Preamble

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) is an umbrella term that includes all available technologies for the manipulation and communication of information, and nowadays used to encompass all available forms of computing systems, telecommunications, and interconnected networks across a localized premises, or an extended area serving a community or city or state or a nation, or across the region forming a global communications network. It ranges from adoption of technologies to accumulate, store, retrieve, process, analyze and disseminate information. In advanced format of ICT, usage of adaptive technologies has progressively reduced the costs of managing information, enabling users to undertake information-related tasks much more efficiently than before, and introduced innovations in products, processes and infrastructures.

However, ICT capabilities vary widely from the highly sophisticated developed economies to less adopted developing or transitional economies. But, it is a promising sign that the later are catching up first, and often leapfrogging over the earlier version of the implemented technologies to enhance novel solutions in a more adoptive way according to the demand at the grass roots. Moreover, ICT is encompassing all forms of human activities ranging from learning, livelihood improvement, governance, and human resources development. The most interactive elements in these aspects, are human and ICT is most essential for human resource development.

Human resource development, basically human development is the process of transforming a community (by raising capacity of its members in groups or individual) or an organization (by enhancing capacity of its employees) through an accepted form of learning to raise their knowledge on information for attaining higher mental capacity so that they can take intelligent decision to run their livelihood and community, perform better in tasks, and take part in national consensus for improved governance.

Despite, the Human Development Report of UNDP (2004a) indicates that, the standard of living of a country can be assessed by the GDP per capita, but, in the context of raising the standard of living, and in addressing the challenging issues of basic human livelihood, like basic social pattern, life expectancy and basic knowledge development neo-ICTs can play as an enabling factor. ICTs in the aspect of human development has covered almost all the arena of human activities, such as e-learning, m-learning, e-governance, e-health, e-society, e-policy, and henceforth, e-culture (Avgerou, 2003; Attewell, 2005; OECD, 2007; Brown & Brown, 2008; Rahman, 2008).

Furthermore, as important as the information infrastructure, human development and ICT use are also becoming two important elements of e-policies in many developing nations. Human skills and knowledge would be the main economic resources in a knowledge-based society, and the stakeholders involved in this aspect require to exchange information about quality and content of knowledge and skill development resources. Therefore, the development of a protocol for communication about skills and knowledge deserves a strong commitment, cooperation and effort on research and development, thus analyzing, prototyping, piloting, structuring, classifying and

Keeping all these issues in context, the International Journal of ICT and Human Development (IJICTHD) of IGI has prepared this special issue of the journal portraying several challenging aspects on the utilization of ICTs for raising human capacities to promote e-governance.

ABOUT THE CONTENTS

Learning is considered as one of the essential tools to empower a community. Due to its potentiality, over the past three decades, technology-mediated learning has been recognized as an alternate channel strengthening/replacing the traditional forms of education in various forms. To enhance the process of human development utilizing the methods of ICTs in learning, Article 1 emphasizes on introducing collaborative learning at community level and improve the knowledge capacity at the grass roots for the empowerment of community participants. The article continued to investigate the relationship of collaborative learning towards improved e-governance, and discusses about various channels of collaborative learning, methods that could be adopted during the implementation. A few cases are being included in the article, and a few future research issues in the aspect of collaborative learning for empowerment of communities are being mentioned.

In recent years, many governmental institutions have started to provide their customers with access to governmental documents by electronic means. This also relates to improve human capacities to participate more actively in the livelihood systems. Article 2 focuses on approaches that provide access to governmental processes for people with visual impairments, elderly people, illiterates, or immigrants. Additionally, it sees a chance to enable electronic government processes in developing countries where the citizens have less experience in handling IT-based processes. The main part of the article describes an approach to combine scanned images of article-based forms containing textual information and text-to-speech synthesis yielding an audio-visual document representation. It exploits standard document formats based on XML and web service technology to achieve independency from software and hardware platforms.

Article 3 discusses about introducing ICT methods in managing local government activities and decision making processes. The article asserts that, despite the popularity, potency and perfection of electronic government (e-Government) systems, it is yet somehow remain in uncharted territory for many countries in terms of implementing e-governance at the local government level. The article has tried to draw a line of reference to implement e-government system by putting forwarding the importance of local e-government organizational structure, and their supremacies through utilization of ICT. Along this context, the article has attempted to synthesize a few prospective local e-government scenarios in a few countries, focus on their adaptation of ICT, puts forward recommendations to improve local e-government for better utilization of information services.

