

Information to change the world by

by John Yip

Have you surfed the Net on your PC, faxed your resumé to employers, watched CNN on TV, listened to your voice mail while calling your parents from a cellular?

Chances are that you have probably used one of the technologies mentioned. High technology has evolved significantly in the industrialized nations to the point where we are dependent on it. This evolution in communications and computer power has changed the way we access information. The ease in which we obtain information is likely to cause information overload, rather than information hunger. The opposite is the case in "lesser developed countries" (LDCs) where fulfilling basic needs and economic growth takes priority over information dissemination.

The scarcity of the transfer of information has left people in LDCs at a distinct disadvantage in their personal development. The explosion in electronic information has the potential of penetrating poverty and empowering people in LDCs. The ramifications of such technology on LDCs could eliminate information poverty and have a positive effect in the process of democratization and popular participation.

LDCs have limited knowledge-processing capabilities to use information. This limitation inhibits LDCs socioeconomic development which in turn inhibits fostering of their human knowledge develop-

ment. As the division of economies between the North and the South continues to widen, so does the accessibility of information. What would we do without our daily dose of radio, television, print and telecommunications?

Phone-based computer communications is quickly becoming the most important tool of quick, easy to use communication systems. As most people in poverty-stricken areas do not own a computer, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and

eliminate
information
poverty

universities in which they belong to do. Such organizations, through a computer and modem can access volumes of information through databases on the Internet such as PeaceNet which in turn connects them to hundreds of environmentalists, peace activists and other NGOs. Moreover, access to international information resources concerning health and disease, agricultural and natural resource statistics and the latest economic trends are just a sample of the information available that could benefit the NGOs, government and people.

Another important feature of phone-based computer communications is electronic mail (email). Us-

ers can have point-to-point conversations internationally. This is a powerful tool in which the average person has a voice to speak without fear of being censored or persecuted. People can send email to the government about grievances he/she might have, link up with activists around the globe to pool information instantly or participate in over 4,000 newsgroups. It would allow people in rural areas to access laws, government documents on-line and be able to offer their input on how these laws would affect them. In effect, each electronic conference creates a decentralized information system, unregulated and uncensored.

Although the potential of electronic communications is unlimited, existing telecommunications and infrastructures in LDCs are. LDCs are impoverished financially and are unable to subsidize their large debts. Although many LDCs do have a substantial surplus of unskilled labour with low wages, the introduction of labour-saving technologies is given a low priority since many of the industries have a low technological base.

Furthermore, even if the infrastructure is in place to provide for high speed information transfer, the fundamental skills needed to benefit from the technology requires basic reading and writing skills which are not widespread enough to sustain the technology. Unfortunately, such factors weakens the planning for investment in any infrastructure component for communications and

computing.

Although technological advances have made communication and information more accessible and the poor, better access to information on its own will not by itself guarantee political empowerment or permanent reductions in poverty. Many issues ranging from information privacy to

the invasion of foreign culture need to be addressed. Yet with cooperative assistance from international organizations, NGOs and governments, the poor may be able to use the information revolution to help reinforce the processes of democratization and social reform and satisfy their hunger for information.

Dalplex TIGER CAGE

**Blow Out
Clearance Sale**

Two days only!! Feb 8th - 9th
Green Room, Student Union Building, 10am - 8pm

All Items Drastically Reduced

- Sport Wear
- Foot Wear (hiking boots, sneakers)
- Swim & Fitness Wear
- Roller Blades
- Racquets
- Dalhousie Crested Clothing
- Stationery
- Trade Books
- General Bookstore Merchandise
- & Much, Much More!**

Shop early for the best selection!
for more details call **Dalplex 494-3372**



University
Bookstore



DALHOUSIE BOOKSTORE

Jerry's PUB

Wednesday Night
10¢ per wing
4pm-12am

Saturday
Burgers,
Hot Dogs
\$1.25 all night

Great Food, Great Prices

Come down & check out the New Look

Jerry's Pub

Kitchen open till 10 pm
1717 Brunswick St.

OPEN 11am-2am every day
Sun 12pm-2am

The NEW
PALACE

Open Monday-Sunday 8:pm 3:30 am

Bands Scheduled

Feb. 2-5	Fire Rooster
Feb. 6-12	Mirror Image
Feb. 13-19	U4EA/ICU (Double Bill)
Feb. 15-19	U4EA/ICU (Double Bill)
Feb. 20-26	Pandora's Box