

Chapter 25

Boosting the Social Development of the Majority Through the Creation of a Wireless Knowledge Society

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ABSTRACT

The advances and diffusion of information and communication technology (ICT) combined with the growth of the internet have led to deep transformations in economic, social, and institutional structures. ICT affects the performance of businesses and the efficiency of markets, fosters the empowerment of citizens and communities as well as their access to knowledge, and contributes to strengthening and redefining governance processes at all institutional levels. ICT is at the same time creating enormous opportunities and posing daunting challenges. On one hand, it has the potential to increase productivity and wealth, generate new activities, products and services, and improve the wellbeing of the population. On the other hand, the uneven distribution of such opportunities can lead to further alienation of marginalized communities and an exacerbation of existing socioeconomic inequalities. This chapter presents some of the best ICT practices aiming at boosting the social development of the majority contributing to the creation of a wireless and inclusive knowledge society.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid advances and pervasive diffusion of information and communication technology (ICT), combined with the growth of the wireless Internet, has led to deep transformations in economic, social and institutional structures. ICT applications affect the performance of businesses and the efficiency of markets, foster the empowerment of citizens and communities as well as their access to knowledge, and contribute to strengthening and redefining governance processes at all institutional levels. Nevertheless, as all major and wide-ranging technological advances, the deployment of ICT is at the same time creating enormous opportunities and posing daunting challenges to the Majority in the emerging economies (EE).

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According to C.K. Prahalad (2005) in his book, *The Fortune at the Bottom the Pyramid*, “The distribution of wealth and the capacity to generate incomes in the world can be captured in the form of an economic pyramid. At the top of the pyramid are the wealthy, with numerous opportunities for generating high levels of income. More than 4 billion live at the Base of the Pyramid (BOP), on less than \$2 per day. Those are the Majority.”

This paper presents some of the successful sustainable ICT practices aiming at boosting the social development of the Majority contributing to the creation of a wireless and inclusive Knowledge Society. It also offers a road map for the international financial institutions, particularly the Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs), aiming at supporting ICT for development programs benefitting EE.

BACKGROUND

The United Nations Millennium Declaration (United Nations, n.d.) noted that efforts to make internet access available to all and to harness the power of ICT could contribute toward the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), thereby creating “digital opportunities” in development. The ongoing debate on the new set of UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) reignites the interest for the ICT in a contest of emerging knowledge economies and societies.

The ICT can facilitate the participation of lower income populations, the majority at the base of the pyramid, according to the definition given in (Pralhad, 2005) in the development process by directly tackling relevant aspects, which precisely hinder their integration into social and economic development. Such aspects concern:

- Limited knowledge and literacy which impairs access to skills and jobs (education);
- Poor health and sanitary conditions limiting employability and risk-taking attitudes (health);
- Scarcity of economic opportunities (economy);
- Limited involvement in civic life and in the democratic processes, as well as uneasy access to public services (government).

The following successful sustainable practices, show how ICT can help reducing the risks of exclusion related to the aspects cited above, thus contributing to the integration of lower income populations into social and economic development. Based on the lesson learned from the practices, we draw some conclusions and offer some recommendations. These recommendations are the basis for forward-looking scenarios that can be realized through the deployment of ICT towards the attainment of an inclusive economic growth process for all, meeting social development and poverty reduction objectives, as expressed in the United Nations Millennium Declaration.

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