UNDP

Pro-Poor Access to ICTs – Exploring Appropriate Ownership Models for ICTD initiatives

Three Case Studies from India

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IT for Change, undertook a field research to study three large scale ICTD initiatives in India, as an input into the deliberations of the Task Force On Financing Mechanisms (TFFM). The TFFM was set up as a follow up of the first phase of WSIS, to investigate the appropriateness of various financing options for reaching the benefits of ICTs to all people by 2015 as envisaged in the Plan of Action adopted by the WSIS at Geneva.

The field research investigated a number of themes considered key in actual implementation of ICTD, probing from a point of view of financing ICT, but taking a wider perspective of the financing issue as a proxy for 'implementing ICTD'. The primary issues considered relevant to the 'financing ICTD' framework, and probed in depth in these case studies are issues of 'ownership' – public, private, community, NGO – of ICTD initiatives; appropriate technology for ICTD – telecom technology, as well as appropriate software and applications; nature of ICT and institutional interface for delivering ICTD services to communities; mainstreaming ICTs into specific developmental sectors of education, health, livelihood etc; the tension between national and regional nature of telecom infrastructure and policy and the local nature of ICTD initiatives; and the issue of analyzing value (against needed investments) that ICTD initiatives in their early phases really bring to communities.

The case studies follow a narrative structure, following the birth and growth of the initiative, and are rounded off by an analysis of the initiative in terms of its most important characteristics. Each of the initiatives has its unique features, which may be attributed partly to the unique conditions in the three different states of India where they are located, and also because they are the results of different paths chosen by different players in the untested area of taking the benefits of the new ICTs to rural disadvantaged sections. The research seeks to glean learnings that these initiatives offer for the larger issue of financing and designing ICTD initiatives, and are not meant to be detailed descriptions of the specifics of these initiatives.

It needs to be re-iterated, that a common characteristic of these three ICTD initiatives is that they are large scale initiatives; two of these cover the population of a district (around 3.5 million each) and the third one covers a sub-district population (200 thousand). These initiatives are already being scaled up to cover whole states (populations of 30-75 million). As can be expected from the scale of the initiatives, all these initiatives also have a significant role of public institutions.