Chapter 19
Managing and Enhancing ICT Uptake in Rural Communities in Botswana

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on the management of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) deployed in rural communities in Botswana to ensure its effective and efficient utilisation in order to improve the quality of life of the rural people. The key for ICT to reach rural communities and satisfy their needs lies with the availability of the telecommunication infrastructure. ICT rural service centres help connect the rural communities to the global village. One of the critical steps in the management of the uptake of ICT in rural communities is a strategic plan driven by village development committees (VDCs). This is expected to facilitate ownership and accountability of the recipients of ICTs. It empowers the communities and establishes keen interest in the uptake of ICT by male and female, old and young. Community centred development is enhanced when the communities themselves are involved right from the conception of ICT initiatives. Communities are more likely to tap into their indigenous knowledge systems to craft strategies that can minimise the digital phobia, hence, increase the ICT uptake by all age groups. Ultimately this arrangement can ensure gender parity. The increase in ICT uptake by rural communities has the potential to close the digital divide between urban and rural areas in Botswana.

INTRODUCTION

The use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in developing countries is critical for improving the quality of life of rural communities. As a developing country, Botswana is currently making an effort to improve the telecommunication infrastructure country wide which is meant to close the digital divide between the urban and rural communities. The participation of rural communities in the management of ICT is crucial for ownership by the end-users and for sustainable development. The strategic management of ICT in rural communities calls for a shared vision and values by the local community. Such a vision should promote effective utilisation of ICTs andenhance the implementation of rural projects. Timely implementation of rural projects brings the desired outcomes and as such contributes significantly to improved quality of life for the rural communities.

This chapter focuses on the management of ICTs in a rural community context in Botswana and on the importance of ICT for rural community development. The state of ICT in rural communities in Botswana is assessed before examining ICT strategic planning, management and strategies for enhancing ICT up take.

The Rural Community Context

The conditions of rural communities in Botswana shows varied levels of development ranging from developed to underdeveloped. The eastern part is mostly developed while the western exhibit serious pockets of underdevelopment. Signs of development in the eastern part include well developed road and telecommunication network. The eastern part also has urban centres which are easily connected to the big villages. This makes investment in telecommunication in this part of the country more lucrative than in the western part where the area is sparsely populated and the villages are smaller. Sources of livelihood in

the rural eastern part of the country are mainly agro-industries, arable and pastoral farming. Also, brick moulding, pottery and craft manufacturing are some of the important activities done in some villages. The eastern part of the country has post offices located in all big villages and the postal services are reasonably good. These Post Offices are also accessible to smaller villages. They have the advantage of having telephonic connections that facilitate transmission of telegraphic money orders.

The western part of the country on the other hand enjoys pastoral farming because it has good grazing pastures However, the challenge it faces is shortage of water as the existing sources often run dry. The other challenge in the western part of the country is that post offices are only at selected villages which happen to be far away from some settlements. The remote settlements have no post offices and this presents a huge challenge for ICT uptake. ICT uptake is easier to facilitate when there are existing structures that can be utilised through sharing of the resources.

The current uptake of ICT in the eastern part of the country is enjoyed by a great number of people because of the existing telecommunication infrastructure, the level of literacy and the existence of a diverse business community. The literacy level of communities in the eastern part of the country is good as both the old and the young are literate above 81%. In contrast, the literacy level in the western part of the country is low particularly in the settlements as it is below 68% (Hanemann, 2005) Therefore, the uptake of ICT is almost non-existent because of the lack of infrastructure..

Current State of ICT in Rural Communities in Botswana

The awareness of ICT in Botswana has spread countrywide (Botswana Technology Centre, 2010). The commonly used ICT gadget are mobile phones which most citizens and residents of

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