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telecentre magazine

examining the role of public access to technology

FACE2FACE

BASHEERHAMAD SHADRACH
RAY ANTHONY ROXAS-CHUA III

TOWARDS A NEW HOME BASE FOR TELECENTRE.ORG

FLORENCIO CEBALLOS

TELECENTRE LANDSCAPE IN THE PHILIPPINES

CUCHIE ECHEVERRIA

SERVICE CENTRE AGENCIES: EMERGING INDIAN

TELECENTRE NETWORKS

SHIPRA SHARMA

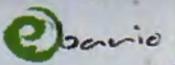


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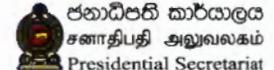


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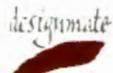
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The telecentre magazine contains articles and features with valuable insights and in-depth analysis on various aspects of telecentres. Authors are requested to follow the following guidelines while sending their articles to telecentre magazine.

Research article/features:

- Articles/case studies should not exceed 2500 words (longer articles will be considered only in exceptional cases.)
- It must contain an abstract of the article of maximum 200 words
- All articles/case studies should provide proper references. Authors should give in writing stating that the work is new and has not been published in any form so far

Conference/workshop(s) reports:

- Reports or notes on conferences, workshops and seminars on ICT or related fields must be 800 words in length
- Mention the theme, venue, date, and name of the organizer(s)
- The reports or notes must contain relevant photographs of the events covered
- The conference held in the past two months of the forthcoming issue will be preferred
- Provide the URL of the organiser's website or a link to the papers

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- All manuscripts are to be submitted directly to the Editor, telecentre magazine, preferably by email at editor@telecentremagazine.net as an attachment, prepared as a Word file, or by posting CD-ROM with two hard copies in A4 size paper to the address given below
- The texts must be typed in 'Times New Roman', 12 font size, at double space. Use standard Oxford English Dictionary spellings (use 's' instead of 'z')
- Relevant images/photographs must be scanned at 300dpi at a minimum width of 5 inches and those must be sent in TIFF format
- The passport size photographs in Tiff format of the author(s) taken against a light background, must be enclosed with the article
- Manuscript must contain a separate coversheet with the name(s) of the author(s), contact information of him/her/them including email, telephone numbers and brief biodata
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 Centre for Science, Development
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Building Systems for Human Resource and Skill Development



For strengthening the telecentre movement across the world, an institutional and strategic framework for human resources and skills development appears to be very critical. telecentre.org Academy endeavours to provide skills training to telecentre managers and operators in order to keep them informed of new technologies and make them capable of serving poor and marginalised dwellers at the grassroots level of the society. The mission to provide one million knowledge workers by 2015 warrants a vision as well as a well-thought strategy and the

Academy is advancing firmly to translate it into a reality. In this issue of telecentre magazine, we intend to focus on telecentre.org Academy and the transition from telecentre.org to telecentre.org 2.0. Thus, in the face2face section we interviewed Basheerhamad Shadrach and Secretary Roxas Chua to highlight these issues and make people aware of recent developments in the Academy and the transition of telecentre.org. Since Philippines will be the new host of the academy, the Philippine success story also deserves proper attention. In addition, we need to ponder how telecentres can be instrumental in coping with the climate catastrophe, contribute to the values of human security and other unforeseen challenges. This issue also brings up the coverage of telecentre events from across the world. The Malay story enlightens us about the emerging dimensions of telecentre movement and Indian experiences of community information centres and the emerging network of telecentres shows strengthening and deepening of the movement in remote areas. Suffice it to say, telecentre movement is now breaching social and geographical boundaries, therefore the movement must be supported with skills and human resources development programmes so that they can serve the humanity meaningfully and its transformative impact reaches to the masses. Last but not the least, we would like to wish all success to the new host of telecentre.org Academy.

We welcome your comments and suggestions



Dr. Ravi Gupta
Ravi.Gupta@csdms.in

Basheerhamad Shadrach: Envisioning Skill Development of Grassroots Workers



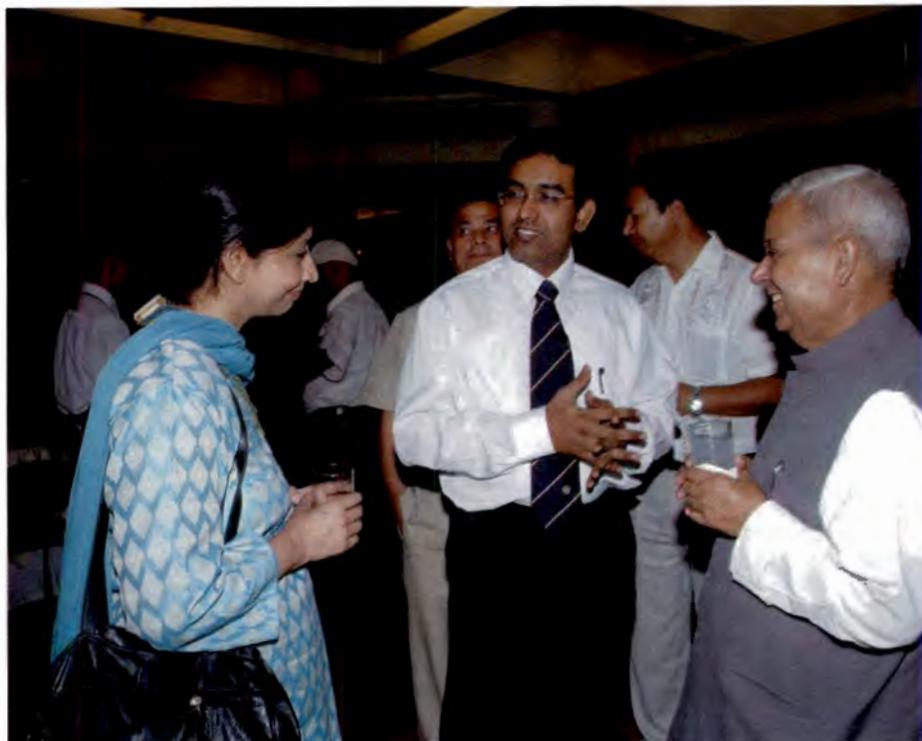
Basheerhamad Shadrach (popularly known as Shaddy) is the Senior Programme Officer at International Development Research Centre, India. He, as the Lead, telecentre.org Academy, has been credited to develop the ecosystem of telecentre.org. As an information professional, Shaddy has been actively working in the realm of information and communication technologies (ICT) for development with various organisations in India and Europe for more than two decades. He has also initiated and developed a grassroots-centric evaluation model for pro-poor ICT programmes. He is member of various professional groups, including the American Society of Information Science and Technology, and OECD e-governance task force. In his interview with Telecentre magazine, Shaddy shared his views and experience on the role of telecentre.org Academy in human resources and skills development for a sustainable telecentre movement across the world.

Photo credit: CSDMS

Greetings from the Telecentre Magazine! We would like to congratulate you for taking telecentre.org Academy to new heights. How does the Academy help to promote the telecentre movement across the world, particularly in the context of the knowledge society? telecentre.org, as you know, is a programme that supports telecentre networks around the world in their pursuit to sustain the telecentre movement. Over the last four years, my colleagues and I, together with a number of telecentre leaders around the world, have been relentlessly attempting at helping telecentres to succeed. For this, a number of support networks should function in a symbiotic manner. These support networks are a part of the ecosystem that nurtures and sustains the telecentre movement, and helps the two billion poor living in Asia, Africa, Latin America and in other parts of the world to reap the benefits of the knowledge era. Telecentres around the world assist poor communities to convert knowledge into action, and this requires skills. The telecentre.org Academy being set up all over the world, with its Secretariat hosted at the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU), New Delhi, India is, therefore, mandated to develop

It is envisaged that the academia, with support from curriculum development specialists, can take advantage of eLearning and joyful learning methods to reach-out to an audience that has abilities to learn only in vernacular languages and at a relaxed pace

skills of the telecentre knowledge workers, so that they can help the communities that access telecentres to convert information and knowledge into action and productivity gains.



Basheerhamad Shadrach discussing telecentre Academy with Aruna Sundararajan, CEO, IL & FS and ICT Minister, Nepal

Photo credit: IDRC

You have developed the conceptual framework of telecentre.org Academy Ecosystem. Can you briefly explain its concept and operational system?

The ecosystem I have developed for telecentre.org Academy is an outcome of a two-year long consultative process, especially with the rural poor and the grassroots knowledge workers. The ecosystem is a win-win opportunity for the learner, who constantly needs incentives to be in the learning curve and for the academia that is often criticized for its inability to penetrate more than two per cent of the learning force. It is envisaged that the academia, with support from curriculum development specialists, can take advantage of eLearning and joyful learning methods to reach-out to an audience that has abilities to learn only in vernacular languages and at a relaxed pace. The Academy ecosystem also promotes peer-assisted learning, mainly from well experienced telecentre operators, who are identified as mentors. Thus, the mentors make the learning more blended and joyful as well as meaningful for they bring along real life experience rather than theoretical knowledge. Moreover, through a consortium of universities that strengthens the



Basheerhamad Shadroch and Stephen McGurk, Country Director, IDRC, SARO, India

ecosystem of the Academy, the learners will be able to obtain credible university certificates and learning credits; and pursue their academic interests further, even to the extent of obtaining a doctoral degree.

Does the Academy provide the much needed institutional framework to the telecentre movement?

The Academy is often seen as the 'real' purpose of the telecentre movement. As of now, as you know, the telecentre movement is embarking upon the following four functions: a) networking for advocacy; b) knowledge sharing; c) skills development for efficient delivery of goods and services; and d) innovative practices for developing locale specific and demand driven content and services. All the above four functions can easily be carried out by the Academy for each of those functions are part of a learning process. The Academy will enable the telecentre networks in 45 nations to facilitate skills development among their grassroots knowledge workers, thus moving beyond mere convening of meetings year after year. The Academy will open up the vista of continuous learning and professional development opportunity for the members of national telecentre networks, thus institutionalising a learning cycle within the movement with a view to excelling in work.

