

Vol. 2 No. 1 January 1999
Special Issue on "IT and Social and Economic Development"

EDITORIAL PREFACE

Guest Editor G. Harindranath introduces this issue with comments on the use of Information Technology for social and economic development. There is an underlying presumption, never entirely proven, that investments in IT increase productivity at the organizational and national levels. Moreover, the complexities associated with the social and economic development process have not deterred decision-makers from having unrealistic expectations, and IT continues to be a panacea for many developmental illnesses. The purpose of the special issue is then to examine these issues in greater depth.

ARTICLES

MODEL OF AN INFORMATION AND DECISION CENTRE FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Authors: Dietrich Spletstoesser, University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and Ade Towry-Coker, Independent Consultant

Abstract: Developing Countries (DCs) are typically faced with weak infrastructures. The lack of reliable transport and communication systems compounds the general misery of disease, ignorance and poverty which in most African DCs has not only not been overcome. Information and Decision Centres (InfoDeCs) are designed to help DCs address common problems, resulting from over-centralization, lack of power-sharing, insufficient participation of civil society in development planning, and uncontrollable migration from rural to urban centres due to the typical neglect of rural development. The authors describe the InfoDeC concept as an expansion of the Multipurpose Community Telecentre (MCT) approach started by IDRC, ITU, and UNESCO in five African countries and have designed a low-cost prototype of an InfoDeC for the district capital of Bagamoyo in Tanzania. The paper presents reasons and rationale for InfoDeCs as intelligent hubs of the future information infrastructure of DCs.

EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES, IT INFRASTRUCTURE, AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN MEXICO

Authors: Roberto J. Mejias, The University of Oklahoma, USA, Jonathan W. Palmer, The University of Maryland, USA, and Michael G. Harvey, The University of Oklahoma, USA.

Abstract: Well-articulated IT infrastructures generate a direct impact on domestic and global economic growth opportunities and have been shown to be an essential factor in reducing disparities between developed and developing economies. This paper examines the role new and emerging technologies play in supporting an IT infrastructure that may enhance economic development in Mexico. A political economy framework (PEF) is used as a conceptual foundation for understanding the impact emerging technologies

have upon the utilization and transfer of technical knowledge. They make the case that the use of new and emerging information technology to enhance economic development in Mexico will require applications at both macro and micro levels.

THE REFORM OF THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS SECTOR IN BRAZIL: IMPLICATIONS FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

Author: Renata Lèbre La Rovere, Instituto de Economia, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Abstract: This paper uses the example of the telecommunications sector in Brazil to argue that the faster IT diffusion associated with privatization of telecommunications will have positive economic impacts on all firms only if a regulatory framework is developed. It also analyses the regulatory challenges that Brazil will face in a new competitive environment. The paper concludes by identifying the main beneficiaries of the telecommunications reform and the difficulties involved in reaching some of its goals.

THE EXPERT'S OPINION

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND DEVELOPMENT: MOVING AWAY FROM A MAGICAL VISION

Author: Subhash Bhatnagar, CMC Professor of IT, Indian Institute of Management, India.

The paper critically examines the role that information technology can play in catalysing economic activity, in administrative reforms and in developing human resources. Learning from the experience of India and several other developing countries which have made special efforts to step up IT investments, the paper attempts to define a perspective with which developing countries can plan investments in IT and its successful integration with the development process. It counters the view of technology enthusiasts who believe that information technology can assist in every aspect of development and that it is the panacea for developing countries.

THE BOOK REVIEW

Written by G. Harindranath. He reviews "**The Newly Industrialized Countries and the Information Technology Revolution: The Brazilian Experience**" by Arlindo Villaschi, Aldershot, UK: Avebury, 1994, This book attempts to counter the thesis that the 1980s represented a 'lost decade' for Brazilian efforts at economic development by examining the country's experience with the informatics and telecommunications industries. Based on a detailed analysis of the Brazilian 'national system of innovation' (BNSI), the author argues that, contrary to popular perception, Brazil developed a variety of capabilities in two highly dynamic industries, informatics and telecommunications, during the eighties

and that these capabilities provided the country with 'windows of opportunities' to enter the technological and production networks being built by industrialized countries around that time.