

Measurement of Tangible and Intangible Impacts of Telecentres on Rural Communities

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ABSTRACT

The issue of evaluating the Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) intangible impacts remains to be unresolved, especially when it comes to evaluating the impacts of ICTs on non-user beneficiaries. The telecentres have been established to disseminate knowledge from basic to advanced level, stimulating the socio-economic status of the underprivileged communities. After a thorough review of the literature, it is found that researchers paid much more attention towards evaluating traditional measurable impacts of telecentre (from both users and non-users perspectives) such as income, health, education. Albeit very few studies have identified non-measurable intangible impacts on users such as psychological wellbeing and empowerment, non-measurable intangible impact particularly from the non-users perspectives have largely been neglected. Telecentre has been existing for almost more than two decades, now the question is, are the non-measurable impacts important? Hence, we believe an alternative qualitative research methodology (The Most Significant Change) will help to evaluate the intangible impacts of ICTs perceived by its non-users such as (self-esteem, self-confidence, feelings of happiness and pride). These stories-based approach can produce diverse, unexpected and emergent impacts from the community's social perspectives, which might not be catered for by using other orthodox research approaches based on success related pre-stated indicators.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

[Internet, Computers and Society]: Miscellaneous

General Terms

Evaluation, Outcomes, Human factors

Keywords

Measurement, Telecentre, ICTD, Tangible impacts, Intangible impact, Users, Nonusers

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1. INTRODUCTION

The objective of this concept paper is to identify the extent to which the research studies identified ICTs impacts (both tangible and intangible) on users and non-users. The initiation of telecentre projects has been successfully undertaken in many developing countries [35], and has been recognized as playing a significant role in stimulating their socio-economic development. It demonstrates that telecentres are found as gateways to technologies, which have potential to enable beneficiaries to enhance their social wellbeing and economic status. However, after a thorough review of the literature it is demonstrated that the *researchers paid much more attention towards measuring the tangible contributions of ICT use.*

However, the other unquantifiable intangible contributions from the non-users perspectives were found neglected. Could these unquantifiable intangible impacts be more important for community wellbeing development and growth such as self-esteem, sense of self-confidence and growth of their capabilities, self-worth. Especially given that these intangible impacts of telecentres on people's well-being analyzes the mechanisms by which access to meaningful information can enhance people informational capabilities, as well as lead to improvements in human and social capabilities.

Proponents of ICTs highlighted that intangible impacts of ICT (such as self-esteem, empowerment, and social cohesion) are important outcomes from a developmental perspective [18]. Reimer (2002) expressed his views about social cohesion that cohesive people can "respond collectively to achieve valued outcomes and to deal with the economic, social, political, or environmental stresses (positive or negative) that affect them" [31]. One recent study recommended a set of non-measurable intangible impacts, which needs to be measured, e.g. encompass empowerment, self-esteem, and sense of self-worth, at the individual level, and social cohesion and strengthening of social fabric, at the collective level [18].

The context of the telecentre intangible impacts can be seen to have positive impact on the individuals' empowerment, personal development, attitude, and behavior. Thus, due to their close relation with psychological well-being, they are considered to be important intangible outcomes which is hard to be measured quantitatively but can be expressed qualitatively. As such, it is significant to look at the non-measurable intangible impacts of telecentre on non-users, which might add to the understanding of non-intangible impacts of Information and Communication Technologies and Development (ICTD) interventions. Thus, it would be of significant value to study the non-quantifiable intangible impacts of telecentres on non-users.