Capacity building and skills development of telecentre operators and managers are very crucial for the sustainability of telecentres. Do you see any specific role of the Academy in the realm of capacity building?

The main purpose of the Academy is skills development and capacity building. We need to build skills so that they become knowledge gatekeepers and grassroots champions and entrepreneurs. Once the grassroots champions are skilled to become social entrepreneurs, they will automatically become a part and parcel of the capacity

building movement. They would be able to impart training to community members, offering customised services and capacity building to each section of the community. The Academy will also help to build capacity among telecentre network leaders as well as policy makers through collaboration with various other actors, such as

The role of the national academies is very simple and straight forward. By collaborating with the telecentre.org Academy, they will be in a position to deliver curriculum to mentors and learners within their nations

the Asian and Pacific Training Centre for Information and Communication Technology for Development (APCICT)'s ICT Academy.

How does the telecentre.org Academy plan to coordinate with other national telecentre academies around the world?

The Global Secretariat of the telecentre.org Academy will be responsible for coordinating the development of

curriculum, customising and sustaining the learning engine globally, and for equipping the national academies to deliver course-ware in their respective nations. The Global Secretariat will also liaise with a consortium of universities for accreditation and credit transfer and recognition. The role of the national academies is very simple and straight forward. By collaborating with the telecentre.org Academy, they will be in a position to deliver curriculum to mentors and learners within their nations. The national telecentre.org academies will also assume responsibilities for placement services as well as for lobbying with their governments for incentivising skills development, especially in under-served and un-served areas.

What are the main challenges and prospects of the telecentre.org Academy?

There are a number of challenges facing the Academy. Although it is an exciting programme, it is also unique in its approach, and quite ambitious in its outlook. For the Academy to achieve its target of supporting learning among one million grassroots knowledge workers by 2015, it is important that all the components of the ecosystem work well; the most critical in this being the role of the mentors. Also, for the Academy to flourish, it is important that within the concept of the ecosystem, there is innovation, so that it can continue to evolve and provide for future changes in the education and learning stream. In addition, in the process of curriculum development, it is important that the basket of curriculum developed is not based on a 'one-size fits all' notion.

Currently, the transition from telecentre.org 1.0 to telecentre.org 2.0 is taking place. How do you perceive this process? What are the vision, strategy and business plan of telecentre.org 2.0?

The vision for telecentre.org hasn't changed from its first generation to the next. However, there are many changes in its business and operational modalities. While in telecentre.org 1.0, grant-making and technical assistance functions predominated, I suppose telecentre.org 2.0 will be a collaborative effort of the present and future telecentre networks. The business plan will revolve around the 'value-adding' feature of telecentre.org 2.0, thus also compelling the programme to earn revenue for every service offered. Consultancy



Photo credit: CSDMS

services to governments will be a key and steady income stream so also the activities of the Academy, especially when it comes to providing capacity building support to the policy makers. telecentre.org 2.0 will work with a number of private and public service agencies, responding to the needs expressed by the community, while also capitalising on opportunities that exist by becoming more of a programme that revolves around aggregation of services and channels of service delivery.

In your opinion, how would telecentre.org 2.0 be more helpful to the developing countries as compared to its predecessor's performance?

telecentre.org 2.0 is much more promising than telecentre.org 1.0. When the latter was announced, there were not many telecentre networks around, barring a few such as the Mission 2007 initiative of India. But, today, as we soft-launch telecentre.org 2.0, there are 45 national networks; there are promises for over half

a million telecentres by various governments; there are highly talented telecentre leaders; there are examples of over 200 services that can benefit communities through telecentres; there are more promises for a telecentre centric social business; and, there is the telecentre.org Academy. So, I see much more scope and depth in the work of telecentre.org 2.0 than its predecessor. It is only important to ensure and protect the global character of telecentre.org, while acting locally in each of these 45 nations and the new ones where telecentre networks are emerging.

Apart from providing the public (eGovernance) services to common man, how do you see the role of telecentres in addressing new development challenges, for instance, climate change, disaster management, spreading climate literacy, etc.

We have seen in recent years, the relevance of telecentres in addressing developmental challenges, especially in providing climate literacy to communities, assisting in disaster preparedness and disaster management during and after the events occur. We have also seen the role of telecentres in assisting governments in food and water security by collecting and processing local knowledge.

We have seen in recent years, the relevance of telecentres in addressing developmental challenges, especially in providing climate literacy to communities, assisting in disaster preparedness and disaster management during and after the events occur

While the role of ICTs are debated in the context of climate change- if and how these tools contribute to addressing the issues, there is also a school of thought that believes that the introduction of ICTs have increased problems associated with issues around climate change. However, what is less debated is if and how telecentres contribute to supporting climate change adaptation and assist in devising local strategies and solutions. While telecentres act as literacy extension counters in villages, they are also knowledge processing centres where local wisdom and local practices can be codified and shared among those who need them. Thus, telecentres, in the context of

climate change, transfer knowledge from land to the lab. Sooner than later, the world will turn to finding solutions to world's problems from people rather than governments. It is then that the role of telecentres will be noticed and recognised.

What sorts of role do you foresee for telecentres in the course of inclusive development?

Already many telecentres are contributing to inclusive development. Wherever there is access to knowledge, technology and processes, there is development. Telecentres have shown how such an inclusion is possible without any opportunity costs. They have, in many parts of the world, become allies in financial inclusion mandate of governments and banking institutions. Telecentres have also become allies to local governance institutions. Under the Right to Information Act, telecentres are good windows of government information for citizens, especially those which affect them the most. Innovation and research in eHealth, eAgriculture point to the role of telecentres in extending agro-business, agro-advisory and agro-literacy services so also telemedicine, health awareness and social marketing types of services to rural people. Of late, telecentres are also being seen as community colleges that offer distance and open learning programmes to communities.

Last, but not the least, what are the new dimensions emerging in the telecentre movement across the world and what are the main prospects of this movement?

The main prospects emerge from the social entrepreneurs, who run these telecentres. In fact, they are replacing the last mile government 'babus'; they are also challenging the middle men, who unscrupulously have earned profits and commissions; they are also practicing the role of community based organisations that find local solutions to local problems.

The grassroots telecentre operators are today demanding services, information and action from the public and private systems. It is not a government scheme aimed at the so-called beneficiaries; it is a scheme that aims to benefit the governments and the industry that has, for centuries, failed the base of the pyramid. It is a new avenue to cement relationships with a billion people at the bottom of pyramid that are also counted in societies. □

An Anatomy of telecentre.org Academy Ecosystem

Editorial Team, Telecentre Magazine

Photo Credit: IDRC India



First telecentre.org Academy Global Stakeholders Meeting

Telecentre is one of the key components of the information and communication technologies (ICTs) enabled system of information and public services delivery. To build an effective and sustainable system of information delivery, application of advance information and communication technologies (ICTs) appears to be indispensable. ICTs facilitate management of information and aids varied forms of communication between human beings and electronic systems, and within the electronic systems themselves through capturing, storage, processing, communication and display technologies. ICTs enable knowledge gateways to act smart, intelligent and dynamic enough to package knowledge specific to locale environment.

Telecentres have emerged as a centre of government service delivery at the local level as well as an effective means to bridge the digital divide at the national and global level. In the emerging knowledge society and economy, information holds the key to stimulate economic growth, capacity building, provide livelihood and empowerment of

the poor and marginalised sections of the society and so on. In addition, the role of telecentres appears to be crucial in addressing new challenges to human beings, such as climate induced vulnerabilities, disaster management, food security, to name a few. Eliminating the distinction between the information-rich and information-poor is also critical to eliminating economic and other inequalities between North and South, and in improving the life of all humanity. Therefore, telecentres occupy a central position in any information and service delivery system. Owing to the multiple uses of telecentres and its transformative impact, a rapid increase in the number of telecentres has taken place. An encouraging trend has been observed in Asia and Africa where telecentre movement has got a fillip. These ICT enabled Kiosks are breaching conventional barriers of society and public administration.

