the role of ICT in poverty reduction. I was hesitant because I thought the subject was one of those techno hypes, and had not much to do with poverty reduction. Yet, I took on the assignment and suspected that the paper would be very short.

While reading reports and research materials I soon discovered that I had been wrong. I found out that ICT had a major role to play in poverty reduction. But I also learned that ICT alone, without aligning it with other development goals and efforts, and without involving the rural poor, would not be able to deliver expected results. I became also convinced that ICT had to be part of a holistic approach to poverty reduction (Kelles -Viitanen 2003).

More than 70 per cent of India's population lives in rural areas, and some 20 million rural households are reported to be landless, while millions more have insecure rights to their land. Agricultural wage earners, smallholder farmers and casual workers in the non-farm sector constitute the bulk of poor rural people. Within these categories, women and tribal communities are the most deprived. Young people in rural areas are forced to migrate seasonally or permanently, without the skills and competencies required by India's rapidly modernizing economy, this trend is not going to change in the near future. Agriculture will continue to be the primary source of livelihood for the rural masses.

The role of ICT is catalytic in the complex task of poverty reduction by leveraging the effects on earnings opportunities, on educational and health services, on good governance and on promoting democracy. Since information exchange is part of nearly every element of the economy, the impact of improvements in the capacity for information exchange will depend critically on how the rest of the economy functions. This suggests the centrality of a holistic approach in evaluating the impact of ICT. For example, the impact of improved ICT access on

farm earnings through increased knowledge of market prices will be muted if there are no roads to carry crops to markets, or there are no markets because of an unreformed agricultural sector. (World Bank 2001).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

One-third of the population in the country is continued to be unskilled workers and the majorities are the rural teenagers up to the age of 17 years. Even modern economy system for the educated rural youth, produces unskilled workers. The present economic system in the rural area is not altered according to the changing economic scenario. On the other hand the huge agriculture workers become jobless with decreasing in cultivation land and use of modern methods of cultivation. As a result, hunger, greed and poverty become the major evils confronting the rural population, in some places migration takes place from rural to urban areas without any employable skills. The only universal remedy to cure these evils is to ensure that the developmental efforts of the government reach the intended beneficiaries. By pointing out the problems at the rural areas what we can improve is that to achieve our developmental goals. It is here that the information and communication technologies will play a pivotal role in providing better information and communication facilities to the villages.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is to focus on analyzing and interpreting the secondary data to explain the role of information communication technology in the rural environment in India for sustainable development and to point out with empirical evidence that how far could be the present ICT approaches will be effective in helping the rural people for their sustainable development. The analysis covers only the Harlakhi block in Madhubani District of Bihar State.

The main objectives are

- a. how far the rural users are interested in using the ICT for their sustainable livelihood
- b. the problems they face in using ICT for their livelihood
- c. what could be the alternative approach in using ICT for sustainable development.

STUDY AREA

The study area is nearer to the Bihar State which is located in northern part of Madhubani District, Bihar state, India. The research study was conducted in the three villages namely Mahadev patti, Rampur, Umgaon and Hurrahi of Madhubani District and the sixty percentage of the main activities of the people in these villages are still involved in agriculture and cottage works. Since these villages are closer to Bihar there is huge possibility to create a good market potential for the agricultural products. The major crops grown in these villages are rice, pulse and groundnut. Apart from this, certain horticultural crops like mango, guava and vegetables have also been cultivated successfully. At the same time the major threat and weakness for the sustainable livelihood in these rural areas are due to rapid growth of industrialization, construction of colleges & universities and residential buildings because these villages are closer

to Bihar. Moreover in these villages people find it more remunerative to work in low salaries in industries, in educational institutions and as construction laborers than to work in agricultural field and related works.

IMPACT OF ICT FOR RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The survey was conducted in all the three villages and from each village 50 ICT rural users were interviewed to know the main objectives of the research. Data was collected only from those who have internet connection in various electronic devices. The detail related with respondent is given in table 0.1.

Table 0.1 Summary of the selected villages

S.No	Name of the Village	No. of Respondent
1	Harlahi	50
2	Umgoan	50
3	rampur	50

a) Rural Users interest in Using ICT for Sustainable Development

The entire respondent in the three villages have internet connection and access either through computer or through smart phones from various providers. The respondents are from the age between 28 to 55 years and know to read and write in their language and educated from SSLC to Degree holders. Majority of the respondents depend on agricultural activities and some in Horticulture and allied activities.

