

## Editorial

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### In this issue

Though information and communication technologies (ICT) are making significant impacts on almost all spheres – social, economic and political – of life, very little is known about the long term impact of ICTs. ICT has been viewed to be the panacea for underdevelopment by many developing countries leading to urgent and rapid introduction of ICTs in many domains without adequate attention to socio-cultural dimensions of their application and use. We have two papers in this issue dealing with this aspect.

Gomez and Melesse, from IDRC Canada, in their paper draw our attention to this issue to warn of the potential dangers of entering carelessly into ICT and suggest some possible remedial measures. Access to ICT resources are normally restricted to a small segment of the population in most developing countries. The technology originated in the west and carries elements of that culture in them. These may not mix well with the cultures present in many developing countries. Therefore, proper investment in training a new generation of people and a national level policy for ICT use are essential for realising the promised impact of ICTs.

Chrisanthi Avgerou, from the London School of Economics provides an analytical perspective on this issue. The paper surveys many theories proposed to understand the impact of ICTs on the economic growth of a country. The author points out that ICTs do not deterministically lead to economic growth; but rather they provide “creative distractions” which when coupled with appropriate organisational and social structures can realise their economic potential. The author emphasises the need for fundamental organisational changes in the context of ICT application. She also debates the question: should developing countries adopt the economic and organisational forms of developed countries?

These two papers debate an issue of significance to developing nations. We would be interested in hearing our reader's comments on this issue. We will carry a summary of the relevant comments in a future issue of the journal. Address your comments to the editorial office at NCST, Mumbai, India.

Schware and Jaramilla describe a case of introducing computers in Turkish schools and list out the impacts and difficulties faced in the process.

Empirical case studies discussing the process of investigating alternatives for technological investments are of value to developing nations. Ruth and Bush provide such a study in the context of implementing a computer network in Indonesia. The paper describes the problem, identifies the parameters and issues of relevance, and prepares the cost/benefit model to study the various scenarios possible. The model is used to explore options such as subsidising equipment costs, attainable number of users, impact of telecom costs, etc.

The paper by Ramasoota is a case study, of Thailand using the tools of Information Technology to create a population information network. The network, on the one hand increases the possibilities of control on the part of the government, and on the other attempts to improve the functioning of civil registration. A network of the type envisaged offers a tremendous amount of accurate data for effective decision making at a national level.

We also have a review of the book “Information Technology, Development and Policy” by E.M. Roche and M.J. Blaine. The book is an edited collection of papers dealing with the conceptual and practical problems to be addressed in order to bring IT to assist in the socio-economic development of developing countries.

The Editorial Team