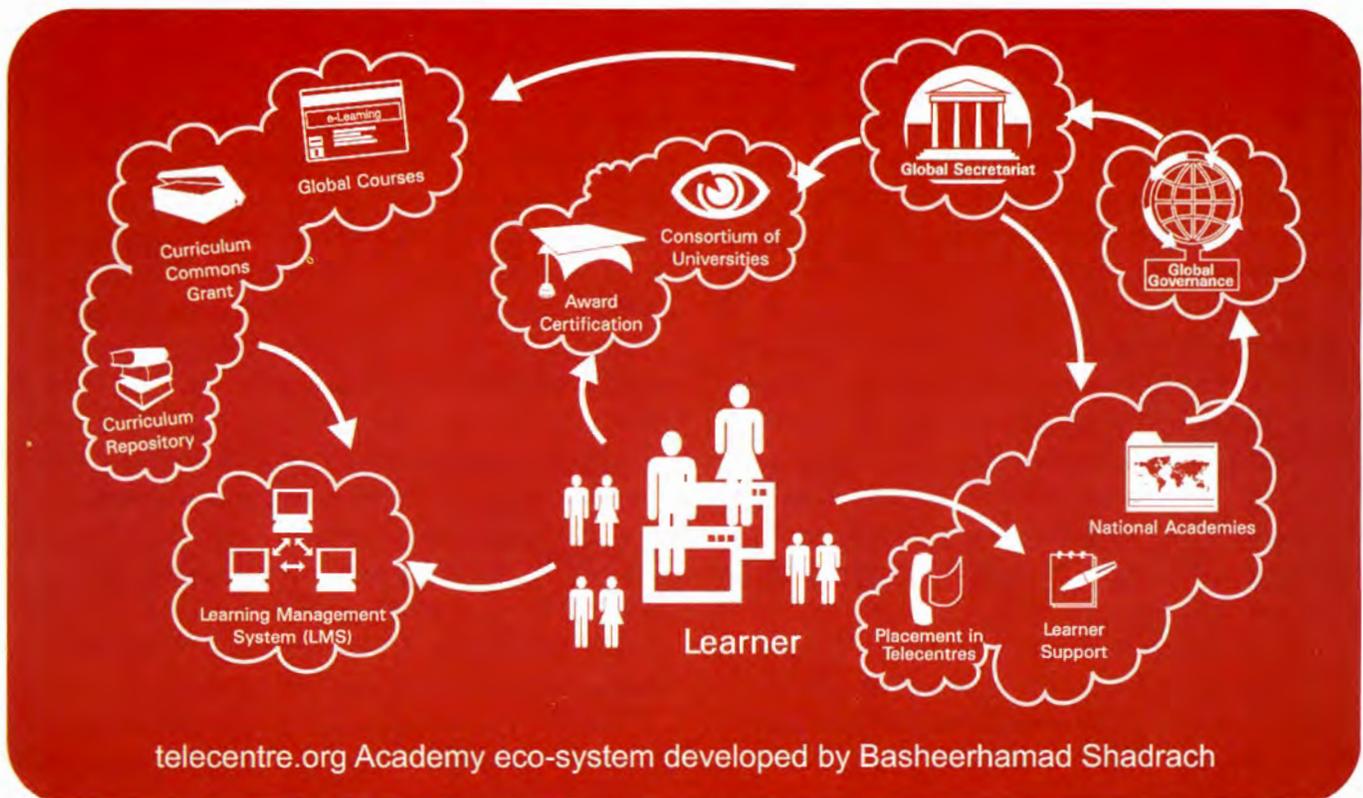
Practically speaking, in order to create a telecentre movement across the world and make it sustainable, skilled human resource is one of the main prerequisites. A telecentre manager needs technological as well as

entrepreneurial skills to run the telecentre. To provide the services to people he/she must be efficient in computer handling and make it financially sustainable, he/she should have entrepreneurial skills. It has been felt across the world that a coordinated strategy and programme would be placed to fulfill these requirements for a sustainable telecentre movement. To enhance the human resources development, an initiative has been taken in the form of telecentre.org Academy. Generally speaking, telecentre.org Academy is a skills development programme that supports actors involved in creating new and inclusive economies in developing countries, particularly at the grassroots level, by taking advantage of knowledge and information into both tangible and intangible services for millions of marginalised and poor communities living in semi-urban and rural areas across the world. The mission of the telecentre.org Academy are following:

- Establishing a global programme to support the learning needs of over one million telecentre operators, thousands of key policy makers, investors and also the leaders of existing and emerging networks who seek to succeed in telecentre work;

telecentre.org Academy is a skills development programme that supports actors involved in creating new and inclusive economies in developing countries, particularly at the grassroots level, by taking advantage of knowledge and information into both tangible and intangible services for millions of marginalised and poor communities living in semi-urban and rural areas across the world

- Developing appropriate learning systems and curriculum, based on the learning needs of numerous grassroots-level knowledge workers and other stakeholders, in an attempt to sustain telecentre operations as mini and micro social enterprises;
- Establishing linkages with academic institutions for developing a linear career path for grassroots-level knowledge workers;



Source: telecentre.org Academy: The present and its future

Milestones in the History of telecentre.org

October 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Karishma Kiri and Basheerhamad Shadrach conceive the idea • Basheerhamad Shadrach agrees with telecentre.org team to test the idea with a wider group • The first concept note on the global telecentre university was produced by Basheerhamad Shadrach • A global consultation meeting planned for and partner identified in India
February 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First national academy comes up. The Indian telecentre.org Academy announced in Coimbatore by MSSRF
May 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CICT, Philippines, intel, IDRC, telecentre.org, ILFS discuss the Academy in Manila to explore partnership between India and the Philippines
November 2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Colombian telecentre.org Academy launched as a pilot programme
March 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Chilean telecentre.org Academy initiated; Government's subtel, the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean; telecentre.org partner, ATACH, UTEM and Zoltner Consulting group become the founding partners of the Academy
May 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brazilian telecentre.org Academy conceptualises work; Microsoft, the Ministry of Industry, Development and Trade, University of Brasilia agree to partner with the Association of telecentre Network to initiate the Academy; A telecentre.org grant announced in support of this partnership • Peruvian telecentre.org Academy conceptualises work; CEPES – a think-tank in Lima, Practical Action Group, Rural Telecom – a private telecom provider, and the Ministry of ICT agree to partner with telecentre.org • Colombian telecentre.org Academy initiates its second phase through another grant from telecentre.org
June 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sudan initiates the Sudan national telecentre.org Academy (SuNTA) at the East African Telecentre Leaders Forum; Sudatel becomes the main partner of SuNTA
July 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Curriculum Commons Grant announced by the Hon'ble Minister of State for Higher Education, Smt D Purandeshwari at a public function in Delhi; The announcement is jointly made by Microsoft's global Vice President and Basheerhamad Shadrach of telecentre.org
August 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Winners of the Curriculum Commons grant announced; A grant of USD 5000 issued to 13 organisations
October 2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The telecentre.org Academy working committees start to work virtually
February 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Sri Lankan telecentre.org Academy launched • Egyptian telecentre.org Academy conceptualised
March 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The technology option for the Academy finalised
July 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The global curriculum development work begins
August 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telecentre.org Academy: consortium of universities meeting held in Delhi led by the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU)

- Establishing linkages with telecentre networks for peer-learning support, mentorship, and placement services;
- Demonstrating that the learning programme initiated by the academy fulfills the human resource development mandate of various governments around the world, in line with their national priorities.

The telecentre.org Academy ecosystem

After working on the job of creating the telecentre.

org Academy for sometime, it became apparent that the ecosystem of the Academy needed to be developed first if the global programme and its mission were to be successful. Basheerhamad Shadrach, Lead, telecentre.org Academy has developed an ecosystem framework that serves as the best guide for implementing the Academy.

The ecosystem of the telecentre.org Academy has evolved after years long consultations with poor dwellers and development practitioners at the grassroots level

The stakeholders

telecentre.org Academy is made up of stakeholders who underpin the success of the programme. The stakeholders are:

- Learners
- Tutors and mentors that support learning
- Content and curriculum providers
- National networks and academies that promote and administer the programme
- A Consortium of Universities that accredits learning and certification
- A Global Secretariat that administers and facilitates the programme
- A Governing body that oversees the programme

Lead organisations steering the Academy at a global level

- International Development Research Centre, Canada
- Indira Gandhi National Open University, India
- A consortium of national telecentre.org academies
- telecentre.org Foundation, Manila, the Philippines

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- University of Brasilia, Brazil
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- Brazilian telecentre.org Academy
- Chilean telecentre.org Academy
- Colombian telecentre.org Academy
- East African telecentre.org Academy, Uganda
- Egyptian telecentre.org Academy
- Indian telecentre.org Academy / Jamesetji Tata Training School
- Malaysian telecentre.org Academy
- Peruvian telecentre.org Academy
- Sri Lanka telecentre.org Academy
- Sudanese telecentre.org Academy
- telecentre.org Academy – Philippine Community Telecentres Academy

The Academy Offers

Levels	Duration	Credits	Entry Qualifications	Certification
I	3 months (min) 6 months (max)	16	Read, write, numeracy, basic digital literacy; X standard or 'O' level examination	Certificate Course
II	6 months (min) 2 years (max)	24	Completed secondary level or 'A' level; or completed level 1; or passed entry level test for Level II Certification	Diploma Course
III	1 year (min) 3 years (max)	48	Completion of Bachelor's degree; or completion of level 2; or passed entry level test for Level III Certification	PG Diploma Course
IV	2 years (min) 4 years (max)	128	Completion of PG diploma programme	MBA in social enterprise

across the world. telecentre.org Academy Ecosystem is a complex design of global secretariat, national academies, consortium of universities, learning management system, global curriculum and learners. The functions and responsibilities of each actor is loosely defined and all these actors are interlinked with each other and complement each other in multiple ways. The system is institutionalised to address the needs of the learners who work in telecentres and develop a course for them so that they can be equipped to work in communities. Another aspect of enhancing the skills of managers and knowledge workers is to keep them abreast of technological innovations and its application in the telecentre movement. Therefore, the role of academia, with the help of curriculum development specialists, is also envisioned in developing courses that could address the needs of the development workers and keep them updated.

Since English is not the lingua franca of the world, therefore, emphasis has been given to develop courses in local language to ensure its suitability to a particular locale. The ecosystem ensures diversity of languages and encourages that the course should be developed in local language otherwise it would not be able to serve the purpose of local workers.

The Global Secretariat of the Academy is centrally placed in the ecosystem as it coordinates with national academies and consortium of universities to develop the global course. Learners would be connected with universities, Learning Management System (LMS) and finally, they would go to the telecentre centre. LMS would handle the multiplicities and complexities involved in delivering learning programmes to millions of learners in different continents. The curriculum would be delivered in their local languages, giving the learners ample scope to learn at their own pace. In addition, because Internet connectivity is unreliable in Africa and Asia, the learning experience needed to be offline as well. It was also proposed that the development of the LMS would be supported through curriculum commons grants.

A global certification system has been perceived, the Samaranayake Committee figured out very early on that the nature of the Academy can be global only if the certification and assessment scheme would be global. The committee's recommendations were based on factors offering a vertical mobility in their academic pursuits and a horizontal mobility to learners in their professional pursuits. This meant that

an assessment scheme that enabled learners to move across telecentres, networks and nations for performing their tasks as telecentre operators was desirable. This was imminent especially in the context of hundreds and thousands of telecentres emerging in the developing world, and particularly in the context of Latin America where operators have shown interest to move around the world to serve as telecentre operators. Such a horizontal mobility can happen only if universities agreed to certify and recognise certification based on a commonly agreed credit systems. The vertical mobility seeks to offer students opportunity to pursue their studies for gaining credit in any university of their choice in any nation that participated in the telecentre.org Academy programme. In addition, the flexible credit scheme would help to pursue all other courses offered by the university consortium on the basis of the learner's individual interests.