Table-1 Rural users interest in using ICT

S.No	Interested in using web site	Harlakhi	Rampur	Umgoan	Total	Percentage
1	Agricultural information	10	-	12	31	21%
2	News, marketing	0	-	-	-	00
3	Government project/scheme	18	20	22	60	40%
4	Health	-8-	-6-	-6-	20	13%
5	Other: e mail, entertainment.	14	15	10	39	26%
	TOTAL	50	50	50	150	100%

In Table-1 the rural users in all the three villages shows interest in accessing the communication technologies for their sustainable livelihood. The closed ended interview reveals that in all the three villages rural users are very particular in visiting agricultural information, government schemes and health related information for their livelihood. Among the total respondent, the majority 40% of them access to government projects and schemes followed by the 26% access ICT for chatting and browse for fun which not related to their sustainable livelihood. In

Agricultural related information which is most important for the sustainable rural development stands only 21% of the total respondents followed by Health related information 13%. Respondents in all the three villages find other medium like newspaper, television for news and marketing because in this medium they get up-to-date information in their own languages.

b) Problems people face in using ICT in rural areas

Table-2 Problem in using ICT in Rural Areas

S.No	Problems	Harlakhi	Rampur	Umgoan	Total	Percentage
1	cost, connectivity& maintenance	7	6	6	19	13%
2	No Feedback	8	7	7	23	15%
3	Time Consuming	5	8	5	17	11%
4	Irrelevant information	12	9	10	31	21%
5	Out dated content	18	20	22	60	40%
	TOTAL	50	50	50	150	100

Table-2 shows around 40% of the respondents in the three villages stated that the information related to the rural development are out dated and not been updated periodically in the ICT. 21% of the respondents reported that information related to our context, location is lacking, information like climate, fertilizers, seeds related to our soil and financial assistance are not mentioned for the farmers. 15% of the respondents feel that ICT's fail to clear our doubts when we need for help. 13% of the rural users in this villages believe the use of ICT for their livelihood is very expensive when compare with other medium such as radio, TV and newspaper. 11% of the respondents stated that use of ICT is a waste of time where we get majority of the information in English not in local languages.

DISCUSSION ON THE FINDINGS

All developmental activities in the rural areas must be considered as important to ensure development. ICT need to set a strong and positive contribution towards achievement of development with relationship to powerful local people and to support their indigenous growth towards the objectives of the nation. Simply copying and using the existing western models in ICT for rural development in India should be modified and to be dully indigenous content should be transmitted to the intended rural receivers. For economic development in rural areas ICT should be collective with the existing models and with the traditional knowledge systems to make sure of the local people involvement and ownership of the rural receivers. Because using of indigenous systems are important not for its richness but for these systems had good progress over generation after generation in preserving the social balance in the rural areas few examples such as "Honey Bee Network" which served as an effective problem solving solution in rural

development in India. Such traditional knowledge systems should be identified and to be disseminated to the rural people for sustainable rural development. Even exchange of ideas, thoughts and attitudes between local communities and development agencies need to be improved to ensure success of the development process because local communities are the nearest to the basic problems as well as best judge to assess alternative use of technology and provide innovative solutions for the local problems in their rural areas. Such rural participation brings ICT models in use for social and economic development in rural areas.

CONCLUSION

It has been argued here that ICT can contribute to poverty reduction, if it is tailored to the needs of the poor and if it is used in the right way for right purposes and complemented with required reforms. Like all technologies, ICT offers tools and applications but no solutions. The solutions to the problem of poverty are what they have always been: economic growth, enabling infrastructure, the creation of livelihoods, social capital, education and healthcare, and sufficiently democratic government to ensure that economic benefits are not cornered by the powerful elites. By providing cheap and efficient tools for access to information and exchange of ideas and knowledge, ICT can become an enabling tool for wider socioeconomic development. When properly used, it can greatly increase the ability of the poor people to benefit from economic development and from development programs meant to help them. Use of ICT's in rural areas should support international content with the locally relevant content in local languages such as local language tools, digital libraries, e-learning, archives of local cultural resources, and needs assessment of rural communities with feedback two-way communication. Online content should have both the State and central Government information such as in publishing citizen information for rural communities on the Web and promoting online services for applications like downloading and submitting tax forms, land records, import/export documents and pension claims which creates the interest of the rural users to access the ICT for sustainable development. ICT for rural development should have a strong grassroots support with local communities in the villages. Online and offline opportunity should be encourage according to the interest of the local communities and given practice to exchange knowledge on control and creating ICTs in the rural context. Showing similar ICT's for development in other rural communities of the world could enable rural India to improve and create interest level and to share knowledge, ideas and attitude meaningfully.

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