**The Use of Information and Communication Technology to Benefit Disadvantaged Sections of Society**

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*This writing sample focuses on the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to address problems experienced by the disadvantaged sections of society.*

**Abstract**

Information and communication technology (ICT) is an extended application of information technology that can be used to dissipate information, connect with various help groups, conduct surveys, raise and deploy funds, and educate the general public. Organizations that aim to uplift disadvantaged groups in society can use ICT to form networks and to coordinate with international institutions to provide support to those groups. Furthermore, ICT can be utilized to establish good governance, which is responsible as well as responsive; this will urge provincial and national governments to be more accountable. The benefits of such effective governance will trickle down to the disadvantaged sections of society. Therefore, extensive research efforts and financial investments should be dedicated toward the development of ICT infrastructure and equipment.

**Introduction**

In current times, information or data can determine the future of people, organizations, and even entire nations. Information technology has been highly effective in connecting people worldwide through innovations such as the internet, digital communication, and social networks. These innovations also facilitate the dissemination of information among wider audiences.

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines information and communication technology (ICT) as "a combination of manufacturing and services industries that capture, transmit and display data and information electronically." The core components of ICT are skills, software, applications, and systems. ICT is implemented by employing computer systems and human resources with the skills required to operate those systems. However, the large-scale deployment of advanced ICT infrastructure is expensive and labor-intensive.

Most ICT companies either import equipment or outsource production to countries abroad. Hardware manufacturing is commonly outsourced to China or Japan to reduce production costs, and software design is outsourced to countries like India. Communication networks are also crucial for the large-scale implementation of ICT. The interconnection of computer systems at a global level requires the use of robust and reliable advanced networking technologies. Finally, human resources with technical expertise are key to integrating the procured hardware and software and the established networks into the ICT infrastructure.

The judicious use of the technology can impact society in various ways. ICT can be used to address global problems such as poverty, hunger, migration, and homelessness. Public awareness around these issues can be raised through the television and the Internet. Although ICT is often used to spread misinformation, the applicability and scalability of the technology outweigh that limitation, which can be overcome through effective regulations.

**How can ICT be used for the upliftment of disadvantaged groups?**

Individuals from the disadvantaged sections of society can be included in the workforce required to implement ICT; this can provide them with employment opportunities and help improve their quality of life. Moreover, individuals will be trained in ICT before being delegated with tasks. Furthermore, ICT can be used to educate the poor population to make them well-informed, confident, employable, and hence empowered.

In addition to the aforementioned benefits, ICT can help achieve food security through substantial improvements in the field of agriculture. ICT-based decision-support systems can help farmers increase productivity and can widen their access to markets.[1] Farmers can expect higher yields owing to the greater access to information on advanced techniques, weather forecast, and tailored solutions to problems. Therefore, ICT can help farmers get better prices for their produce and thus increase their income. This may further encourage them to continue using ICT to improve their agricultural practices.

**Why should the poor have access to ICT?**

Today’s society is divided based on access to and awareness about technological trends. Over 50% of the world's citizens have never used a telephone, only 7% have access to a computer system, and only 4% have access to the internet.[2] Although governments are endeavoring to improve the quality of life of people living in poverty, digital illiteracy deprives them of various schemes and programs launched to benefit them. The exclusion of the poor population from the technological infrastructure has furthered their exclusion from society. This exclusion has also widened the class divide in society because capitalists, who have access to ICT, use it influence people through advertising and take advantage of markets to become more affluent.

**Is ICT all good or all bad or some of both?**

The increasing use of ICT has both positive and negative consequences. Owing to the availability of a large pool of ideas and resources, ICT improves the ease of communication, increases reach and support, and provides quick resolutions to problems. The social impact of ICT can be increased through the collaboration of individuals and groups to work toward shared goals. However, ICT can also be misused to disrupt social harmony. The information shared on the internet is prone to cyberattacks and unauthorized use. Some offenders may even use phishing emails or websites to capture confidential information. These risks can cause stigma among people regarding the use of ICT.

**Challenges**

The implementation of ICT is hindered by two main challenges. First, governments/authorities lack initiative for the promotion and implementation of ICT infrastructures. Second, lack the understanding of the contributions of ICT to society. The underprivileged sections of society are deprived of basic needs and amenities such as food, shelter, clothing, healthcare, and education, let alone access to new technologies.

**Conclusions**

The large-scale implementation of ICT can be achieved by encouraging a flexible and accepting attitude toward new technologies. The privileged sections of society should be more considerate toward people living in poverty. However, charity alone cannot improve their living conditions. Initiatives should be taken to educate them about the latest technologies and to create employment opportunities to reduce the extant class divide in society. Furthermore, the authorities should be held accountable for delays in the implementation of ICT through necessary infrastructural and technological changes.

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