In sum, the ecosystem provides an integrated model of skill and human resources development.

Now they are proposing to introduce a learning programme for telecentre operators as a 'learn at your own pace' programme offering 16 credits for a certificate and 32 credits for a diploma; so that they have ample opportunities to learn based on their individual interests for specialising in learning streams that offer advance diploma certificates with 64 credits; to introduce curriculum that enhances the livelihood skills of communities served by telecentres to stimulate mini and micro enterprise development at the grassroots level, thus expanding a significant number of the telecentres as community colleges; develop leadership programmes for grassroots workers. It has also proposed the idea of curriculum commons and has contributed to research and scholarship in technology enabled learning. To achieve these goals, a well functioning, fully staffed telecentre.org Academy secretariat with adequate funds, functional learning system and a model for revenues sharing are the prerequisites. Last but not the least, to sustain the telecentre movement across the world, skill building and human resources development would be very crucial. □

Based on excerpts from the report, 'telecentre.org Academy: The present and its future' by Basheerhamad Shadrach, 2009

Ray Anthony Roxas-Chua III: Paving the way for telecentre.org 2.0



Ray Anthony Roxas-Chua III is the Chairman of Commission on Information and Communication Technology (CICT), the Philippines, the nodal agency for deployment of ICT in rural areas of the country. As the Chairman of the commission, he has been instrumental in shaping course of telecentre movement in the Philippines. His role is going to be more critical as Philippines has been selected for the new host of telecentre.org Academy. In his interview with Telecentre magazine, he expresses his opinion on the vision and strategy of telecentre movement, telecentre.org Academy and role of CICT. He believes that telecentre.org 2.0 is an opportunity for the Philippines to share its experiences and success of telecentre movement to the world community.

The Community eCentres (CeCs) project is the flagship programme of Commission on Information and Communication Technology (CICT) for rural public access in the Philippines. How is the CeC programme progressing? What measures has the Commission taken to deal with connectivity, power and other challenges encountered while implementing the CeC programme in the rural areas?

Infrastructure is a major concern in the implementation of the Philippine Community eCenter (CeC) Programme. The CICT has taken initial steps towards the formulation of a national broadband policy for the Philippines. Earlier this year, we convened telecommunication companies and major ICT organizations in the country for a consultation workshop to get more information on policy issues that need to be addressed. As a result of that workshop, a working group will soon be created to sit down and draft our national broadband policy.

Another very important strategy that we are employing is the public-private partnership (PPP). This has specifically proven to be a major contributing factor in getting the Philippine telecentre movement off the ground and on to a good start. We see the spirit of collaboration between the public and the private sectors as one of the main ingredients that will enable us to meet the challenges posed by the lack of telecommunication infrastructure in the rural areas. Indeed, experience says that PPP approach is key to the success, especially of large-scale ICT projects.

We have also begun the mapping of existing telecentres in the country and their respective infrastructure and services. With such a national survey, we hope to establish benchmark data that will enable us to make informed decisions and further enhance our strategies to reach the 2010 vision spelled out in the Philippine CeC Programme Road map - a CeC in every municipality of the country.

Apart from providing public access to rural people; what are other potential areas in which CeCs can be instrumental?

CeCs can play a significant role to make people avail of benefits of ICTs. It can bring government closer to people and give them a stronger voice in governance. It can also play an important role in shaping education and in marketing local products to the world. The CeC can serve as a conduit of these benefits and present a model

that can help developing countries pave the way towards development.

CICT played a key role in the emergence and development of PhilCeCNet as a formal organisation and also acts as its Secretariat. What are its main roles as PhilCeCNet Secretariat?

Yes, CICT played a very important role. It was actually the convener of the network. But I must say that having multi-sectoral partners, who are willing to work with us made things quite easier.

telecentre.org supported our network start-up programme in 2007, which involved activating the network, developing the road map of the Philippine CeC Programme, creating the web portal, and establishing the telecentre.org Philippine CeC Academy

PhilCeCNet Secretariat renders administrative support to the network's executive council, implementing directives, overseeing day-to-day network operations and making tactical decisions for the network. It also serves as the network's animator, ensuring that things keep moving as they should. Basically, CICT has come into being to support the network in every possible way.

What are the major contributions of telecentre.org in the evolution and growth of PhilCeCNet?

telecentre.org was indeed instrumental in the evolution and growth of PhilCeCNet. telecentre.org provided crucial support in terms of finance and technologies to help the network attain this position.

telecentre.org supported our network start-up programme in 2007, which involved activating the network, developing the road map of the Philippine CeC Programme, creating the web portal, and establishing the telecentre.org Philippine CeC Academy, the network's capability building arm.

But more than the infusion of funds, it was the technical guidance, the hand-holding during our start-up years that spelled a lot of difference for us. And for that, telecentre.org has left an indelible mark in Philippine CeC history.

LOI Signing for the host of

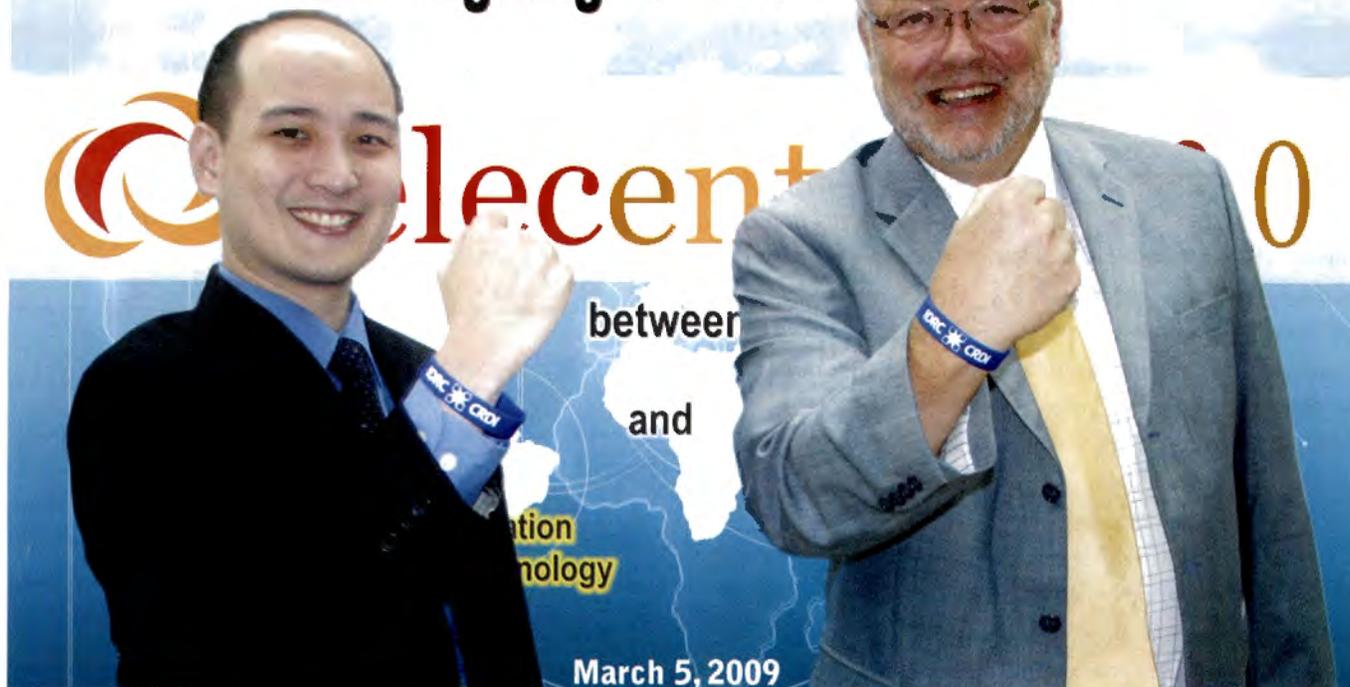


Photo Credit: PhilCeCNet

How is the CICT facilitating growth and institutionalization of telecentre.org-Philippine CeC Academy (tPCA), the capacity building arm of PhilCeCNet?

Primarily by bringing in partners together to form a consortium, CICT has paved the way for institutionalisation of the Academy. To further spur its growth, we give our full support to all Academy-related activities, promoting its pilot courses, linking partners and CeC knowledge workers, encouraging participation of stakeholder groups, providing policy guidance to the Academy. As with the network, we are there at every step.

It has been confirmed that CICT is going to host telecentre.org 2.0 and the arrangements for transfer are already underway. According to you, what are the factors that led the telecentre.org stakeholders to select Philippines as the new host?

While it is true that the Philippines has been selected as the next host, it is going to be the telecentre.org Foundation rather than the CICT who will be hosting this global programme. telecentre.org Foundation is a new,

non-profit organisation based in Manila that will soon be legally incorporated.

As for the selection of the Philippines as the new host, I do believe that our modest achievements in the Philippine telecentre movement have built the necessary foundation for us to embrace greater challenges.

Being selected as the next host of telecentre.org is one such challenge, probably the biggest so far, especially in the context of Asia where phenomenal telecentre growth is expected in the next couple of years. In addition, the Philippines being a part of the developing world, must have influenced the decision of telecentre.org management.

Above all, I do believe that our longstanding relationship with telecentre.org and our good track record in our projects with them was also a crucial consideration in the decision and we welcome it. To be at the forefront of the global telecentre movement, to be leading and managing a global initiative from our own backyard is truly an honor, a distinction that confirms our nation's status as an emerging leader in rural informatics.

How is the transfer going to impact the vision and mission of global telecentre movement in general and that of CICT in particular?

