How would you score as a babu?

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Last Updated: 03rd August 2017 11:15 AM | A+ A A- |

BENGALURU: Studying and analysing the push and pull of policies set by governments across the world is not exactly easy. How about a game to help you understand the decisions taken at such levels and their impact on the environment, economies and people?

A city-based non-profit has developed a computer game that allows people to step into the shoes of a politician or a bureaucrat and thus control the fates of countries they serve. The main objective is “to encourage players to develop a futures orientation and apply the same to shape real-life sustainable economic policies.”

Called the Cantor’s World, the game has been developed by the Fields of View (FoV) over a period of 18 months in collaboration with New Delhi-based UNESCO-Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development, which is also funding this project.

Explaining the game, Bharath Palavalli, co-founder of FoV, says, “Players make choices based on targets or objectives set by themselves. These could be achieving an X per cent of economic growth or ensuring education for all, or reducing the carbon emissions in the country.” Most development indicators such as the GDP rarely take into account things such as environment impact. The game accounts for such indicators as well as for the Inclusive Wealth Index (IWI), a development index introduced in 2012 as a means to measure development in a more inclusive manner in terms of environment and societal progress.

Game guide

Bharath explains that the players can pick one country each and play between in a time period between 1990 and 2010. They can make choices each year for their own country that will affect the three kinds of capitals measured in the IWI - human, natural and produced capital. Changes in the capitals allow the player to understand the impact of their policy choices in the previous years. They can then make necessary course corrections to achieve their intended targets, adds Bharath. A maximum of 25 players and minimum of five can play the game at one time.

“Some scenarios players may face are having to choose between education for all and reducing mortality rates through access to healthcare, using limited resources, or deciding on increasing or decreasing growth by choosing to exploit or conserve natural resources, which would then provide the player with greater investment options but deplete the natural capital,” says Bharath. The game is based on real data from the sources such as the World Bank, International Labour Organisation, United Nations Environment Programme, to name a few. Data from 140 countries are available. The game is grounded in both economic models and game design theory. Bharath however cautions, “We do not use the game to make predictions about the future, rather we use the outcomes based on policy decisions to understand the impact of choices.”

Who will play

Civil servants, politicians, students of policy making are some of the target audience of the game FoV is already in talks with a number of institutions in Bengaluru, Delhi and those in Japan, US, Sweden and Netherlands for them to use the game as part of their training and curriculum. “The game is designed to be part of a curriculum that draws from economics and sustainability studies and is not a stand-alone game.” says Bharath.

Game design for policy studies

Bharath has been teaching game design (as a research tool) over the past 5 years for aster level students at the NID, Bangalore and IIIT-Bangalore. On games as a learning tool he says that games allows people to experiment without worrying about failure “As future policy makers or current ones, this becomes an important aspect of decision making and understand interlinkages that are often implicit and complex,” he adds.