



Chapter VI

The E-Pabelan National ICT4PR Pilot Project: Experiences and Challenges of Implementation in an Indonesian Context

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Abstract

The chapter presents a case study of an ICT-based attempt to reduce poverty (ICT4PR) in a rural Indonesian community. Differences between the theoretical approaches adopted by the implementing agencies and the difficulties inherent in achieving these aims in practice are outlined. The chapter is particularly concerned with how issues relating to implementation impact on efforts to move toward greater beneficiary inclusion in socioeconomic networks. Crucially, the chapter stresses the ongoing need in practice to move away from a homogenising digital-divide-style approach to ICT4PR, and to better engage with localised realities and contexts.

Introduction

We have plenty of information. We visit other farmers, talk...listen to the radio, watch television...read books! ~Farmer and local official, male, nonpoor, December 4, 2004

Maybe the telecentre is only for rich people [orang mampu]....Information [in Pabelan] does not flow evenly [tidak merata]—it is only for certain people. So poor people, like me, often do not in fact receive information. ~Occasional child minder, female, poor, February 29, 2005

In recent years, there have been increasing interest, speculation, and debate regarding the potential of information communication technologies to facilitate and contribute toward a process of development (ICT for development, ICT4D). This interest has been accompanied by a plethora of activities seeking to harness the potential of ICTs to a correspondingly varied array of development ends. This chapter focuses on an attempt to utilise ICTs for poverty reduction (ICT4PR) in a rural Indonesian community. Research informing this chapter was conducted at the e-Pabelan national ICT4PR pilot project in the village of Pabelan between October 2004 and August 2005.¹ e-Pabelan (<http://e-pabelan.myserver.org/portal>) is the initial pilot of the Partnerships for e-Prosperity for the Poor (PePP) programme (<http://www.ict4pr.org>) of the National Development Planning Agency (Badan Perencanaan Pembangunan Nasional, BAPPENAS) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

e-Pabelan became operational in May 2004. The project takes the form of a telecentre that was established with five computers providing dial-up access to the Internet, plus ancillary equipment including a scanner, printer, and digital projector.² More established ICTs such as a telephone or facsimile machine were not provided. The equipment was provided by BAPPENAS/UNDP as was payment for the Internet connection for the first year, some educational materials, and limited training for some staff and members of the community. The chosen local partner was the Islamic boarding school Pondok Pesantren Pabelan acting through its community development wing Balai Pengkajian dan Pengembangan Masyarakat (BPPM). The pesantren is a coeducational secondary (equivalent) school, which, alongside the emphasis on Islamic teachings and proper conduct, follows the Indonesian national curriculum. Additional emphasis is placed on the teaching of languages, including English, and science classes, as well as a range of extracurricular activities. The pesantren is highly regarded nationally and has attracted students from across the archipelago and from abroad. In its capacity as a local partner, the pesantren provided the use of the BPPM building and payment for electricity. Staff, acting on a volunteer basis at the telecentre, were appointed from within the BPPM as well as some senior students from the pesantren (all male). Usage of the Internet at the telecentre was free for the first year, although there were some complaints that individuals from outside the pesantren had been asked to pay in the early months. The project was, somewhat optimistically, expected to be financially independent after the first year.

The chapter proceeds through presenting a case study of the e-Pabelan project rather than a more theoretical analysis of ICT4PR, and limits itself to issues arising from the implementation and development of e-Pabelan over the project's first year. Enthusiasm for ICT4PR is first briefly situated against a broader backdrop. e-Pabelan is then placed in its local context. The chapter emphasises that such contextualisation is critical. Experiences from the three

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