



**Putting
ICTs
in the hands
of the poor**





The question

Are ICTs a useful tool for the poor?

If so, how...?

As part of a crosscutting theme on the eradication of poverty, especially extreme poverty, UNESCO has launched a new pilot initiative to innovate and research social and technological strategies to put ICTs to work in the hands of the poor.

The focus is not so much on technology itself, but on its **innovative** use to empower the poor with tools to change their circumstances.

Poverty is not just a question of income or assets. It is also a question of power. Expanding on community-based approaches to communications development, new initiatives must engage the poorest and prioritise marginalised and disempowered groups and individuals within communities.

Central strategies:

- Promotion of voice and empowerment through communication
- Localise appropriate communication and information networks
- Link resource-poor to information and tools for knowledge management

Action research is integrated across a series of different project sites in a variety of settings and environments. The approach is designed to develop a better understanding of how ICTs can be used by the poor

Key areas of investigation:

- Grassroots relationships between poverty, people and technologies
- Information and communication needs and environments of the poor
- Barriers faced by the poor in accessing and applying technology
- Effectiveness and sustainability of new solutions and initiatives





“ Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you have seen, and ask yourself, if the steps you contemplate are going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore to him control over his own life and destiny? ”

Mahatma Gandhi



- Build upon shared networks and existing assets of the poor
- Focus on women and youth as agents of change
- Build horizontal linkages and reinforce collaboration at a local level
- Increase the organising capacity and bargaining power of the poor
- Support social movements and change to oppressive social norms

ICT and strategies for change

- Integrate social and technological networks
- Combine new and traditional media
- Innovate solutions and new applications of technology



ICT examples for change

Women and their grassroots networks are a focal point for change. In a majority of project sites, women are the main participants: as learners and entrepreneurs, information users and media producers. In pilot sites in South India, the focus is on linking ICTs to women organised into 'self-help groups' (SHGs). The groups save and lend money, supporting members to manage their assets and to generate income through entrepreneurial activities. SHGs represent a powerful movement for women's self-development, for organising across communities and building awareness and skills.

In **K**arnataka, women are combining computers, internet and audio production with a local cable network to create an ICT facility that spans the entire community, its people and institutions. From the local multimedia centre, SHG representatives and other community members run a daily radio service focused on local culture and development. Using simple, adapted cable TV technology, the whole community is able to listen to their own local radio programmes, including a wide range of content sourced from the internet and CD-ROM. They can access computers, internet and multimedia at the local center.

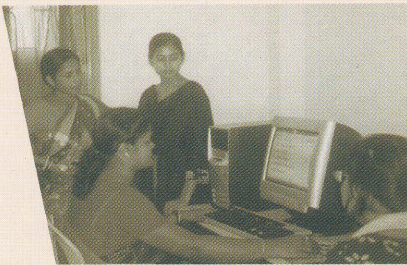
In Western **N**epal, local youth are combining the internet with local video production, training



to use computer and AV production equipment to create a 'TV Browsing the Internet' programme. The show brings the vast resources of the internet to local schools and homes, in languages and contexts that people understand. With new skills, tools and networks, poor youth have greater opportunities for education and participation, as well as accessible spaces in which to share opinions and ideas.

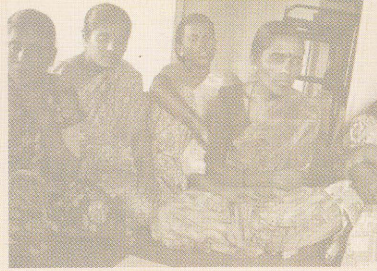


In **T**amil Nadu, women's groups in urban, semi-urban and rural locations are accessing computers, internet and multimedia content in homes belonging to their self-help group members, overcoming the barrier that many women face in using public spaces. The computers link grassroots networks of women to the knowledge networks of a state university and to the resources of the internet.



In a poor area of **E**ast Delhi, a progressive madarsa has created a space for girls and women to learn about computers and internet and to use multimedia tools to develop marketable skills. The focus is on building women's confidence through access to new tools and spaces, mentoring, imparting vocational and life skills and by encouraging entrepreneurship, cooperative approaches and new opportunities.

In **W**est Bengal, poor women from discrete and disparate regions of a geographically unusual municipality are developing a web-based partnership and building up a localised information network on issues that are of concern to them. Through collaborative development of open content and a participatory approach to both online and offline information networking, poor women are more aware, better connected and organised; with new skills and greater capacity, women are enabled to demand more equitable access to economic, social and cultural resources.



