From Uttar Balia to Japan: Unique Learning Experience

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I have seen the news of competition on 'My Village My Pride' from Prothom Alo. As the competition was focusing on ICT in village development, I found it very interesting to participate with my unique tele-center plan. I needed some preparation to participate in the competition. I took five (5) days to collect the information as per requirement of the HTML category. I also collected picture and information of my union (Uttar Balia of Chandpur District) and talked with villagers for knowing their expectations. Then I developed my business idea according to the needs of my village (Uttar Balia) and finally submitted the website content. After scrutiny at different levels by the expert committee, I became a lucky winner of the HTML category and got a chance to visit Japan hare having an unique learning experience.

It was my first visit to Japan though it was not my first foreign trip. We started for Japan by Malaysian Air Lines. At first we had to fly for three hours to reach Malaysia and there we had six hours transit and after that we had to fly for six hours to reach Japan. We reached Narita Airport of Japan at 8: 00 PM on 28 th February. Our Co-ordinator Tanabe-san gave us warm welcome reception at Narita Airport, we started by bus for Yakohama Kenshu Centre. After three hours journey we reached a rail station where we bought some food for us and after fifteen minutes rail journey we reached at Yakohama Kenshu Centre (YKC).

At Yakohama Kenshu Centre first we checked-in where we received single room with all necessary facilities. The provided a small training with a nine minutes long video regarding how to use the centre. There we learned about self-service canteen and waste management system of Japan by segregating garbage like burn item, plastic item, general waste, container or cans etc. That reminded me about my country's poor waste management, which we even do not utilize properly.

At the centre we attended an ICT workshop for village Development in Bangladesh. Our Schedule was as follows:

First Day (01, March) we had in the Morning session an orientation and opening Ceremony from 9:30 am to 12:30 pm and in the afternoon session 13:30 pm to 16:30 pm a Lecture and Discussion on ICT Policy in Japan and Rural Development presented by Prof. Takashi Kobayashi (Faculty of Political Economy, Tokai University).

Here we learned that in the 1950's the population composition of Japan was dominated by young age and independent people. At that time Japan also emphasized on industrialization and urbanization, at the cost of ignoring rural development. Since Bangladesh population structure at this moment is similar to population composition of Japan in 1950's, Bangladesh should not do the same mistake as Japan did, focusing on industrialization ignoring rural development based on the strength of population composition. However later on Japan focused on the development of rural areas including ICT application which subsequently reduced the pressure on urban area and increase the tendency of rural people to stay in the rural area. It therefore implies that because of comprehensive ICT policy of Japan covering both urban and rural areas, Japan has been able to facilitate balanced development of the country. In terms of population structure, industrialization strategy and ICT implementation, Bangladesh might be compared with those of Japan in 1950s. Therefore it gives us a lesson that if Bangladesh wants to ensure uniform development of whole country, Bangladesh must be focusing on rural areas specially in terms of ICT implementation.

Second Day (02, March) we visited (10:00 am- 11:30 am) Toppan Co. and GREE to see how Japanese ICT Technologies work and attended a Lecture on ICT Business Strategy , presented by Prof. Seiichiro Yonekura , Hitotsubashi University .Here we also informed about the Japanese Management System and visited (13:30 pm to 18:00 pm) Roppongi Hills which is 53 storied building.

Toppan started its operation in 1900.Over the years Toppan maintained its superiority in the market by ensuring quality and cost performance through application of ICT technology. That was really an eye opening for us that the application of ICT is must for quality improvement and cost reduction irrespective of the status of the entities, whether located at urban or rural areas.

Our visit to GREE revealed an interesting phenomena. Since Japanese people like to stay closer to each other and establish social networking among themselves, GREE emphasized on those technologies to fulfill the desires of Japanese people. Because of the characteristics of products of GREE which focused on networking of the Japanese people, GREE has become very popular and has been successful for maximizing profit just within four years. It indicates that focusing the people desire must be the ultimate objective on the part of a company in order to become successful which will be facilated with the help of ICT application.

Third Day and Fourth Day (03, March and 04, March): Moved from YKC to Fukuoka

03, March: ICT in Community Development, Joint session with KU Grameen Creative Lab. (13:30 pm to 16:30 pm), where we presented our projects on respective villages.

04, March: Visit (10:30 am to 12:30 am): In the morning we visited Flau Co which is basically information centre collecting information from different sources regarding mothers need, child items etc and subsequently disseminate those information to the mothers who need it. As a result existing and potential mothers have been able to reduce their information and transaction cost. That was made possible because of application of ICT. This is also a great learning for us that by applying ICT we can also develop some sort of information centre for the rural people specially farmers, rural women. It may be mentioned that information centre of Japan are sponsored by the corporate bodies as part of their CSR activities. In Bangladesh also large corporate can perform this sort of CSR activity.

Even the costly micro credit and finance activities can be turned into cost effective and profitable micro finance through the use of ICT has been demonstrated by KU. In Bangladesh the major obstacle of expanding micro finance activities is high transaction cost. Simply by taking lesson from e-passbook of KU the Bangladeshi MFI's will be able to reduce their high transaction cost.

05 th March and 6 th March were holidays.

On Seventh Day (07, March) we visited one Non Profit Organization (NPO) named Linking Smile which is engaged in producing crops and vegetables in the abundant hills and land. The products of the NPO are later on marketed to the corporate bodies in the urban areas by using the ICT devices. Here ICT is used for marketing the product in urban areas. Of course this is not only an example of e-commerce but also an example of digital connectivity between rural and urban areas. In Bangladesh agriculture production marketing is also a big problem which we can easily solve taking lesson from Linking Smile. It may be also mentioned that agriculture sector of Japan are sponsored by the corporate bodies as part of their CSR activities. In Bangladesh also large corporate can perform this sort of CSR activity. In the afternoon we reached at Tokyo Kenshu Centre where we again presented our projects on respective villages on 8th March.

Then in next day we safely returned to Bangladesh.

I have observed that, in every step, Japan has a plan to do everything through ICT. Waste management system, Energy savings system, Water management system indicate that the technical knowhow in Japan is very modern and expensive. We cannot apply in our social life all those technology but we may make our community aware about wastage of GAS, Energy or Electricity or Water by using ICT. It is true that by using ICT in a project, profit can be maximized and social gain is unlimited.

Personal initiatives can be helpful for developing awareness regarding ICT and uses of internet. But personal initiative can never ensure the logistics support like infrastructural development. The government must come forward for taking proper steps for developing the scenario. For example, In my village we have load shedding 16 hours a day. Without electricity I cannot run a tele-center. So I may have to use alternative solutions like solar-energy for running an effective tele-centre, which is too expensive. To-do attitude play a vital role for developing rural area like urban area through ICT in Japan. I am soliciting cooperation from corporate bodies or donors to help the rural project and encourage people who want to contribute for their country. Thank you everybody who support the country in time of need.

At last but not the least, I would like to extend my heartiest gratitude to GRAMWEB and other partners for organizing this event. I will be glad to make my dream true by working hard for my village with my unique tele-center plan.