

Chapter III

An Explorative Study of Dynamic Influences on ICT–Led Developmental Impact at Community Level

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ABSTRACT

While there is hope that ICT interventions will lead to socio-economic development in developing countries, there is a dearth of research concerning ICT-led impact studies aiming to identify either potential or actual development at the community (individual/family/group) level in rural areas. This chapter presents an exploratory and interpretive study that investigates the human development perspective at the centre of the research. The authors present data gathered from a village in rural Bangladesh where an ICT intervention; namely Gonokendra (multi-purpose community access centre), has been incepted. From a thematic analysis of the data, issues such as access to technology/information; skills building; income opportunity; health/legal awareness; and gender implications, have emerged. This chapter concludes that development at the community level is a dynamic process emerging from the complex social interaction of actors' (for eg individual, family/group and society) interests. The authors uncover that the interactions are further influenced by other dominant forces, including social constraints over individuals or family interests and decision making.

INTRODUCTION

It is argued that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can contribute to development, especially in developing countries. Bearing this in mind, developing countries are implementing various ambitious ICT projects (also known as ICT for development/ICT4D projects) in rural areas, aiming to foster the socio-economic development of actual beneficiaries. However, the question remains unanswered: *What are the influences of ICT4D projects on the socio-economic development of the actual beneficiaries in rural areas of developing countries?* Unfortunately, little emphasis has been given to understanding the impact side (for example, users' willingness and capacity to acquire/use services) compared with implementing the project (Ashraf, Hanisch & Swatman, 2006; Heeks, 2002). Few attempts have been undertaken to investigate impact (Harris, 2005; Madon, 2003; Sein & Harindranath, 2004; Selhofer & Hüsing, 2002; UNDP, 2004; UNESCO, 2005; Young, 1997) especially at national and organizational level, leaving a gap in understanding at the community or micro level.

This research is an attempt to fill this gap by addressing the above question in a particular social context of Bangladesh; one of the most densely populated developing countries in the World. The first National ICT policy, 2002 in Bangladesh had a clear vision and an agenda with regard to the national and rural socio-economic development, as described '...promote and facilitate use of ICT in all sectors of the economy for transparency, good governance and efficiency improvement' (Gazette, 2002, section, 2.2.4).

Since then the Government of Bangladesh, along with donor agencies and NGOs, have initiated various ICT4D projects in rural areas. Therefore, it is important to understand the impact of such projects at the micro level in order to analyze the current status of such projects, providing guidance for future effort. This research seeks to contribute to this body of knowledge by under-

standing one particular ICT4D project namely 'Gonokendra' (multi-purpose community access centre) in a particular village of Bangladesh. Having established the rationale of this research, we turn to present a brief literature review of ICT4D that provides the foundations of this chapter.

ICT for Development (ICT4D): Literature Review

The objective of this section is to analyze some aspects of the evolution of development (concepts and perspectives) and the interaction between ICT and relevant dimensions of development. 'ICT for Development' is a relatively broad concept which requires thorough discussion. Hence, the section is broken into three sub-sections – including (1) the core concept of development; (2) some perspectives of development; and (3) how ICT interacts with development, providing a mechanism to address the research question.

Understanding Development

Development may be viewed with regard to any or all of a list of national goals or values in the economic and social life (McGranahan, 1972). Though there was a tendency to interchange development with growth, such identification came under criticism in 1960 (Szirmai, 2005). Simply put, development considers human resource and infrastructure improvement, whereas growth considers only per capita national income (Yah, 1991). Further, Yah (1991) has differentiated development and growth in terms of long-run and short-run perspective of production, technological change, literacy and so on.

Identifying *per capita* Gross National Product (GNP) is the ultimate intention of defining development from the economic perspective. Some such indicators are production, investment, consumption and government purchase (McGranahan, 1972). This viewpoint has been criticized by many authors (Hettne, 1990; Peet, 1995; Sen,

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