Research

“ The process of ... communication development cannot be measured in the same ways as an agricultural production process ... specific instruments to measure the processes of development communication do not yet exist; we need to find them ... ”

From an interview with Alfonso Gumucio Dagron,
Development Communication Specialist

Integrated research and documentation has been built into all of the project initiatives from the outset using an Ethnographic Action Research methodology developed in association with experts from the London School of Economics and the Queensland University of Technology.



Supported by a regional team, local on-site researchers are actively involved in day-to-day work at different project locations, building our understanding of dynamics and relationships, problems and solutions: what works, what doesn't and why. Each initiative is working with an identifiable group of poor families, generally at least two hundred women and/or youth who are engaged as entry points into the larger family and community.

Daily research is conducted using a variety of tools: dairies maintained by researchers and participants; individual and group interviews (structured and informal, brief and in-depth), participatory appraisals; participant observation and field notes; ICT usage analysis; resource mapping and survey tools.



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The research process is designed to feed into the ongoing planning and adaptation of the project's strategies. Continuous research allows local teams to reflect on results and respond appropriately. At the same time, the process develops a larger understanding how ICTs can be used effectively by the poor.

Research findings and regional analyses are shared across the entire project network on an ongoing, in-progress basis, using websites and electronic forums, through formal publications, and at relevant seminars and workshops.

For more information on the research programme consult:
www.cirac.qut.edu.au /ictpr

“ We should look at the whole structure of communication and information flows in people's ways of life: the kinds of communication and information activities they do (or want to) carry out; the communicative resources at their disposal -- media content, technologies, skills -- and how they understand the way these resources can be used; the social relationships and institutions in which they do their communicating. Once we have built up this bigger picture it is far easier to understand the impacts and possibilities of a particular medium, and how communications fit into the other things that people are doing. ”

From the *Ethnographic Action Research Handbook*
developed for the project by
Jo Tacchi, Don Slater and Greg Hearn.



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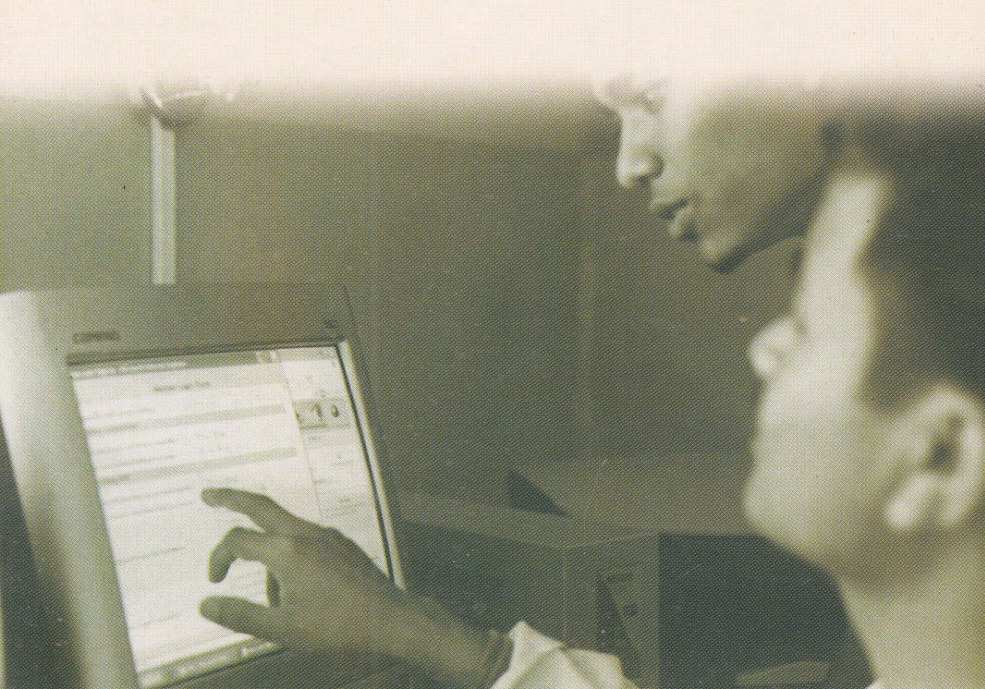


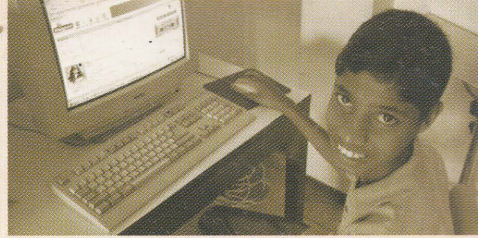
ICT solutions

Developing and adapting ICT solutions for the poor is a collaborative process requiring wide-ranging, specialised and dedicated inputs: from technology and media experts, development intermediaries and poverty reduction specialists, local communities and most importantly from poor women and men, boys and girls themselves.

