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but seldom succeeded in initiating a healthy growth curve of utility to acceptance to aspirations.

India has been in the forefront of implementing many ICT initiatives to propel the development goals- human, economic, social, infrastructure and governance. Many initiatives have been sponsored by state agencies, and of late, all the federal units have established a separate ministry for Information technology implying attempts to democratize IT. However, factors like poverty and illiteracy distance the poor's cultural ergonomics from technology, which in turn

## From Technological Alienation to Aspirations

The ICT revolution envisages a global revolution by bridging the glaring digital divide across nations. Sadly, the disparities are alarming.

The problem, I have to say, is not new. Developing nations have just 20% of the 153 mn global broad band connections. Western nations have more access to bigger bandwidth. Just 38% of developing nations' schools is online. If culture of literacy is a proxy for culture of technology, then, the illiteracy that exists in the developing nations can make the story more complicated by adding social groups such as marginalised groups and women who are at the wrong side of the digital divide.

I suggest we need some serious reworking here because time and experience has shown us that the solution to technological gaps does not lie in merely having computers, mobile phones and the internet. More significant are issues of affordability, penetration and utility (Manzar, 2005).

This brings us back to the issue of democratizing technology at all levels - policies, production and application. Information Communication Technology for development (ICT4D) is a school of thought that attempts to harness the developments in ICT to advance the goals of development, which includes tailor made production and application and implementation based on an understanding of who is left out and why.

### ICT4D: Beyond the Clichés

A sweeping statement that would describe ICT4D interventions is that there are many islands of good interventions and many of the interventions have been able to reduce the distance between the disadvantaged and the technology

reduces the utility technology for them. The technological acceptance model can be simplified in a way that it reduces the technological alienation through enhancing the existing skill levels or livelihood mode. This model holds a special relevance to India. For example, the Green Revolution increased food production in India by making technology acceptable to farmers by using utility as the entry point.

### Traditional Skill Conversion Project in the Old City of Hyderabad

Speaking in this context, I would like to give the case of Hyderabad, the capital city of Andhra Pradesh, which is an urban agglomeration characterized by high density of low income population living with poor infrastructure and civic amenities. The incidences of illegal occupations and crime rates are high, and so is the school drop out rate, especially among girls. The city also witnesses high rate of child labour in domestic and other low productive enterprises. The slums in the old city do not hold conducive environment for any realistic aspiration for the economic or social wellbeing of children. This manifests in adherence to traditional skills and continuous poverty through generations.

Technology for the People (TFTP) organisation's intervention in the old city has been to support schools (run by Roshan Vikas - a Cooperative Society of women) that would cater to working adolescents who cannot return to formal schools due to several factors. By offering flexible timings and adequate individual time to appear for the National Open School, TFTP helped overcome illiteracy. Education opportunities have also raised the average age of marriage which is otherwise lower than the legal age of 18.

TFTP has partnered with Star Features Studio (an Indian Firm involved in developing animation series) to develop the training methodology for conversion of the traditional craftspeople into animation artists.

While this collaboration addresses the issue of high turnover of artists, the trained persons from the TFTP initiative are provided work at the existing market rate by the studio. Towards this, the studio is willing to outsource its work to the trained young people. During the current year of 2006-2007, 70 animation artists were trained and 30 are already employed during the pilot phase by this particular studio.

### Blending tradition with modernity

An irony is that the poor living in slums, despite being well endowed with traditional skills, barely manage a living out of it due to archaic methods, lack of access to capital and markets.

My suggestion here is that we should blend tradition with modernity and use novel methods to market these skills in the new economy. Such an initiative will help the youth in supplementing their family incomes. More importantly, being economically productive will relieve girls from such backgrounds from the pressure of early marriage.

### A New World: From Mehendi to Animation

A project was started to enable this blend of traditional art with modern technology, where adolescent girls with drawing skills who undertake Mehendi designing and zardosi embroidery as a source of livelihood were screened for the first batch.

Now the programme comprises course duration of six months, followed by a one-year internship with stipend. This programme is coordinated in a way that it ensures completion of secondary level education, as the course and the internship is linked to school attendance. The two-hour long classes conducted to prepare these working girls for the NIOS exam are extended to complete the training in six months. The job placement by the training agency for a monthly salary which is six times more than the current monthly income is another incentive to continue education

### Insights from the Intervention

Most girls who joined this programme had their first experience with computer only during the training. Lack of technical knowledge created less apprehension among them as they were chosen based on their existing skills. The only new skill to be learned in the initial stage was getting famil-

iarized with the mouse and this reduced any apprehensions they had in operating a machine. Practice kits gave them a challenging situation to create the same with a mouse that they otherwise would do with ease. Use of ease with which the training programme started safeguarded drop outs.

Some of the trainees who were faster in completing the module were taken on a stipend earlier than others. This not only acted as an incentive for others to indulge in practice, but also allowed the community to value the intervention on many counts.

The dispensation of education has many unintended social benefits. Foremost is the discernible increase in the value of education for girls among the community which otherwise tends to send girls only for learning scriptures and marries them off soon after puberty. The intervention has pushed the age of marriage closer to the legal age.

The community experienced for the first time that technology can bring value addition to a women's life.

Most importantly, the insistence on secondary school certificate to become permanent employees of the training agency has raised their aspirations to become full fledged animation artists. Such aspirations were not only reflected in their efforts to pass the exam but also in their desire to learn and converse in English.

### Its time to change things

These are glowing examples of how technological alienation of communities can be addressed effectively by linking technological value addition or utility to their existing skill levels or livelihood practices. The challenge and opportunity lies in identifying more traditional skills that can be made modern through an inter phase of technology.

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