Infosys hosts Government of Karnataka-World Bank IT Workshop on Poverty Alleviation

The IT Workshop on Poverty Alleviation conducted by the Government of Karnataka and the World Bank in association with Infosys, was held at Infosys City today. The Workshop brought together luminaries from the World Bank, Central and State Governments, Private Sector, NGOs and Educational Institutions to discuss ways to take the benefits of IT to the common man.

In his opening remarks, Session Chairman, Mr. Narayana Murthy, Chairman and CEO, Infosys Technologies Ltd, called upon political parties for a consensus on the positive role of IT in helping the poor. He also emphasised that rhetoric must be backed by quick pilot projects to demonstrate the benefits of IT, and that these benefits must be publicised.

Mr. James D Wolfensohn, President, World Bank stated that the World Bank was trying to stay at the cutting edge of IT applications to address issues of development. He elaborated on the "Global Gateway" project, which will enable a global resource base of development projects. This will be an orderly way to accumulate knowledge of developmental initiatives. Describing Karnataka as a "test-tube state" he called upon the government to link up with the experiments the World Bank is conducting in other parts of the world. Mr. Wolfensohn suggested that it was time to get away from the Hollywood of IT, and get down to the application of IT to benefit the common man.

The Workshop was divided into three sessions:

1. E-Governance
2. Improving educational levels
3. IT in rural and urban low income areas

E-Governance

Mr. Sudheendra Kulkarni, Director, Prime Minister's Office described the Warana Wired Villages Project, a pilot project of the Prime Minister's Task Force on IT. He used this as a case study to explain that IT alone cannot eradicate poverty, but requires efficient conduct of business as well as commitment from both the government and the people. Reengineering processes in the political and administrative systems is another prerequisite.

On behalf of Mr. Satyanarayana, Secretary IT, Government of Andhra Pradesh, Mr. Vivek Kulkarni, Secretary to Government, Department of Information, presented the Andhra Pradesh Government's "Computer-aided Administration of Registration Department", CARD, which is one of the most successful examples of e-governance in India. Mr. Kulkarni mentioned that he would like to emulate this project.

Improving Educational Levels

Mr. Vivek Agarwal, CEO & Founder, Learning Universe Pvt Ltd., elaborated on the benefits of IT in education, as it has the power to remove time and space constraints. Mr. Vivek Kulkarni, Secretary to Government, Department of Information, described Yuva.com which aims to create more IT professionals by offering training programs by NIIT, APTECH and SSI, to rural youth and housewives, at nearly 1/3 of the usual cost.

Ms. Uma Ganesh, CEO, Zee Interactive Learning Systems, suggested that convergence technology be used to allow media such as cable, which has touched nearly 25 million households, to promote education. Mr. N. Balakrishnan, Chairman - SERC, Indian Institute of Science, called for a review of the copyright laws which prohibit many books from being placed in the public domain, though they have developed the technology to transfer even a large book to the internet in a matter of hours. Ms. Elaine Wolfensohn, with over 30 years in the field of education and arts, called for a model education programme for the poor.

IT in rural and urban low income areas

Prof. K V Sane, Hon. Director, Studies in Information Technology Application, elaborated on "SITA" a gender empowerment program, which aims to bring the disadvantaged into the mainstream IT-enabled service sector. The pilot project sponsored by the World Bank has met with considerable success.

Mr. Salil Taneja, Managing Director, Sanjeevini Infotech, described the farmer's pressing need for information on topics ranging from sourcing of inputs to marketing the produce. He elaborated on how they are creating a platform that focuses on distributing information rather than creating it.

Dr. A Ravindra, Additional Chief Secretary, Government of Karnataka emphasized that in a country where 70% of the population depends on agriculture, IT had an important role to play in increasing the efficiencies here.

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