2. Innovations for diversity, inclusion and community empowerment ●♦

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Rethinking Necessity: Evaluating the Role of Technology in Indigenous Communities●

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Indigenous communities around the world are often identified as marginalised groups. Those living in remote areas are particularly seen as digitally disconnected with little or no access to information and communication technologies (ICT) and the digital universe. The United Nations permanent forum on indigenous issues state that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) should be used to support and encourage cultural diversity and to preserve and promote indigenous languages, distinct identities and traditional knowledge of Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes. While digital inclusion is identified by many as an enabler for social and economic development, especially for minority and isolated, marginalised communities such as indigenous people, there is also augment that digital technologies can be addictive and therefore, harmful to individuals.

There are several studies conducted on indigenous people's interactions with technologies involving such communities in Australia, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Malaysia. However, a study of indigenous people of Sri Lanka and social/cultural/economic implications of ICT use on this community has not been done to date. The First People of Sri Lanka, also known as Veddhas, are a small community of individual accounting for less than 1 percent of the national population. There are several socio-anthropological studies being conducted about indigenous people of Sri Lanka, but there is lack of interdisciplinary, in-depth research conducted to date on the adaptation and impact of ICT on these indigenous communities. Therefore, in this study, qualitative data was collected using semi-structured interview method from a sample of indigenous people living in one of the settlements (Dambana village) in Sri Lanka. The data was collected in December 2024.

The data collection focused on several key aspects including current technology use, and socio-economic factors such as livelihood, access to education, literacy, cultural identity, and opinion towards technology use. Data saturation was researched at seventeen interviews. This is likely due to the homogeneous nature of the sample and the highly focused research questions.

The preliminary findings are interesting. The most common theme that emerge suggest that technology is not considered as a necessity by the indigenous people. While there are some generational differences in opinion,

the consensus is that technology can negatively affect the way of life and the indigenous cultural identity. The data shows that indigenous culture values human-nature connection more and does not see technology as a necessity or a means for socio-economic development.

Keywords: Indigenous communities, Sri Lanka, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) , Cultural identity, Technology impact

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