

Chapter 4

Capacity Development Initiatives for Grass Roots Communities: Two Cases

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The world has seen the unprecedented development of information and communications technologies (ICTs) and adoption of their diversified methods in elevating all forms of human endeavors. Even a few years back, it was fashionable to speak about the global village. In recent years, many countries have taken leading role in implementing innovative ICT products to accelerate their national developments, enhance their livelihoods, strengthened their national economies and improve their governance systems. This has been observed that those countries could reap the most benefits out of ICT strategies, which could penetrate at the lowest tier of their governance system. In this context, human development is an element of importance. This research emphasizes that cumulative human development through community approach would be the next level of knowledge dynamics across the world. It also argues that as much the country provides thrust on capacity development initiatives at the grass roots, it has more opportunity to reach at greater context of governance system. This chapter would like to focus on two cases, which penetrated the grass roots reaching out to the community level, act as catalyst to strengthen their national economy and government. Some features and perspectives of e-Sri Lanka and e-Korea are being discussed here to provide insight into these cases, so that researchers in developing and transitional economies could gain knowledge.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

The twenty-first century predominately constitutes a information and knowledge-based society, where

every country aspires to achieve its goal of social and economic development, including education, food security, health, environment, gender equity and cultural pluralism. However, the most important problem would remain as attaining and sustaining those goals. Therefore, every continent

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-61692-814-8.ch004

is concentrating in building its own Information Society, until a global village is formed.

However, in contrast to the developed countries that have been steadily capitalizing the rapid pace of information and communications technologies (ICTs), a large number of developing countries, particularly low-income countries are lagging behind in adapting these technologies and contributing to the information-divide or digital-divide, or more appropriately knowledge-divide (GITR, 2006; 2007). This is also true in case of rural villages where modern technologies are struggling to reach. The majority of people living in rural areas has neither access nor the means to obtain modern ICT because of their low economic position (Gunatunge & Karunanayake, 2004; Escudero-Pascual, 2008). They aggravate further when other hindrance parameters such as policies or politics, cultures or societies, regulations or regulators, promotions or motivations, and economic gain or status gain mingle up altogether.

The term 'global village' perhaps, coined by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in 1998 (UNDP, 1998) with aspiration that everyone will be a full member of this village. With support from UN, ITU and others, IGF (IGF, 2008) coined another term, 'Internet for All', which could bring everyone on the planet under this future umbrella. But, author argues that both of these terms are over ambitious, despite their importance, and need to be nourished with total subsidized support from all corners to establish at least the information backbone in all countries, which is the most basic pre-requisite for carrying out those two slogans. Furthermore, he argues that with the shifting of focus of international organizations and donor agencies towards the development of information base knowledge society may lead to another form of divide within or among the country's in need. He would like to give one example from the Internet Governance Forum, which is the most effective and dynamic forum providing all out issue support for the development of the Internet. Focus of IGF has even

shifted from openness, security, diversity, access (emphasizes the openness) (IGF, 2006); access, diversity, openness, security (emphasizes the access) (IGF, 2007); Reaching the Next Billion, Promoting Cyber-Security and Trust, Managing Critical Internet Resources, Emerging Issues: The Internet of Tomorrow- Innovation and the Evolution of the Internet (more pragmatic approach in reaching out for the grass roots, emphasizing perhaps the access) (IGF, 2008); Managing Critical Internet Resources, Security, Openness and Privacy, Access and Diversity, Internet Governance in the Light of WSIS Principles (emphasizes more on technology issues; access is there, but in diluted form (IGF, 2009).

The shift of focus or emphasizing of efforts or re-direction of resources are inevitable for any development programme, especially who are dealing with human development utilizing the novel techniques of ICTs. But, there remain several forms of gaps or laggings, in those countries who are not among the forerunners. Hence, in spite of putting all out painstaking efforts and resources, and even dedicated willingness, many set apart from being among the mainstream. There could be many failed projects, programmes or strategies, but this research scope would like to focus on two success cases of ICT strategies in two countries, who have taken lead in terms of providing e-government services at the grass roots.

This chapter as a continuation of research work in the perspective to reach the people at large, especially the marginalized and disadvantaged through utilization of ICT (for previous work, see the case portion of e-Sri Lanka from Islam, Murelli, Noronha & Rahman, 2006:338-351), would like to revisit a case, the e-Sri Lanka who has proved itself as a success case in South Asia, and in addition being familiar with the other project, e-Korea (through three consecutive visits to various project area in 2001, First Asia Internet Right Conference, Organized by Jinbonet and the Association for Progressive Communications, Seoul, South Korea; participant of a World

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