The Development Potential of the Virtual Economy
ICTD2010 Royal Holloway, University of London, 13-16 December 2010

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

This infoDev/World Bank Workshop looks at the emerging "virtual economy" of digital games and platforms. It will explore how the virtual economy has started to create earning opportunities for semi-skilled and unskilled workers and how it could stimulate local growth and entrepreneurship in the developing world. The centrepiece of the workshop will be a presentation of infoDev's new “Knowledge Map” of the Virtual Economy.

WORKSHOP ABSTRACT

The widespread adoption of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in everyday life in the Global North has given rise to a massive market for digital goods and services. Addressing the business opportunities in this market has traditionally required significant amounts of skill and infrastructure, putting them out of reach for most people in the developing world. However, an emerging "virtual economy" of games and platforms has started to create earning opportunities for semi-skilled and unskilled workers with even minimal access to digital infrastructure. An estimated 400,000 students and migrant workers earn wages in China and Vietnam by playing online games at the behest of wealthy foreign players. A growing number of crowd-sourcing and click-work platforms promise to employ even more workers in tasks ranging from pattern recognition to text transcription. Unlike the traditional outsourcing industry, these opportunities involve low barriers to entry and few intermediaries between suppliers and consumers. The virtual economy may therefore hold significant potential for developing countries, in terms of stimulating local growth and entrepreneurship and supporting organic investment in ICT infrastructure.

PROGRAMME

The workshop will be held on Monday 13th December from 12:00 to 13:30 at the ICT4D2010 conference at Royal Holloway, University of London (see: http://www.ict4d.org.uk/)

12:00 Welcome

Welcome Remarks by Chair (Tim Kelly, Lead ICT Policy Specialist, infoDev/World Bank)

PART ONE: The Knowledge Map

12:05 Speaker: Vili Lehdonvirta, Helsinki Institute for Information Technology
Presentation of the infoDev’s Virtual Economy Knowledge Map

PART TWO: Expert Panel on the Virtual Economy

Panelists:

Tom Chatfield, Author and Journalist
Leila Chirayath Janah, Founder, Samasource
Jared Psigoda, Co-Founder and CEO, Reality Squared Games
Vili Lehdonvirta, Helsinki Institute for Information Technology

12:30 – 13:00: The range and scope of Virtual Economy Business Models
13:00 - 13:30 Applying Virtual Economy Business Models to developing economies
13:30: Chairman’s Closing Remarks