

Leveraging Information and Communication Technology (ICTs) for Responsive Governance in meeting MDGs

Abstract

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South Asia is a region of striking socio-economic and cultural diversity with wide variations among countries. The scale and diversity of South Asia present a huge challenge in addressing Millennium Development Goals which are a set of numerical and time-bound targets related to key achievements in human development. The Millennium Declaration calls for development efforts to address poverty in all its dimensions by 2015.

Assessment of progress in South Asian region reveals that the challenge of poverty remains great. Accounting for nearly half of the total world population living in poverty, over 500 million people in the region suffer from severe deprivation. The main reason for South Asia's human deprivation is not just economic rather they go hand –in- hand with social and political factors rooted in poor governance. Governance in South Asia has witnessed poor accountability, improper coordination and lack of transparency-leading to increasing poverty. The critical links between governance and human development need to be addressed. Good governance must lead to broad-based economic growth and social development and ensure that human development is sustainable. In this context the role of ICT assumes paramount importance.

The framework of this paper is based on Systems Analysis from a Holistic Perspective where multiple factors i.e governance, ICT and developments are inter-linked to each other. In this process ICT is a supportive component of development catalyzing meaningful initiatives. .To plan an appropriate ICT strategy, it is necessary to blend other development variables such as gender, equity and empowerment.

In the recent times the issue of good governance has emerged at the fore front of the agenda for sustainable development. The major characteristics of good governance i.e participatory, consensus oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive and follows the rule of law .Good governance puts people at the center of all policies, strategies and actions Here development is a political process that engages people particularly marginalized sections of society in a meaningful

interaction with government and society.. Good governance depends upon three important elements i.e institutions, the delivery mechanism and a supportive and subordinate framework of rules, procedures and legislation. There is a continuous interplay of these elements. Right to Information (RTI) Act 2005 is an important tool which can ensure responsive governance. People have a right to know how the government is functioning. The primary power of RTI is the fact it empowers individual citizens to requisition information. There is a need to advocate the usage of RTI so that responsive governance prevails. The application of ICTs holds immense potential of catalyzing this process.

Decentralized planning and programme intervention can ensure people's participation for advancing good governance. In India Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) on the decentralized units of local governance have to play an active role Introduction of ICT will open a whole range of opportunities for integrating community participation in development and strengthen the partnership between state and society. Enhancing the capacity of institutions and people by empowering them with ICT assisted new knowledge, skill and competency required for sustainable human development.

Investment in ICT are needed however investment will provide the desired result only when an responsive governance is in place. It is imperative to advocate for responsive governance to ensure that benefits of development percolate down to the people. Development strategies should incorporate ICT policies as an integral part in diagnosis of needs and in the design and implementation of selected priorities. Government needs to consider ICT as a crucial part of the national development process and adopt a positive and proactive approach.

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