



MAKING INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY WORK FOR AGRICULTURE IN INDIA

Despite a rapid growth in its information communication technology sector, the digital divide in India is getting wider. Using IT in the agricultural sector is one solution to help reduce poverty in India and bridge the digital divide.

Satellite dishes are nothing new to the Indian landscape. For years now, high-tech parks have been springing up all over the country. India's Information and Communication Technology sector now employs about 800,000 people, and this is expected to rise to two million by the year 2008. Nevertheless, the digital divide is getting wider instead of narrower.

Roughly two-thirds of India's workforce is found in agriculture. But it is weighed down by poverty, poor infrastructure and small unproductive farms.

Panna Lal Madhab, farmer (in Hindi)

I have a lot of problems. I grow wheat and soy. But I have no knowledge of the weather, seeds, and pesticides. Whatever crops we take to the market we are cheated.

ITC limited of India, a major exporter of agricultural products, decided to take the knowledge that was concentrated in India's dynamic information technology sector and plant some new ideas among India's farmers.

Using echoupals or internet kiosks, farmers were given access to weather reports, information on crop market prices and advice on modern growing techniques.

Mr. Srinivas Rao, New Initiatives Division, ITC

Now we find a situation where he's able to choose when to sell his produce, at what price to sell his produce and what makes sense for him. So we found actually his incomes have gone up. We find he is a person who finds the power of technology has impacted his life.

In addition to private sector initiatives like ITC's, the Indian Government is also taking steps to stimulate rural development.

Raghavendra Kumar Singh, District Collector, Sehore

For the betterment of our agriculture, there has to be better seed replacement, there has to be better distribution of fertilizer, there has to be training of farmers.

Linking dynamic sectors like ICT and those where the majority of people work, is one way of balancing employment and productivity in India while at the same time reducing poverty.