I think that this is the appropriate time for the transfer when telecentre.org has already reached a certain level of maturity and has succeeded in giving a face to the global telecentre movement. In terms of vision, telecentre.org 2.0 will carry on the original vision set forth in the start-up phase. But global telecentre landscape is much different now than it was five years ago. The technologies that are available to us now were not there before, and the challenges that we face today are greater both in magnitude and number. There is definitely a need for us to align our mission to these new challenges in the next five years. With renewed spirit and redefined strategies, we will be able to rise up to face various challenges.

On the part of CICT, the Philippines' hosting of this global initiative is not going to be an easy task. But CICT is embracing it not just for the Philippines, but for the global telecenter.org community, who look to telecentre.org's continuing leadership and presence. With the support and cooperation of global community, we are confident that we will be able to meet, or perhaps even exceed, the expectations of the global telecentre movement.

Please provide some information about the structure and functions of telecentre.org 2.0 under CICT. How is it going to be different from its predecessor?

As we are still in the transition stage, the Philippine transition team is working hand in hand with the telecentre.org team in Ottawa. Currently, they are working overtime to define a business strategy for the next phase of telecentre.org. That is seen to build on the successes of the initial phase, while also striving to break new ground for the global telecentre movement. But the crafting of the business strategy for telecentre.org 2.0 will have to go through an intensive consultation process to ensure that the interests of the programme and its partners, investors, and various stakeholders are upheld. Until that is done, we cannot prematurely say what exactly are the structure and functions of telecentre.org 2.0 going to be.

Though one thing is certain at this point that the principles and ideals of the programme will still be the same, as it moves to a new host, enters a new phase and faces new and bigger challenges. There is definitely going to be

a new flavor to it with the voice of the global telecentre community resonating even louder.

Last but not the least, how do you perceive telecentre.org 2.0? How are you going to be associated with it?

I view telecentre.org 2.0 as an opportunity for the Philippines to share its experiences and successes in the telecentre movement with other countries that face challenges in providing access to ICT to its citizens. Universal access to ICT is a vision that is very close to our hearts, and nothing will make us feel more fulfilled than to see our modest level of success replicated all over the world.

I will be very directly involved in the programme, particularly in the early stages. As CICT Chairman, I will be part of the Board of the Foundation and along with IDRC, will play a lead role particularly in the decision-making process of the Foundation, a function that is critical especially during the transition period. □

Quick Scan

Envisioning PhilCeCNet during the 3rd Knowledge Exchange Conference, 27-29 September 2006 at the Cebu White Sands of Maribago Beach Resort, in Mactan, Cebu.

Establishment of telecentre.org-Philippine CeC Academy (tPCA) on November 2007.

Formal launch of PhilCeCNet, its web portal, tPCA and election of PhilCeCNet Executive Council members, April 2008 during the 4th CeC Knowledge Exchange Conference.

The Philippine Community eCentre Network (PhilCeCNet) becomes a legal entity following its registration with the Philippine Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), February 2009.

Announcement of Philippines being selected as the new host of telecentre.org 2.0 (Now known as telecentre.org Foundation), August 2009.

Source: <http://www.philcecnet.ph/>

Towards a New Home Base for telecentre.org

Photo Credit: Maite Ormaechea



Florencio Ceballos

Since its creation in 2005, telecentre.org's founding investors – the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Microsoft and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) – planned for the programme's transfer to an organisation in the developing world once the start up phase was complete and telecentre.org had established a track record of success. As of December 31st of this year, telecentre.org will be housed at the telecentre.org Foundation in the Philippines, a non-profit organization with big plans to continue the programme's mandate of increasing the impact of grassroots telecentres on social and economic development in communities around the world. Florencio Ceballos is the Programme Manager for telecentre.org and is a senior member of the working group responsible for moving the telecentre family to its new home.

Why was the Philippines chosen to be the new host of telecentre.org?

Let me start by saying that telecentre.org was incubated at IDRC, a Canadian Crown Corporation, based in Ottawa, that works to find long-term solutions to social, economic and environmental problems by helping developing countries use science and technology for development. Our aim, and that of our funding partners, Microsoft and the SDC, was always to host

telecentre.org for the first five years of life and then move the programme's home base to an organisation in the South. This is in keeping with IDRC's approach to capacity-building and, by extension, its tradition of incubating and then transferring programmes that are sufficiently able to succeed to the developing world.

Last year, our governing body, made up of telecentre.org's original funders decided that the time to move telecentre.org to a new host organisation was here. First, we wanted to move telecentre.org to a country with a track record within the telecentre movement and, more particularly, with telecentre.org's and its development efforts of the past five years. The Philippines was clearly one of the countries where the telecentre movement was strong. Second, we were looking for a country with basic democratic guarantees: freedom of speech, the free flow of information, and transparency. The Philippines also met this test. Third, we wanted a country that was based in a region where new technologies were emerging and vibrant. The Philippines certainly had a strong record in this regard, particularly with rural technologies and in the use of mobile telephones for development. In addition, the Philippine government was supportive of the idea. Its Commission on Information and Communications Technology (CICT), expressed an interest in hosting telecentre.org in the Philippines, so the government was motivated and its commitment was important to us. Finally, the Philippines is a country that looks both East and West. What I mean is, it is located in Southeast Asia, but English is part of the country's culture; so is Spanish – that makes a difference when you are trying to decide where to locate a global, multicultural, multilingual enterprise like telecentre.org.

You mentioned that the Philippines is home to emerging and vibrant new technologies. Can you describe what kind of track record the Philippines has developed?

The Philippines is one of the first countries in the world to massively adopt mobile phones for development.

Because of the country's geographic reality (it is made up of thousands of small islands, many disconnected from each other), it has turned to mobile technology as a tool for disseminating health information. The Philippines is also making huge advances in digitizing its voting processes so that by next May's general election, the country's population of one-hundred million will have access to a fully digitized system of voting cards. This is a first for a country of Philippines' size. The Philippines is also making a lot of progress in rural informatics. It has a national programme in place to increase public access to new technologies.

But on top of all of this, the Philippines built not only a strong, national, telecentre network, but it built a network that brought together important actors from across the public access field, so programmes and initiatives that offer public access as well as the private sector, government and the Academy. I think the Philippines represents one of the few cases where a multi-sectoral approach was adopted and was then able to successfully influence public policy.

What are the implications for telecentre.org as it moves to its new home?

Two things: first, the Philippines brings with it a real understanding of the telecentre movement as an ecosystem where different actors with diverse interests, backgrounds, and way to behave within the ICT-for-development world, can work together. This has been one of telecentre.org's guiding objectives and one we were really keen to reinforce with the telecentre community, that is, this is how we increase the size and strength of the movement, by working with other actors. From a practical point of view, I think the approach allowed the Filipino telecentre movement to gather a great deal of human and social capital around their network.

What conclusions should the global community draw from the choice of the Philippines as future host?

We had the choice: we could look for someone outside the telecentre "family" – to a new organisation not related to us at all – or we could recognise the leadership role of some of our historic partners and

ensure the right mix of continuity and change. In the end, we decided that a future host that is recognised by the telecentre community and is embedded in the history of telecentre.org, like the Philippines, is one that is best placed to position telecentre.org for future success.

By choosing the Philippines as the next host, we are sending a strong message: one that affirms that we want to get stronger and better at what we do and we want to stay global. The Philippines is outward-looking and, I can tell you from experience, it is set on expanding the global reach and relevance of telecentre.org. I don't really think that the people and organisations that are part of our movement need much convincing of this.

Let me explain: when we talk about international cooperation, we often assume that we're talking about the North helping the South, i.e., providing funds, technical assistance, knowledge transfer, etc. But in the case of the Philippines, it has set an example, and in some cases, the standard, for both newly-emerging and countries in the North.

The Philippine experience within the Academy, for example, has proven more useful than the economically powerful nations that would later join our international training initiative, like India and Brazil. It also provided inspiration to peers in the Telecentre Europe network, a network with significantly more resources and capacity. Through exchanges between its PhilCeCNet staff and that of Telecentre Europe's, the Philippines transmitted lessons learned and best practices, which influenced how the European network planned for its future success. This kind of track record should be very reassuring to our stakeholders.

What's your best advice to telecentre.org's new hosts?

Keep the passion. You have an important job to do and have a tremendous opportunity to work with our partners and our entire telecentre family to make a difference in the world through telecentre.org. I am convinced that telecentre.org Foundation is well placed to build on our past successes, as it plans for even more success in the future, I know our community – with its energy, knowledge, and ideas – will be with you at every step of the way. I know I will.

Strategic Planning for Telecentre Network: The KenTlinks Workshop

Francis Mwathi

To brainstorm the various aspects of telecentre movement and networking in Kenya, a workshop had been organised by Ugunja Community Resource Centre (UCRC) in collaboration with International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and telecentre.org on 20th - 21st August 2009 in Ugunja, western part of Kenya. It was attended by various sections of Kenyan telecentre people and representatives of telecentre organisations from all regions of Kenya. They were also joined by a representative from UgaBYTES initiative.

Photo Credit: UgaBYTES Initiative



A section of participants at the end of the workshop



Map Credit: Google Maps

Kenya Network of Telecentres (KenTlinks, earlier known as KenTel) is a national network of telecentre communities in Kenya. The idea to establish a national network in Kenya was put forward by the regional telecentre representatives, when they met at various forum, such as the East Africa Telecentre Leaders Forum, the Benin Telecentre Leaders Forum, etc., to pay heed to telecentre issues in the country. The idea of KenTlinks was translated into reality in 2007 with the objectives of establishing a national network for different telecentre models operating within the country and also for strengthening the role of telecentres to contribute substantially for the welfare of people at the grassroots level of society.

