

Building on Diversity: ICT in sustainable development of communities:¹

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ABSTRACT

National and international action agenda on Sustainable Development recognise the importance of participatory decision-making and action by networks of socially and culturally diverse stakeholders and communities. The facilitating role of ICT forms an integral part of such agenda. How to integrate knowledge systems embedded in diverse community experiences and practices (the tacit community knowledge) in ICT facilitated sustainable development action agenda is the central theme of this paper. The paper draws upon essentially two experiences of community development in India. 1) The 'Honey Bee' approach of the National Innovation Foundation that locates development in the recognition and enhancement of innovative capacity inherent in communities marginalized by the dominant organised development stream and 2) the experience of All India Council for Electronics and Computers of setting up a network of more than a thousand ICT kiosks in small towns and villages leading to the setting up of Dr C.V. Raman University. The key questions analysed are a) who all are to be viewed as providers and receivers of information b) the influence of different social and cultural formations of people to be networked on the form and content of ICT support systems c) the distinct institutional design of these development programmes. Based on the analysis, critical intervention spaces in the ICT related technology development and social science research agenda that has recently emerged from the World Summit on Information Society are pointed out.

¹ Abstract for Brighton Conference: 'Building & Bridging Community Networks: Knowledge, Innovation & Diversity through Communication, March-April 2004

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