

# Output from discussion group on: Asymmetries in the emerging information regime

# Topic Overview

- High-end work is concentrated in developed countries
- Developing countries have low access to internet
- Business process outsourcing is a growing trend
  - U.S. jobs and union concerns
  - May not be doing that much good for India and others
    - The amount of work is minimal
    - Not the best kind of work
- Profitable business to be made?
  - Not just aid
  - Low-cost devices may be a good business
- Kinds of inequalities that arise
  - Power, choice and freedom (among nations, East/West, North/South, but also classes)
  - Authorized techno-scientific capabilities (standards)
  - Lack of recognition of skills in less developed areas.
  - Digital divide (distribution of infrastructure, tools, etc.)

# Topic Overview

- Concentration of capabilities in the center (core vs. periphery). Rates of diffusion. Moore's law driven technology growth.
  - Do all good things originate in the core, and radiate outward?
  - Where are the cores?
  - Multiple distributed core.
- Stemming out-migration
- Issues of access: where do people connect, what do they want to do?
- Data and visibility – mining, tracking (but some areas invisible)
- India's middle class is growing, with a sustainable model of literacy
- Education, skills, language are issues for development
- Make people employable in world of transnational exchange.
- Is internet access more important than other facilities (television, drinking water, etc.)?
- Technology gap may be filled by new generation

# Topic overview

- What is purpose of IT?
  - Transaction efficiency
  - Fostering whole marketing and delivery systems
  - Unexpected utilitarianism
- Technology must be both:
  - affordable and
  - usable
- Development can occur through addressing hard problems (tropical diseases, HIV)
  - New set of minds applied
  - New, large markets

# What are the research/business issue or problems?

- What do people need access for?
  - Wireless access to medical services
  - Technology as enabler of societal engineering
  - Agriculture
  - Sciences
- What are key classes of asymmetries?
  - Access to tools
  - Knowledge that supports sustainability
  - Timeliness of access to information
- What kinds of intervention might make internet access available?

# What can we do to address the issue/problem?

- Investigate and understand problems and needs in developing areas
  - Visit and talk to rural people
  - Focus groups
  - Participatory design
  - Other tools and approaches
- Package information that usefully address asymmetries
  - Local development of knowledge content
  - Address language issues, and cultural differences
  - Visual literacy
- Research appropriate community technology
  - An affordable wonder chip that can improve the developing world
  - Emphasize local partnerships – IBM specialize on a few things that can be done well
  - Find ways to support functional (technological) literacy
- Apply developing brainpower to hard problems like tropical diseases while leveraging an extended market.

# What activities can we carry forward after the symposium?

- Continue to refer back to the record developed by this event to remind ourselves about what can and should be done.
- Create an informal community of anthropologists and friends of anthropologists.
- Lobby to have IBM pay focused attention to problems and opportunities represented by asymmetries.