As one in a series of new solutions adapted to the needs and circumstances of the poor, UNESCO and the National Informatics Centre (NIC) of India are developing **eNRICH**, a web-based solution for community knowledge management.

eNRICH is a fully customisable interface that enables communities to quickly and easily build their own gateway to the web and other multimedia resources -- tailored to meet specific local needs, enriched with local content and available in local languages.

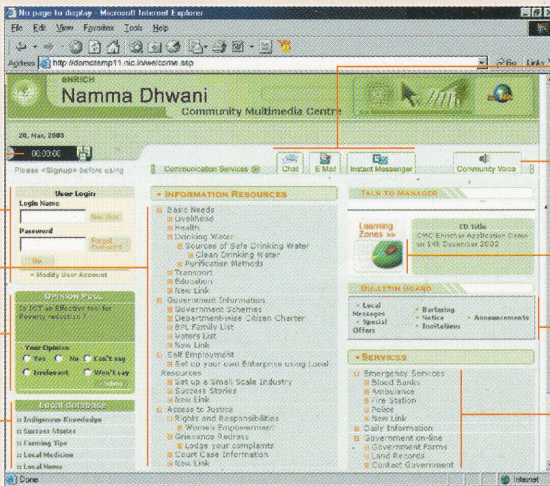




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eNRICH features:

- Customisable multilingual interface to suit specific local needs
- Easy to organise information resources and services
- Electronic community bulletin boards and community opinion polls
- Post local content and messages using text, audio and video
- Quick links to email, chat and messaging services
- Enables researchers to analyse community needs and preferences



Quick Links to email, chat, etc.

Community Voice eg. Record your message or a song

Learning Zones eg. Educational Resources

Community Bulletin Board eg. Bartering

Information Services eg. Government Online, Employment Services, etc

Time Manager

User Login

Information Resources eg. Livelihood, Health, Access to Justice, etc

Community Opinion Polls

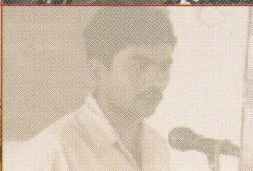
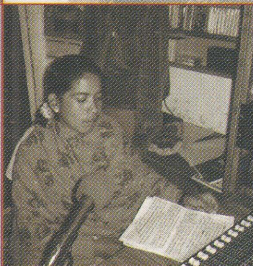
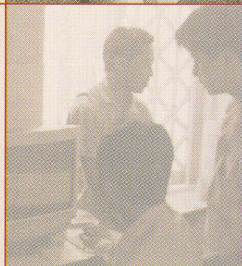
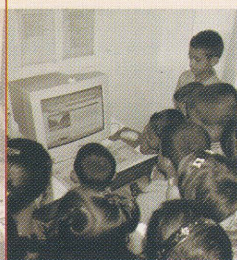
Local Database eg. Local Medicine, Farming Tips, Indigenous knowledge etc.

