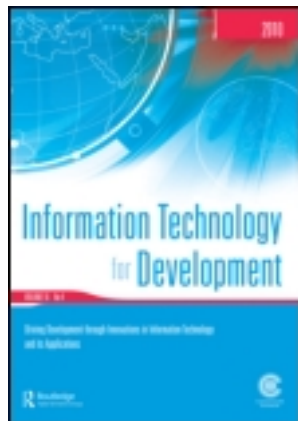


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New communication technologies and development

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A word from the editorial team

New communication technologies and development

Pioneers of satellite technology had dreamt about a revolution to be brought about by satellite technology in the developing countries. In India, the pioneer was Vikram Sarabhai. We must note with pleasure, that this dream has been realised. Very Small Aperture Terminals (VSATs) are revolutionising computer networks. Wherever the regulatory environment allows the use of VSATs, they have undone decades of damage done by slow progress in adoption of technology and by highly restrictive communication regimes. In a matter of two years, India alone has installed nearly 2000 VSATs, enabling remote parts of the country to get the benefit of reliable and affordable communication. A 30,000 \$ investment enables any site with electricity to get the benefit of communication. Today, practically all regions of the world have access to satellites. However, as mentioned above, the regulatory environment has to permit this, allowing service providers to lease out to customers adequate communication capacity on a satellite operational in the region.

The 30,000 \$ cost compares with the cost of an elevator in a building. The annual operational costs are roughly 10,000 \$. At this cost, many bank branches, transportation facilities, factories and offices can afford to exploit the technology.

It is difficult to do justice to the variety of issues involved in the use of this technology, in a short editorial. Technical as well as economic issues and issues of social and political impact have to be considered. The Journal proposes to have a special issue on this topic. It is planned to make it the July 1997 issue, giving enough time for potential authors to submit papers in time. We invite everyone interested to contribute papers. Particularly welcome will be papers on the social, cultural and economic impacts and implications of new communication technologies. We are keen that these aspects are not ignored. We will follow the standard international refereeing for this issue also.

In this issue

In this issue, we have a paper by Jose Cassiolato and Margarida Baptista dealing with the implications of liberalisation on the IT industry in Brazil. The authors draw attention to some of the issues of concern such as loss of growth in domestic expertise on technology and suggest some remedial measures in order to reverse some of these negative impacts. We also have a short paper from Mathias Cyamukungu on possible networking models in Africa.

“Distance learning is an answer to the developing countries for the problems of ensuring education to a geographically spread-out population”, says a UNESCO report. Pat Hall discusses distance learning experiences of the Open University, UK. There is much that we can learn from the pioneering institution in this field. The paper is particularly concerned about the possible uses of computer networks in distance learning.

We plan to carry interesting technical reports from organisations such as IDRC, World Bank, and the Commonwealth Secretariat. These are organisations sharing our concern for IT in Developing Countries and the reports are selected based on their relevance for this topic. We are sure you will find these reports useful. In this issue, we have a report from IDRC on their “Global Program Initiative”.