Strategic planning is the key to growth and proper functioning of any organisation. Generally speaking, it is viewed as a process to define the direction, decision making and allocating resources both capital and human to meet the objectives of the organisation. KenTlinks too has to set its goals for a period of three years; need to assess its current status and decide how to manage the resources to achieve set goals. As KenTlinks is going

ahead with its registration process, therefore, strategic plan is expected to outline the aspirations of the Kenyan telecentre community in the context of specific priorities and information collected from other participatory processes and external expert reviews. During the workshop, strategic plan of KenTlinks for the span of three years; and the opportunities presented to telecentres by the introduction of high bandwidth through fiber optic cable and the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) sector were discussed.

Charles Ogada, on behalf of the Director of UCRC, delivered the opening remarks and discussed primarily about the UCRC. He was of the opinion that the proliferation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in rural areas still confronts numerous challenges, particularly the negative attitude of the community members, who are still not aware of the transformative impact of these technologies. They generally perceive them as luxurious services rather than an effective means to social and political transformation. He also expressed his concerns over the current status of inadequate infrastructure in rural areas, such as shortage of electricity, skilled human resources, etc. to name only a few. He added that generally skilled people do not like to live in rural areas and prefer to migrate to cities in search for better opportunities and a decent life style.

Nelson Karilus Otieno, chairperson of KenTlinks said that there was a need of people who can contribute to his organisation by availing of information and the research conducted by them to public libraries like Kenya National Library Services for archival and future reference purposes. He pointed out that the process of national network would enhance access to information and knowledge for

The proliferation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in rural areas still confronts numerous challenges, particularly the negative attitude of the community members, who are still not aware of the transformative impact of these technologies.

communities to improve their productivity and quality of life. The national network will facilitate the dissemination of knowledge and information, and networking in rural areas through the applications of telecentres by utilising the community-based learning facilities both online and offline.

This would also provide relevant information and knowledge pertaining to key areas of socio-economic development, such as education, employment, health, gender empowerment and so on.



Photo Credit: UgaBYTES Initiative

UCRC main offices in Ugunja in Kenya

Kenya: At A Glance	
Population	38.77 million (2008)
GDP	26.95 US\$ (2007)
Telephone Subscribers	42.53/ 100 Inhabitants (2008)
Broadband Subscribers	8.67/100 Inhabitants (2008)
Mobile cellular Subscribers	0.05/100 Inhabitants (2008)
Subscribers	41.88/100 Inhabitants (2008)

Source: International Telecommunication Union, Country Data by Region 2008, Accessed on 12 October 2009, available at <http://www.itu.int/ITU-D/ICTEYE/Indicators/Indicators.aspx#>

Cleopa Otieno, National Coordinator of KenTlinks told about his organisation. He shared with participants that the network was now registered as a non-profit company. It would ensure that the network serves telecentres in Kenya more effectively and appropriately. During the registration process several challenges were encountered, one of them being the fact that the name KenTeL had been registered by another entity. This realisation forced the board to



A section of participants at the end of the workshop

look for another name. After about a week long search, finally the name Kenya Telecentres Link Limited (Kentlink) was adopted and used for the registration. This brought about the question of which name to use now because 'KenTel' had been used widely. They also discussed any consequences that may occur due to change of name especially on a global scale.

Most of the participants were very keen to know how people can be made aware of the benefits of telecentres, particularly its immense potential for social transformation and effective and efficient public service delivery in rural areas and to isolated communities

There were also many presentations by invited telecentre leaders from various regional telecentre organisations across Kenya before the floor was open for comments and queries. Most of the participants were very keen to know how people can be made aware of the benefits of telecentres, particularly its immense potential for social transformation and effective and efficient public service delivery in rural areas and to isolated communities. It had been realised that regular interactions among various communities can be helpful, so that they understand and learn from each other. Eventually that would lead to realisation

and sensitisation in the communities about knowledge sharing and the potential benefits of telecentres. It had been also recognised that a fair regional balance in the KentLink board and other committees is crucial to give the network a national outlook. Participants also went through particular sessions on writing blogs, posting them on websites, participating in online discussions on KentLink, UgaBYTES and telecentre.org. The Chairman of KentLink, Nelson Otieno, on behalf of the KentLink board, proposed a vote of thanks. In his concluding remarks, he observed that the findings and the thoughts shared during the workshop would be useful

for future course of action of the telecentre movement and networking in Kenya.

At the end of the workshop, participants were provided an opportunity to visit UCRC. UCRC is a community development NGO located in Western Kenya. They serve the area of Siaya District and neighbouring communities to promote sustainable development, and empower communities through increasing access to information.

They have a Vision for a community that is sustainable, equitable and empowered. Their Mission Statement is to facilitate sustainable development in the community through Networking and knowledge exchange. UCRC serves as an umbrella organisation for over sixty local community groups including women, youth, disabled and farmers. The centre provides access to information for promoting development and fighting poverty in the region. So, the workshop provided an opportunity to share knowledge and discuss future course of action for strengthening telecentre movement in Kenya. □

Author



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Telecentre Network in Malaysia: Bridging the Digital Divide

The Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister's Department, Malaysia

"In the information age that we are living in, the Malaysian society must be information-rich. It can be no accident that there is today no wealthy, developed country that is information poor and no information-rich country that is poor and undeveloped. There was a time when land was the most fundamental basis of prosperity and wealth. Then came the second wave, the age of industrialisation. Smokestacks rose where the fields were once cultivated. Now, increasingly, knowledge will not only be the basis of power but also prosperity. Again we must keep up. Already Malaysians are among the biggest users of computers in the region. Computer literacy is a must if we want to progress and develop. No effort must be spared in the creation of an information-rich Malaysian society."

Tun Mahathir Mohamad
Former Prime Minister of Malaysia at the Malaysia Business Council
Kuala Lumpur, 28 February 1991

The vision of the former prime minister has paved a new strategic path for Malaysia to embark onto the knowledge-economy. Significant benefits have been reaped both socially and economically from efforts made in steering the country in this direction. As with most countries, development of infrastructure and modernisation start with towns and urban areas. With time, such urban dwellers become more advanced leaving behind rural communities. The fast advancement of technology further increases the divide thus aggravating the imbalance in the socio-economic well being of society. The Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and its use, though, on one hand enables generation of wealth, can also cause a rift between the information "haves" and "have-nots". In Malaysia, the digital divide is defined as a condition when a part of society is unable to gain access to ICT infrastructure or unable to use such infrastructure due to IT illiteracy or unable to create value out of the ICT facilities available.

Access, awareness and affordability

About 40 per cent of our population lives in the rural areas, which are mostly underserved especially in terms of access to information infrastructure. They also constitute most of IT illiterate population. Surveys also show that about 83 per cent of rural households and about 50 per cent of urban households may find it difficult to afford to

buy PCs and to be connected to the Internet. The cost of a PC to average income in Malaysia is about 14 per cent compared to the United States where it is about two per cent. The lack of local indigenous content has also contributed to the digital divide where about 70 per cent of Malaysians know only the local language (Bahasa Malaysia) and about 90 per cent of content on the Internet is in English.

Table 1: Household Use of Internet by Main Use

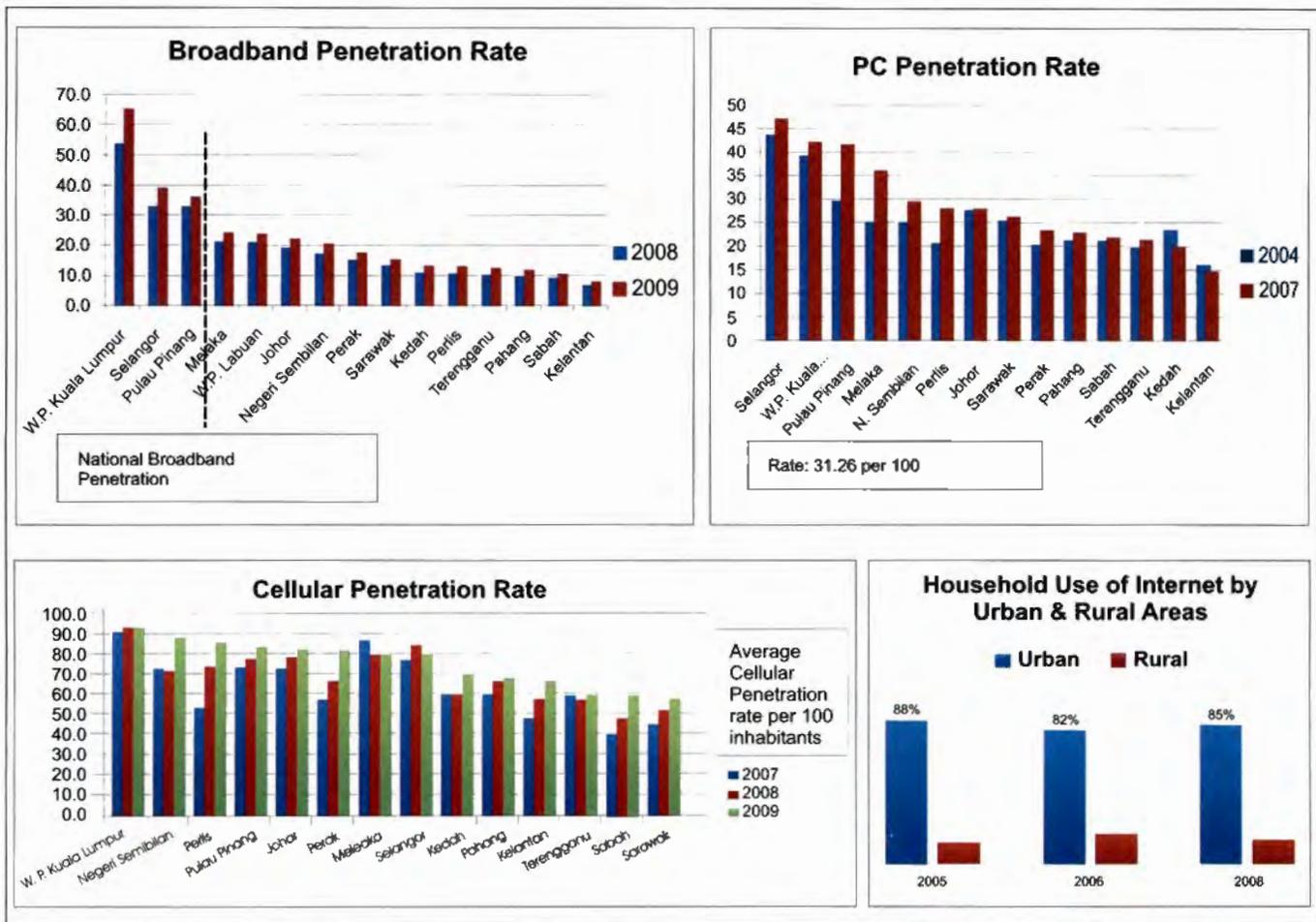
Type of Use	2005	2006	2008
Getting Information	40.5	84.5	94.4
Communication by Text	99.6	80.7	84.7
Leisure	47.1	52.6	63.5
Education	46.8	45.9	64.5
Financial Activities	14.6	23.6	31.8
Public Services	12.7	12.0	29.2