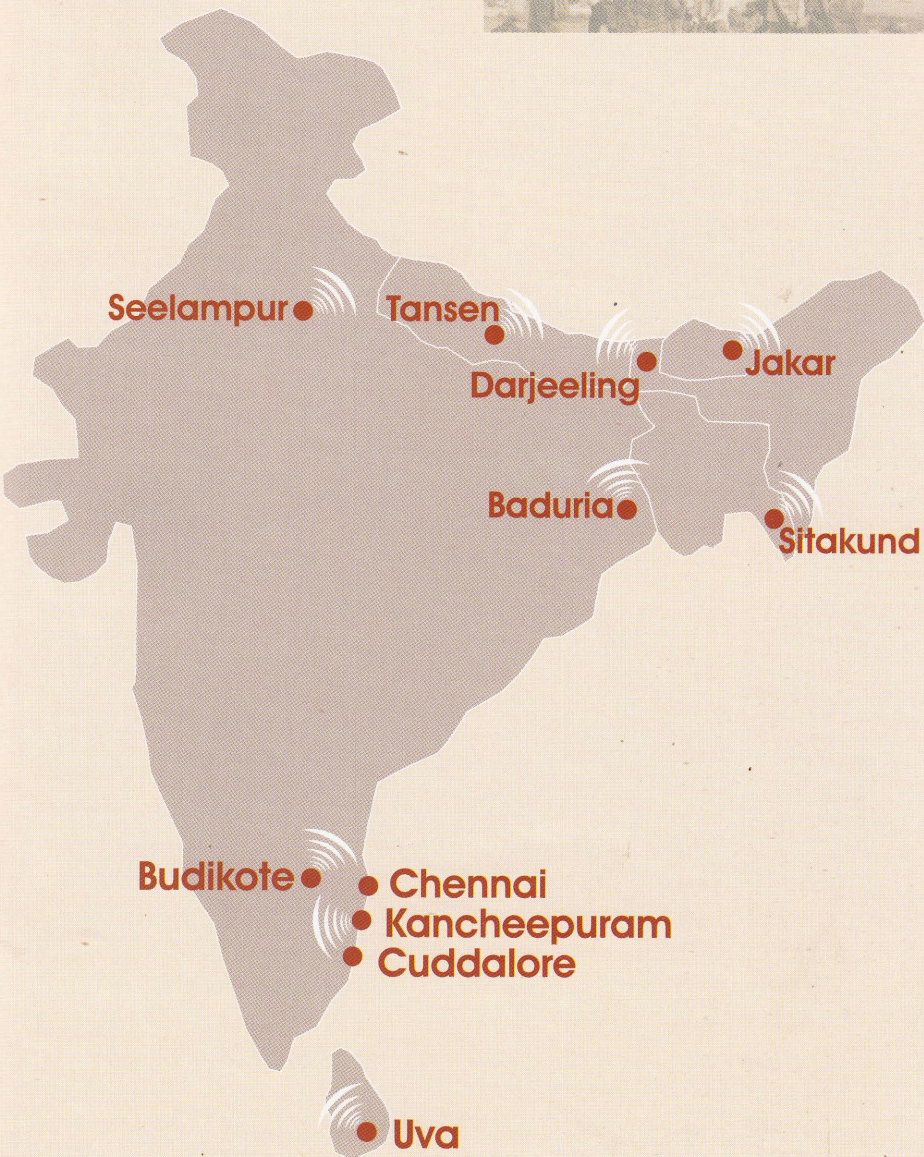
For more information on eNRICH, consult <http://enrich.nic.in>



Project sites

Project sites have been established in partnership with NGOs, local governments, universities, government departments and agencies, private sector companies, media and technology groups as well as poor women, youth and their families.







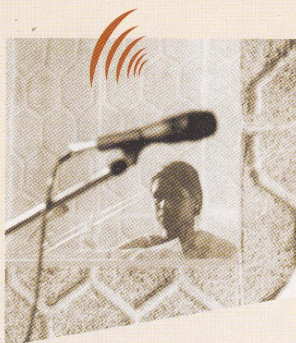
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Project sites

Namma Dhwani Local ICT Network
Budikote, Kolar District, Karnataka,
India

Partners:

VOICES: www.voicesforall.org;
MYRADA: www.myrada.org;
Jagruthy Resource Centre;
Namma Dhwani Media Centre



- Local ICT network combines a radio studio and 750-household audio cable network with a telecentre: computers, internet connectivity and other multimedia tools
- Run by and centred on a network of 10 SHGs with about 200 women members and linked to one government school and a local development resource centre
- Daily community radio programming addresses local information and communication needs, drawing on a variety of multimedia resources



**Empowering Resource Poor Women
to Use ICT**
Tamil Nadu, India

Partners: Tamil Nadu Veterinary and
Animal Sciences University
(TANUVAS); www.tanuvass.org;
University of Madras: www.unom.ac.in;
EID Parry: www.indiagrilline.com;
nLogue: www.n-logue.co.in

- In rural, urban and semi-urban areas, women and their SHG networks use ICTs in safe, empowering spaces with content geared specifically to meet their needs
- Computers with internet connectivity and multimedia content located in homes of self-help group members
- Multimedia content centrally developed, based on ongoing needs assessment; maintained by TANUVAS with support from field offices and local partnerships



ICT Learning Centre for Women Seelampur, East Delhi, India

Partners: Datamation Foundation;
Datamation Consultants:
www.datamationindia.com;
Babool-Ulm-Madarsa



Project sites

- In a high-density, low-income area of New Delhi, marginalised women use ICTs to learn marketable skills and build their awareness of development issues, their rights and livelihood opportunities
- ICT centre located at local madarsa (religious school): an open learning centre for girls and women
- Interactive multimedia content developed and used to support vocational and life-skills training and provide appropriate information to poor girls and women



Nabanna: A Web-Based Information System for Rural Women Baduria, North 24 Parganas District, West Bengal, India

