



Increasing Access to Education in Pakistan Role of ICTs

Common Wealth Fund for Technical Co-operation



FINAL SURVEY REPORT

*"The route from poverty to empowerment starts with the click of a mouse"
(Coul, 2004).*

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World-wide, ICTs have emerged as the basic means for the exchange of knowledge leading to socio-economic empowerment, poverty reduction and sustainable livelihood. Economies in transformation that have realized the significance of information and communication technologies have focused on creating synergies between education and development through technology enabled access to the quality education from primary to tertiary level. Moreover, the core foundation of education being learning; the potential of using ICTs is significant as it tends to follow a learner-centered approach rather than the traditional and outdated teacher-centered one as still largely practiced in Pakistan. In Pakistan's education sector one can find few success stories of using ICT at the higher level of education i.e., universities and other institutions of tertiary education. However, the same is not true for Primary and Secondary level of education. The rationale for using ICT at these levels is compelling as it can revolutionize the face of education by filling the education vacuum that exists in the form of "Ghost Schools". In Pakistan there are as many as an estimated 30,000 "ghost schools" i.e., nonfunctioning schools that continue to exist only on paper.¹

The policy makers and economists all across have drawn consensus about the enormous role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the development and reformation of a country through its wide role in reducing poverty, enhancing empowerment, human capacity building, and technological change management. Not surprisingly, ICTs' won global recognition for being the basic enabling tools towards achieving Millennium Development Goals of reducing poverty to half by 2015 at the World Summit on Information Society in 2003 at Geneva. ICT for Development (ICT4d) platform was introduced to exchange knowledge between developing countries and industrial countries about use of ICT for development and capacity building. In this context the present study is indeed quite significant. There are national and international NGOs working for promoting education at the grass root level and would stand to benefit from the findings of this report with regards to the potential use of ICTs for education for the marginalized communities including minorities and women.

In an economic sense of development, the spread of ICTs is often considered as an economic path to new industrial revolution (Bedi, 1999). The diffusion of ICTs in all human activities is accelerating economic and societal changes giving rise to a new economy – an information economy that is "powered by technology, fueled by information and driven by knowledge" (Tinio, 2003). Pakistan's need for transforming to the information technology is amplified by its geographical location and yet exacerbated by the lack of awareness or will for bringing about the needed change.

The survey conducted for this study allows having a broad view of the possibility of using ICTs in socio-economically backward areas of Pakistan, where provision of education as a formal system is non-existent, not accessible or solely dependent on non-effective modes of teaching. It also gives incisive details by exploring the types and use of ICTs for different purposes; not necessarily of academic nature.

¹ **The Ghost Schools of Pakistan: Frightening realities from inside an education system on the brink**

By Sarah Stuteville July 17, 2009. This article was written for [GlobalPost](http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/pakistan/090602); <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/pakistan/090602>

This identifies the existing gaps, lack of awareness and essentially highlights the possibility of using ICTs for academic purposes.

Limitations

Like any other focused study this one also had its limitations as mentioned below:

1. The study was carried out in three provinces out of the total four and it included Azad Jammu and Kashmir. The access to the far flung areas by our survey team was exacerbated by the non-availability of roads. However, the network of the local community based NGOs came in handy.
2. One of the major survey related challenges was to cover the critical conditions and different parameters of the region that hinders the enabling position of ICTs and gap analysis for access to education by identifying the contextual aspects like geographical, social, cultural, and structural dimensions of the areas. A comprehensive data analysis give an insight to the prevailing factors that ultimately turn over the underlying critical causes of the enabling position of ICTs for the increasing access to education in backward areas of Pakistan.