Nowadays, diffusion of ICTs has become a global phenomenon. However, in spite of rapid globalization there are considerable differences exist between nations in terms of the adoption and usage of new technologies. The focus of Article 4 is slightly different from other studies in this journal. This research conducted an analysis on the impact of national culture that has on e-government readiness and its components in 62 countries. E-government readiness assessment used in this study is based on the UN E-Government Survey 2008, while the national cultural dimensions were identified using Hofstede’s model of cultural differences. The research model and hypotheses were formed and tested using correlation and regression analysis. The findings indicate that worldwide e-government readiness and its components are related to culture.

Finally, Article 5 emphasizes that, e-government is not only an innovative idea, but also a practical activity of high priority in a growing number of countries. It reflects the emergence and development of information societies (IS) with increased participation of each elements of the society. The article argues that socio-cultural context is a framework of e-government strategies and practices. It is important to consider and understand the socio-cultural characteristics and functioning of society while its e-government un-
 Undertakings are planned and introduced. From this point of view, the presently emerging worldwide information societies can be grouped in classes. It may help to analyze the classes’ needs and possibilities and to formulate proper e-government agenda to be implemented. The article has tried to identify and briefly analyze the challenges for e-government strategies and practices from the point of view of socio-cultural context. It further argues that this context should be treated dynamically, as changing and as creating potential for change leading to further advancement of IS.

**CONCLUSION**

Despite the fact that ICTs have enclosed each and every area of human endeavors, but in many countries their proper application and implementation are at their experimental stage. In many countries, pilot projects or programmes have been launched, but their effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and especially the sustainability need to be benchmarked, researched, measured and compared to similar nature of implementations. Furthermore, comparison of individual efforts with global or regional nature of initiatives is not that simple. They imply numerous factors, such as culture, society, economy, policy, law, geography, and others.

This special issue of IJICTHD has focused on enhancing the human capacities through collaborative learning, creating an elevated platform of accessibility to provide better e-government services to people of special needs, and further, extended inclusion of all elements of the society through management of e-government systems at the local level to enhance e-governance at the grass roots, and analyzing an important element of the ICT implementation in the society, as such the socio-cultural aspect. However, as stated above, many countries are lagging behind in implementing pragmatics ICT implementations in their countries, and reaping real benefits out of it.

Moreover, there has not been many researches in the aspect of analyzing the operational modalities (qualitative, quantitative) and measuring the impact of implementations of ICTs (qualitative, quantitative). Organizations have started realizing importance of this issue and recently conducting research and studies along these contexts. It is expected that this special issue of IJICTHD will act as a baseline or catalyst to motivate its readers and researchers to exhume further into this arena, and a handbook of research can be arranged by collecting researchers on benchmarking and put forwarding effective measurable criteria (digital access index, digital opportunity index, ICT opportunity index, ICT development index (World Bank, 1995; UNDP, 2004b; ITU, 2009), for measuring actual impact of ICT implementations at the grass roots.

**REFERENCES**


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**ENDNOTE**

1 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information_and_Communication_technology

2 http://www.ict.ox.ac.uk/strategy/plan/plan.xml.ID=appF


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Hakikur Rahman, PhD is the founder-principal, Institute of Computer Management & Science (ICMS), and president of ICMS Foundation. He is currently serving as a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Minho, Portugal. He is an adjunct faculty of the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Agricultural University, former faculty of International University of Business Agriculture and Technology, Bangladesh, and former secretary of the South Asia Foundation Bangladesh Chapter (2001-2008). He served Sustainable Development Networking Foundation (SDNF) as its executive director (CEO) from January 2007 to December 2007, the transformed entity of the Sustainable Development Networking Programme (SDNP) in Bangladesh where he was working as the National Project Coordinator since December 1999. SDNP is a global initiative of UNDP and it completed its activity in Bangladesh on December 31, 2006. Before joining SDNP he worked as the director, Computer Division, Bangladesh Open University. Graduating from the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology in 1981, he has done his master’s of engineering from the American University of Beirut in 1986 and completed his PhD in computer engineering from the Ansted University, UK in 2001.