Source: MCMC Household Use of Internet Survey 2008

Strategies to bridge the digital divide

In Malaysia, most urban areas are connected to the Internet, for about 40 per cent of the population living in the rural areas, it is still very much work in progress. At the end of Q2, 2009, the Internet penetration rate is 65.7 per cent while that of broadband is 24.8 per 100 inhabitants. The percentage of Internet users between urban and rural households is at 85 per cent to 15 per cent respectively.

Box 1: Penetration Rate and Household Use of Internet in Urban & Rural Areas, Malaysia



Source: MCMC Household Use of Internet Survey 2008

In order to achieve the target of 50 per cent broadband penetration rate in 2010, a High Speed Broadband (HSBB) project has been rolled out and among the initiatives included under this effort is Broadband for the General Population (BBGP). Under this project, main industry areas including big cities and local public universities will be connected with high speed Internet by using fiber optic up to 10mbps, while the sub-urban and rural areas will be connected by using Broadband up to 2mbps and wireless Internet, such as 3G and WiMAX. The HSBB project is a public and private partnership between the Government and Telekom Malaysia and besides providing connectivity, Telekom Malaysia is also obliged to build more telecentres in urban areas to provide broadband access to the urban poor. Taking cognisance of the current scenario and the challenges of addressing these issues effectively, the

National Strategic Framework for Bridging the Digital Divide (NSF-BDD) was formulated and approved by the government on 20 August 2007. The NSF-BDD consists of three components and five implementation thrusts as depicted in Figure 1.

There are nine groups identified as the most vulnerable and can easily be marginalised by the digital divide. These are the elderly, women, rural community, small, micro and medium enterprises, youth, children, people with disabilities, indigenous and the poor. All these groups fall within the responsibility areas of certain ministries. These ministries have been nominated to assume the role as lead agencies, which will coordinate the implementation of bridging the digital divide efforts for the group within their responsibility area. The Lead Agencies engage with stakeholders, including public, private and non-



profit organisations as well as the community itself in a coordinated approach with the objective of bridging the digital divide through the development of appropriate infrastructure and introduction of programmes, which can add value to the everyday lives of the community leveraging on the telecentres and available ICT facilities. A Top-Down-Up methodology is adopted in the design and implementation of programmes by blending the strengths of grassroots participation with institutional resources. Besides telecommunications infrastructure, the issue of affordability of devices is also a barrier for certain segments to get access to the Internet.

Telecentre development programme

Today, there are 2,150 telecentres set up by various Federal and State Government agencies. There are also a number of centres set up by private companies in collaboration with non-profit organisations under their corporate social responsibility programmes.

In general, the telecentres are equipped with facilities, such as computers, Internet, printers, scanners, digital cameras, telephones and some with LCD projectors. The number of computers in each telecentre varies from two to twenty, depending on the size of the local community being served. These centres conduct training on the use of basic software applications as well as the use of the Internet to get information, to communicate and to do basic transactions with the government, private and financial institutions. Some telecentres also conduct training on basic computer maintenance. The daily operations of the telecentre are managed by staff appointed by the respective implementing agencies on a full time basis.

There are various models of telecentre implementation in Malaysia, but all have an underlying principle of providing either free or minimal fee access to the Internet.

The Rural Internet Centres (RICs) set up by the then Ministry of Energy, Communications and Multimedia (now Ministry of Information, Communications and Culture) in 2000 are located in the annex part of the Post Office buildings. The Post Office is an ideal location, as it provides outreach to remote places, is secure and is a place frequently visited by the community as a one-stop centre to pay their utility bills and to do most of their other transactions. Each RIC consists of between five to eight computers with Internet connectivity. The usage of computers for Internet browsing is free for the members and a minimal fee is charged for non members. The Medan InfoDesa telecentres (MIDs), an initiative of the Ministry of Rural and Regional Development (MRRD), are set up in buildings belonging to MRRD. The MIDs charges a small fee to users for all services offered including Internet browsing. The revenue collected is used to fund some of the operational expenses, such as utility charges, computer accessories and paper for printing. A major portion of the funds for the sustenance of the RICs and MIDs still comes from government funding.

Two other models are the Community Broadband Centre (CBC) and the Community Broadband Library (CBL) started by the Malaysia Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) with the target of achieving at least one CBC and CBL per selected mukim by 2013. The development and operations of these centres are funded under the Universal Service Provision fund, which is a mandatory contribution by the telecommunication

The Post Office is an ideal location, as it provides outreach to remote places, is secure and is a place frequently visited by the community as a one-stop centre to pay their utility bills and to do most of their other transactions

operators. Selected mukims refer to the designated underserved areas in compliance with the Communications and Multimedia Act 1998. The CBCs involve a smart partnership between MCMC and the local authorities where MCMC will appoint a telecommunications service provider to build and operate the centre in a space or building provided by the local authority.

Telecentre managers: role and responsibilities

In Malaysia, most telecentres are operated by a manager and assistant manager. These managers and assistant managers are mostly graduates and local candidates are given priority. The roles and responsibilities of a telecentre manager include sensitising the community about the services provided by the telecentres, promoting telecentre usage among them, conducting ICT training and reporting computer hardware and software faults to facilitate speedy maintenance, communicate with the local authorities, attract local entrepreneurs, help private companies and so on.

Collaboration between public, private and non-profit organisations

More recently, a collaborative effort was made between the government's MOICC and MRRD (telecentres) and Microsoft Malaysia, Virtual Malaysia and the National University of Malaysia. This is an effort to enable promotion of rural products using existing e-business sites with ready customer base and global reach, such as virtual Malaysia. Another collaborative effort, which is underway, is between the Ministry of Education, MOICC, MRRD (telecentres) and a private sector e-learning content provider. This e-learning content would be distributed to telecentres under this programme, as it requires low bandwidth and can hence be accessed by rural students using the telecentre facilities.

Impact of the programme

Since the Eighth Malaysia Plan, the programme has, to a large extent, achieved its intended objectives of providing collective access, creating awareness on the capabilities of ICT in improving the community's socio-economic status and increasing computer literacy among the underserved communities. Until 2008, more than 200,000 participants have been trained by the main implementation ministries, namely the MOICC, MRRD and MCMC. The total number of people trained in ICT would be very much higher if those trained by telecentres operated by the state governments and the non-profit organisations are also taken into account. In several locations, the telecentre programme has contributed towards generating economic value to the local community in many different ways.

Challenges towards sustainability

There are still challenges that need to be overcome for better implementation of the telecentre programmes. A main challenge is the sustainability of the programme itself. Several factors, such as low population density, low income, high operating cost, etc, have been identified as challenges of sustaining telecentre programmes. A study is currently being conducted to develop telecentre models that best address the needs of the local community.

Future plan

The focus during the Tenth Malaysia Plan will be on elevating telecentres to provide value, both social and economic, to the underserved communities through the use of ICT. The provision of broadband infrastructure via the nationwide broadband roll out will also upgrade connectivity to the telecentres. A set of measurable targets for BDD need to be identified in order to benchmark our current status. Existing measurement focuses on infrastructure readiness, such as Internet, PC and cellular penetration, etc. Some factors that also need to be measured are ICT literacy rates, number of local content generated and socio-economic benefits to community. The National Coordinating Committee on bridging the digital divide will focus more on coordinating the initiatives undertaken by the numerous stakeholders; development and provision of appropriate and customised content; and improving the management of telecentres through the inculcation of best practices. As the telecentres evolve with the needs of the community, future plans must be considered to ensure continued relevance and sustainability of the telecentres.

Conclusion

Malaysia has made significant headway in projecting telecentres as agents for bridging the digital divide. Several of the initiatives have gained international recognition, such as Eagles' Nest, for the elderly, e-Homemakers, for housewives and single mothers and the e-Bario. However, more needs to be done to provide opportunities for the underserved groups in Malaysia towards ensuring a more equitable distribution of benefits to all. □

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Telecentre Landscape in the Philippines

Cuchie Echeverria

Understanding the Philippines scenario

The Philippines is an archipelago with 7,107 islands divided into three major island groups: Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. These island groups are further subdivided into 80 provinces, 120 cities and 1,511 municipalities. To date, some 1,000 telecentres - locally branded as Community eCentres (CeCs) - have been established in the Philippines, spread over different cities and municipalities throughout the country.

These telecentres were born of different initiatives by different organisations and their target groups are just as varied. For instance, there are telecentres that cater to out-of-school youth and adults, telecentres for farmers, telecentres for overseas foreign workers (OFWs) and their relatives, telecentres that are based in the local government units (LGUs), telecentres that cater to victims of trafficking, and so on.

Until a few years ago, digital inclusion efforts in the country were diversified and scattered, and providing a unified direction to these efforts proved to be a big challenge. In 2006, during the 3rd Knowledge Exchange Conference organised by the National Computer Centre - Field Operations Office (NCC-FOO) under the Commission on Information and Communications Technology (CICT), the Philippine Community eCentre Network (PhilCeCNet) was born. Today, telecentres in the Philippines are gathered under a formal organisation that is PhilCeCNet, fully charged with a unified direction and a shared vision.

