INTERVIEW

Interview with Prof. Subhash Bhatnagar, Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, India

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1. Amartya Sen defines development as giving the opportunity to individuals to become the authors of their own lives within the social groups they belong to. How could information and communication (ICT) tools contribute to achieve this view of development?

I do not see ICT tools contributing to empowerment of poor people in the immediate future. The main reason why poor are disempowered is their lack of literacy. They neither understand their own entitlement nor have the ability to seek help. ICTs cannot be the primary tools to create literacy. However, in disseminating the rights and entitlement of the people, electronic media can play a significant role.

Now, or in the foreseeable future, poor people will need the support of external agencies that can understand their needs and guide the poor communities to use ICTs in a manner that can help solve some of the community’s problems. I am talking about grassroots organizations that live and breathe in the same space as the poor communities and help them articulate their concerns. At a point, when the poor can stand on their own feet, perhaps either the non-governmental organization (NGO) withdraws or the community pushes out the NGOs. Because these grassroots organizations are half part of the community, I feel that they are much better placed than agencies that are completely external and are trying to provide solutions for the problems of poor communities. Often grassroots organizations first grapple with a problem and then may look for solutions which are ICT based or otherwise. On the other hand donors tend to push technology and seek problems that can be solved by ICTs even though such ICTs may not be the most cost effective way to deal with the problems.

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Online Social Capital Among Social Networking Sites' Users
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