ICTs and Educational Benefits in Regional Development

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Abstract

ICTs can play an important role in improving public education in rural regions. The effects of ICT use in schools can, in turn, bring unexpected economic benefits to the region. ICT developers interested in building economies can use education as a sustainable, grassroots building block for future growth. While many development programs tend to focus on private models for ICT dissemination in remote regions (such as telecenters), public education embodies a spirit of universal accessibility that can bring global technologies into the daily lives of all world citizens. When ICTs are recognized as pedagogical tools, they serve both the long-term economic and cultural needs of communities.
Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have changed the way of thinking about the planet by transforming almost every field of human activity, from agriculture to entertainment, from government to education. While many rural regions of developing nations have yet to experience all of the benefits of a high-tech era, significant efforts are being made to bring ICT to all communities around the globe. However, building and maintaining the infrastructure of a networked world is no small undertaking, and many governments strain to justify the costs of bringing cutting-edge technologies to impoverished regions in the developing world. Furthermore, the technologies exported from developed nations seldom come without considerable ideological baggage concerning their usefulness, as well as their social and environmental impacts. If many communities around the world continue to struggle with basic necessities, it can certainly be asked whether or not an aggressive strategy of ICT development is really a universal priority.

Nevertheless, ICT’s potential to bring about radical growth and development is difficult to dismiss. In regions where many development agencies continue to focus on providing clean water and protecting fundamental human rights, other development groups are exploring ICT dissemination as a useful tool in those same projects. Although ICT growth is often at odds with established programs of development, many innovative projects attempt to balance these two, seemingly contradictory sets of demands. ICT infrastructure is an extraordinary expense for many developing governments, but short-term costs must be considered in relation to long-term advantages. Communication networks allow remote regions to interact with urban centers, democratizing trade and protecting against widespread health crises. Telecenters and computer kiosks provide rural communities with increased access to government records and forms, improving democratic transparency and aiding with legal disputes.

Furthermore, and most importantly for this chapter, information and communication technologies radically transform public education, allowing students and teachers to bridge the gap between local communities and global issues. ICT development can introduce young learners to an incredible realm of information and culture, while at the same time allowing students to express their own identities to the world. Technical literacy, supported with the critical skills needed to protect cultural awareness, can open unimaginable possibilities for students, bringing the realities of a global knowledge economy to any schoolroom on the planet.

Accordingly, the international community has long held education as a fundamental and inalienable human right. Education helps to create citizens for the world in which they want to live, allowing individuals to develop their identities within a context of historical, cultural and ethical norms. As a result, education plays a pivotal role in development projects; as the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Koichiro Matsuura, argues, “Education—in all its forms and at all levels—is not only an end in itself but is also one of the most powerful instruments we have for bringing about the changes required to achieve sustainable development” (UNESCO, 2004, p. 8). Education fosters development because it encourages learners to consider their own, local circumstances in a broader context. Furthermore, it promotes sustainable development by situating new perspectives within historical frameworks; whereas individual development
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