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## **Five-Point Information and Communications Technology Plan Against Asian Poverty**

By Derek Williams

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- According to the World Bank, more than 1.2 billion people live in extreme poverty – primarily in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.
- Asia wants to halve the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015.
- Let me quote the World Bank:

“In many developing countries, the poor struggle at the margin of the formal economy. They lack political influence, education, health care, adequate shelter, personal safety, regular income, and enough to eat.”

“Worldwide, the number and proportion of people living in extreme poverty declined slightly through the mid-1990s. Most of the decline was in East Asia, notably in the People’s Republic of China. But progress slowed temporarily in some Asian countries in the late 1990s, and ground to a halt or reversed in others. In the rest of the world, while the proportion of people in poverty declined, population growth meant that the number of poor people increased. And in the Europe and Central Asia, undergoing economic and social transition, the proportion of poor more than tripled.”

- Before I outline my ‘5-Point Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Plan Against Asian Poverty’, please allow me to make several assumptions:
  - that we agree with the World Bank’s goal of halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015 (14 years);
  - that funding for such programmes will be undertaken by world bodies such as the United Nations, World Bank or Asian Development Bank;
  - that such world bodies will take ownership of providing or organising non-fiscal resources needed to implement such programmes; and
  - that the 5-Point ICT Plan Against Asian Poverty could be implemented over a period of at least 10 years, touching communities deemed to be poverty-stricken.
- And here is my 5-Point ICT Plan Against Asian Poverty

### **1. Asian PoveRty Alleviation Intelligence SystEm (APRAISE)**

ICT is all about information management and communication. Recent developments in Internet-based info-communications models provide us with the ideal platform for the creation of a

Virtual Database on Asian poverty information. The planners can decide on the depth and breadth of such a database. The more granular the information, the better its intelligence. My position here is that we today have the technologies needed to build such a data-warehouse. I am sure many such databases are already scattered around the world. I am suggesting that APRAISE, being an Internet-based environment, can consolidate these databases and be the platform for new content. Being a centralised database, generating the required intelligence from the system becomes a lot more achievable. It is not what you put in that matters – it is what you extract. APRAISE can make a big difference.

## **2. Accelerated Communications Infrastructure Deployment Project (ACID)**

Now that we have all the intelligence on poverty-stricken zones and communities in the region, the next ICT plan of action is to accelerate the building and deployment of communications infrastructure to the target audience. In my opinion, this is the most important step in using ICT to fight poverty. In general, those who live in poverty are not only disenfranchised but also disconnected. How can one prosper if they can't communicate? ACID is imperative. If we are to halve the poverty levels over the next 14 years, we need to ensure that the required communications facilities are in place within the next 2-3 years. Even this is a long time. To expedite things, I would strongly recommend a heavy focus on wireless technologies. Not to mention a renewed focus on existing infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, welfare authorities, and national registries. How do we improve accessibility into these knowledge centres?

## **3. Awareness, Accessibility and Acculturation Programme (Triple-A)**

With the necessary communications infrastructure in place, we can now boldly implement actual ICT awareness initiatives. Of course, what good is awareness without access! On accessibility, please let me return to the Internet platform. Believe me, this is the most affordable computing medium for the world today. More importantly, it is a level playing field. It does not differentiate. And it is rich in content and services. It also has many faces – each speaking a language of its own. Internet computers and devices are already making their presence felt and their prices are falling by the day! The poor need to have these devices more than anybody else. Accessibility at an individual level could be long shot. Community-based access systems (such as kiosks) need to be developed. If they have them, in large enough volumes, then the process of acculturation commences. Therefore, Triple-A educates, connects and nurtures mindsets.

## **4. eSkills Development Scheme (eSkills)**

Having triggered the imagination and confidence of the region's poor, we must now develop them to a state of inter-dependence. Here it is all about imparting knowledge to the poor – specifically technical skills. eSkills could be a programme that introduces to the poor a new way out of poverty. I am sure that of the thousands of technical resources that Asia produces each year, many come from poverty-stricken homes. The learning curve is not all that long and there is variety to cater for myriad interest levels. And the market for such skills is ever increasing, not to mention that the skill in itself evolves rapidly. However, reaching the poor in their preferred language is key – to reduce the learning curve even further. This will be a major challenge.

## **5. Commerce, Content and Community Development (C-Cube)**

For the thousands who would benefit from the above programmes, more mature applications and services would become necessary. This is where these communities, once lost in poverty, connect into the mainstream economy. Not only do they connect but they begin to contribute. For those who have succeeded, now it is their turn to develop and manage the disenfranchised globally. C-Cube is about transitioning the accountability to the successful communities. They

are now the champions, and they work on other poverty zones in their economies. It is a handshake – to use a wireless metaphor.

In ending, if ICT can power both Big Science and Small Science – fiddling with planets and microns – I really do not see any reason why ICT can't be used to leapfrog poverty in Asia. It is really left to us!