HARNESSING INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: A POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT

Unprecedented advancements in Information Technology have made mankind very much dependant on it for a wide array of activities. IT also has paved a path for developing countries like Sri Lanka to overcome the severe challenges imposed by the globalisation of economic and financial activities. Therefore, the time is opportune for Sri Lanka to embrace IT and harness its capabilities for national development. Sri Lanka possesses the necessary prerequisites like a literate population and a liberalised economy, which would make this a relatively easy task. This paper discusses the measures needed to strengthen the key enabling factors for proliferation of IT includidng IT manpower and IT literacy, information infrastructure and legislation, measures needed to promote application of IT for activities falling under the major potential areas including education, access to information, governance, public services, business & commerce, industry, agriculture and home & leisure activities. The paper also presents measures to reap the maximum benefits of the two sectors related to IT having the greatest potential for success i.e., software industry and IT education & training. The paper argues the importance of incorporating the measures discussed under the above categories if Sri Lanka is to successfully harness the opportunities made available by IT for its development.

Keywords : Information Technology, IT application, Software industry, IT policy.

INTRODUCTION

The potential offered by the emerged IT revolution for national development is quite clear. The achievements made by India over the recent years in the IT sphere give a clear picture of the potential available. Indian software exports generated US$ 4 billion during the year 1999-2000. According to analysts India has prospects to earn an annual revenue of US$ 87 billion and to provide employment to 2.2 million persons in the IT sector by the year 2008. The Indian success is directly attributed to an enabling environment created by a well thought out and implemented policy framework. Sri Lanka, however, has not yet been able to harness the available potential to its benefit.