Partners: Change Initiatives; Baduria
Municipality

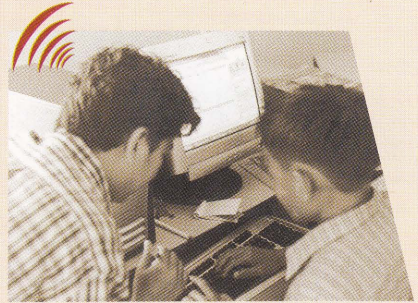
- Poor women write about their lives, learn computer skills and run neighbourhood information groups; using internet, newsletters and group interactions they share and manage knowledge
- Grassroots process to build an information network among low-income women to share and develop indigenous and other knowledge
- Networking is web-, print- and person-based, linking ICTs and women's groups from different parts of the municipality



Project sites

Youth-Led Digital Opportunities Sitakund, Chittagong District, Bangladesh

Partner: Young Power in Social Action
(YPSA)



- ICT centre linked to grassroots youth development network addressing root causes of poverty and key areas of social and economic development
- Empowerment of marginalised youth through ICT skills training, access to computers, internet and other multimedia content
- Impact extended through multimedia channels, graphic newsletters and cable TV



Tansen Local ICT Network Tansen, Palpa District, Nepal

Partner: Communication for
Development Palpa:
www.tansenpalpa.net

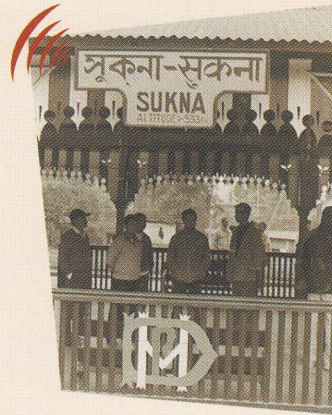
- Local youth, especially from poor families and marginalised groups, training in video production and use of ICTs
- Video/TV production studio co-located with ICT access centre
- 'TV Browsing the Internet' programme distributed on cable networks to local households and schools



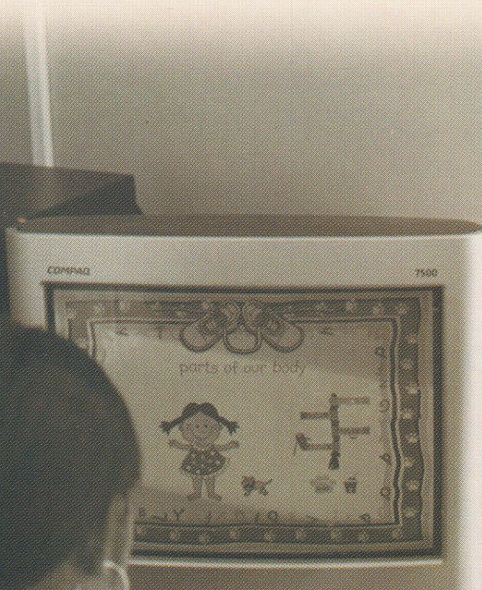
Project sites

Darjeeling Himalaya Internet Railway
Darjeeling, West Bengal, India

Partners: Northeast Frontier Railway;
www.nfr.railnet.gov.in;
COSMOS



- An historical focal point for the area, the railway is being promoted as an information highway and renewed stimulator for development
- Community ICT centres located at stations along Darjeeling's heritage railway, offer secure, central and easy access to computers and internet facilities
- Training and access for railway children and other poor groups living on or close to railway lands





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Project sites

Additional research sites

Jakar Community Multimedia Centre
Jakar, Bhutan

Partners: Bhutan Broadcasting Service;
Department of Telecommunications



- Remote BBS production station in Jakar feeds into national broadcast system allowing for increased level of content from isolated rural areas
- Dedicated internet connectivity offers local communities new services, like email and e-post, and links to ICT resources for distance education



Uva Community Media Network
Uva Province, Sri Lanka

Partners: Uva Provincial Council; Sri Lanka
Broadcasting Corporation; Uva
Community Radio; Uva Federation of
Knowledge Societies

- Uses combination of radio and new ICTs as a facilitating tool for development on a province-wide basis
- A series of remote community multimedia centres and a large network of volunteers and local knowledge societies feed into the new Uva community radio station
- Government and NGOs offer unified electronic services across different sectors using local ICT facilities



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Other partners

- National Informatics Centre (NIC) of India: <http://home.nic.in>
- Canadian Centre for International Studies and Cooperation(CECI): www.ceciasia.org
- London School of Economics: www.ise.ac.uk
- CIRAC Queensland University of Technology: www.cirac.qut.edu.au



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www.ictpr.nic.in

Photographs courtesy of UNESCO, CCT project partners & Tanya Notley

