Telecenters: One-stop learning hubs in rural Bangladesh

Abstract:

In rural areas in Bangladesh, local ICT resource centers, usually called telecenters, have the potential of bringing the benefits of new communication technologies to rural people who do not otherwise have access to technology in their homes, through their work place or at an educational institution. The potential impact of telecenters relates to providing information in domains related to the daily life of citizens, such as agriculture, health, e-governance, employment, etc., and furthermore to the role of access to both information and ICT as a means of empowerment.

Among other things, ICT offers an opportunity to build social networks among people and promote the informal and non-formal learning processes which are connected to empowerment and rural development.

Through a case study conducted in rural areas in Bangladesh, this paper aims to illustrate the importance of context in designing and utilizing ICT for local purposes. It also elaborates the social, practice related and technological contextual aspects of importance in the development and use of ICT. The case study reports on what learning processes are related to people’s use of telecenters in rural areas. Informal learning or non-formal learning has a potential impact in rural life and also for socio-economical advancement. To avoid what can be seen as uncritical adoption of culture sensitive learning approaches, this study takes its methodological point of departure in ethnographic methods and puts an emphasis on understanding the local practices in the community and participating groups. Informal learning as a theoretical concept relates to both institutional educational settings and non-educational settings such as work life practices and daily life in general. In this study, focus will mainly be on low literate women in rural areas, and focus will be on their daily life, their work practices, their interactional patterns with others, use of resources in information seeking and problem solving in every day life. Of particular interest in the study is the potential of telecenters in relation to the selfdirected learning of the users.

Questions addressed in the case study are:

In what way can telecenters become part of rural life and life-long learning processes?

What is the potential of ICT in empowering local users in their daily life?