The Social and Political Challenges of Akshaya Rural Kiosks

Renee Kuriyan
Energy and Resources Group
University of California, Berkeley
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Overview

- Study Area
- Introduction to Akshaya
- Research methods
- Challenges for Kiosks
  - State
  - Entrepreneurs
- Conclusions
Study Area: Kerala
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- Kerala Model of development
- Sustainability problems
- Two alliances
  - UDF & LDF/ Communist Party of India (Marxist)
Study Area:
Malappuram District of Kerala
Malappuram District Facts

- Area of 3550 km²
- Population 3.64 million people
- 60% of population Muslim
- Highest number of people living abroad in Kerala
Akshaya Project Background

- Grassroots beginning
- Shared access model - telecenters
- Public-private partnership
- Goals
  - Bridge digital divide
  - Provide e-governance services
  - Universal access
Akshaya Project Background

- Initially 630 centers
- Serve 1000 households each
- Now- 435 centers
- E-literacy phase
  - 65% women
- Roll out of project
State Strategy

Dual Strategy:
- Social Development
- Financial Sustainability

State’s aims:
- Provide access
- Provide information in local language
- Awareness of IT for citizens
State Strategy

State’s role
- E-literacy, training, establish connectivity
- Infrastructure

Entrepreneur’s role
- Awareness, business strategy, provide services and applications
Research Methods

- Ethnographic approach
- Interviews
  - Households
  - Entrepreneurs
  - Panchayat members
  - Akshaya project staff
- 3 centers
Challenges for State

Balance the pressures of the dual goals

- Redistributive pressures from CPM and classed based interests for the ‘masses’
- Pressures from Kerala’s ‘financial sustainability’ crisis
- Politics of Muslim league and CPM

Many contradictions associated with dual goals
Challenges for State

Other rural kiosk projects in India (link financial sustainability with project success)

financial sustainability, business plans, and business principles
Challenges for State

- Implement ICT kiosks as “development project”
  - IT dissemination to the masses
- Recruit entrepreneurs
  - Business driven aspects & expectations of government
- Risk of political criticism (excluding masses)

Branding as Development Project and Achieving Business Goals Are Difficult
Challenges for Entrepreneurs

2 Populations

- Need Development assistance
- Can contribute to making the rural kiosks profitable
Challenges for Entrepreneurs

- Akshaya name vs. private sector
- Images associated with poor branding for both populations is the challenge

Branding for both populations is the challenge
Conclusions

- Even in a place like Kerala with strong redistributive principles
- Tendency for the state to adopt an ICT strategy that promotes private sector participation and sustainability of kiosks
Conclusions

- Substantial government support
- Difficult to make rural telecenters both financially sustainable and also socially oriented
Conclusions

🌟 Akshaya project straddles both goals, yet is not fully achieving either in its implementation

Financial Sustainability

Social Development Goals
Challenges to Consider

- Integration of dual goals and provision of more relevant applications
- Public private partnership-shift in history of development in Kerala
- Transition is slow
Positive Note

Widespread awareness of ICTs and basic training in the Malappuram District
Thank You

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