Building, learning, sharing and growing

The birth of PhilCeCNet has spawned several initiatives, all of which contributed to taking the Philippine telecentre movement to the stage it is today. In less than three years, the network has laid the groundwork necessary for a strong foundation upon which to build the pillars of the Philippine telecentre movement.

Much credit is owed to telecentre visionaries in the Philippines, both within and outside government, who



Philippine Telecentre Location Map. Each placemark color represents a particular telecentre initiative.

seized on the potential that telecentres had to offer. Many were assisted in this effort by telecentre.org, an international network of people and organisations committed to increasing the economic and social impact of telecentres around the world. Through its support and investment in several Philippine initiatives, telecentre.org, in collaboration with government and non-governmental partners, helped establish a telecentre presence and ensured its impact on Filipino communities, starting with the important step of establishing PhilCeCNet.

Map Credit: PhilCeCNet

The network

Following PhilCeCNet's creation, several working committees were organised: Infrastructure, Content Development, Capability Building, CeC Development and Management, Resource Mobilisation and Membership. In April 2008, during the 4th Knowledge Exchange Conference on CeCs, the members of the PhilCeCNet Executive Council were elected. The network, along with other important components of the Philippine telecentre programme, was officially launched during the same event. Early this year, PhilCeCNet became a full-fledged legal entity upon its registration with the Securities and Exchange Commission, an agency under the Philippine Department of Finance, responsible for security laws and regulating the security industry. At present, PhilCeCNet boasts over 300 registered members from both the government and the private sector.

The road map

After the establishment of the network, work began soon on the crafting of what is now known as the Philippine Community eCentre Road Map for 2008-2010. The document sets the direction for the growth and sustainability of telecentres or CeCs, with a vision of opening at least one CeC in every municipality across the country by 2010. As with the establishment of PhilCeCNet, this initiative was spearheaded by CICT and was well supported by telecentre.org.

The road map spells out the direction of the Philippine telecentre programme in terms of four major component areas: infrastructure, content development, capability building, and CeC development and management.

The formulation of the strategic road map is anchored on several legal mandates of the Philippines Government, such as the Medium Term Philippine Development Plan 2004-2010, which calls for the establishment of CeCs to provide access in unserved areas, and the Philippine Strategic Road Map for the ICT Sector 2006-2010, which states that at the heart of the government's effort to bridge the digital divide is the Community eCentre Programme.

This year, the government has reaffirmed its support for the telecentre movement in the country when it pledged to implement the road map by providing much-needed resources from the country's government fund.

Under the road map implementation project, which will run for a period of three years, the following major activities will be undertaken:

- a) establishment of new telecentres in municipalities where such facilities do not exist yet;
- b) transformation of existing school laboratories and Internet cafes into telecentres;
- c) development and enhancement of CeC knowledge workers, such as telecentre manager and the technical and administrative support staff in the areas of planning, managing and sustaining the operation of the CeC; and
- d) provision of relevant content in the CeCs, particularly in the areas of health, education, employment and agriculture.

The road map spells out the direction of the Philippine telecentre programme in terms of four major component areas: infrastructure, content development, capability building, and CeC development and management

Furthermore, While the 2008-2010 road map focused on municipalities, the succeeding road map will go down to the barangay (village or district) level. With over 42,000 barangays in the country, this is going to be a herculean task but nonetheless achievable with strong determination and synergistic action.

The Academy

Consistent with the strategy of road map to support the capability building goal of the Philippine telecentre programme by ensuring the availability of competent knowledge workers in every telecentre or CeC, a consortium of government, private and academic institutions was formed to serve as the capability building arm of PhilCeCNet. This consortium came to be known as the telecentre.org-Philippine CeC Academy (iPCA).

The iPCA also functions as the accreditation body for member-programmes, and the certifying body on proficiency of telecentre knowledge workers in the Philippines and also in the region. Since the establishment of iPCA in November 2007, a charter has been adopted,

the national competency standards for telecentre knowledge workers had been formulated and approved, a curriculum had been developed, and the pilot run of the series of tPCA foundation courses for CeC managers has been completed.

Also in the works is the standards on tPCA course accreditation and certification protocol which is currently under review. At present, the Academy is being managed by a Board of Trustees (BoT) whose members were elected in December 2008. The institutionalisation of the BoT has enabled the Academy to go full gear this year.

Web portal and online community

Recognising the value of online advocacy and knowledge sharing in furthering the goals set forth in the national road map, a web portal was created to serve as the network's cyber hub facilitating sharing and interaction among CeCs, government agencies and private partners involved in implementing the national CeC programme.

The web portal makes available information on different CeC initiatives and services, statistics and geographical distribution of CeCs, contact information of telecentre managers, as well as success stories and the best practices.

Apart from more conventional features such as blog, download, gallery, feedback form and online survey, the web portal includes a location map of telecentres established nationwide using google map. It also features telecentre profiles, and telecentre managers and staff may update their respective profiles online as well as contribute content in the form of blogs, events, photos and downloadable files.



tPCA charter signatories extend their hands in a show of commitment during the charter ratification in August 2008 in Manila, Philippines.

Significantly, just six months after the web portal's official launch in April 2008, it became a semi-finalist in the 11th Philippine Web Awards. And in July of this year, it was recognised by the Philippine Web Accessibility Group

Apart from more conventional features such as blog, download, gallery, feedback form and online survey, the web portal includes a location map of telecentres established nationwide using google map

and the National Council for Disability Affairs as among a few websites of the country that are friendly to persons with disabilities.

Furthermore, in an effort to promote greater interaction among members and further propel the growth of the telecentre movement in the country, an online community was created using the Ning platform to complement the existing web portal. The PhilCeCNet Online Community incorporates such interactive features as groups, forums and member profiles, enabling CeC implementers and stakeholders nationwide to get to know one another, exchange ideas on common issues and interests, and stay connected.

Other initiatives

Knowledge Exchange Conference

The CICT has been organising a Knowledge Exchange Conference (KEC) on CeCs every year. The conference brings together telecentre leaders and stakeholders from all over the Philippines to share strategies, services and experiences for supporting CeCs and to promote increased collaboration among CeC players in the country.

The 5th KEC was successfully staged in September 2009 with around 200 participants. The 5th KEC chronicled the growth and progress of PhilCeCNet as national network working towards its vision of a CeC in every municipality.

Telecentre Managers Exchange Programme

PhilCeCNet and CICT, in partnership with telecentre.org, organised a three-day exchange programme in December 2008 for telecentre managers with the primary goal of providing them with an opportunity

to visit other telecentres to learn from them as well as share experiences, with a view to improving telecentre operations. A nationwide Infrastructure and Services Inventory Survey (ISIS) was launched in June 2009. The survey seeks to take stock of the facilities available in the CeCs across the country to serve as the basis for future network plans and programmes. Another activity in the pipeline is the formulation of a CeC operations manual or guidebook. During the recently concluded 5th KEC, Secretary Chua announced that the Philippine CeC movement has reached a point where giving recognition to those who have excelled in CeC service delivery is timely and appropriate. The CeC Excellence Awards are now in the works.

Telecentre.org support

Although telecentre.org, was already making its presence felt as early as the 3rd KEC by providing assistance in convening the conference and in forming PhilCeCNet, it was in 2007 that a more formal partnership between CICT and telecentre.org was established.

telecentre.org provided a grant to CICT for forging the CeC directions in the country and the strengthening of PhilCeCNet. It was through this grant that the development of the road map, the activation of the network, the creation of the web portal and the establishment of the tPCA were made possible, all in a span of one year.

This collaboration between telecentre.org and Philippines was instrumental in the early achievements of the telecentre movement in the Philippines. In addition to

financial support, telecentre.org's technical assistance, especially during PhilCeCNet's start-up years, proved invaluable.

Moving forward

The management and operation of local Centres are often affected by the change in administration, which takes place every three years. And, sustainability is a major concern not just for Philippine CeCs, but also for telecentres and networks worldwide. But, with a road map in place to provide clear direction, multi-stakeholder and international support, plus a pro-active, steadfast leadership, the Philippine telecentre movement is more than ready to face up to these and other challenges.

The commitment and passion with which government leaders and PhilCeCNet members embraced the whole telecentre advocacy is truly one for the books. Their accomplishments are visible today, and three years in, PhilCeCNet is just starting now to pick up momentum.

Gearing up for telecentre.org 2.0

Things continue to look up in the Philippine telecentre landscape. In August 2009, telecentre.org announced that it had achieved a significant level of maturity and global success and it was preparing to move to a new home in 2010. The Philippines has been selected as the new host for telecentre.org.

The initiative is welcomed by the entire Philippine community. While being completely aware that it is not going to be an easy task in view of the rather high standards set by the men and women behind telecentre.org 1.0 and its remarkable success in the global telecentre arena, CICT and PhilCeCNet are more than ready to take on the challenge. Yes, the enthusiasm is there and the energy is palpable! □



The PhilCeCNet Online Community now has close to 200 members.

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Service Centre Agencies (SCAs): Emerging Indian Telecentre Networks

Shipra Sharma

Analysing the concept of telecentre network

At the conceptual level, the term 'telecentre network' traces its ancestry back to the sociological concept - social network. It is defined as a social structure built around 'nodes' and 'ties', where the nodes represent individuals (or organisations) and the 'ties' represent one or more specific types of interdependency or relationships between the nodes¹. Of late, telecentre networks have started appearing in different parts of the world to solve emergent telecentre problems and challenges, make them viable social enterprises and help in consolidating the overall telecentre movement.

A telecentre network refers to "any group of people working in telecentres whose members come together to learn from each other and cooperatively access services. The common thread is that networks are about telecentre people working together to make their centres more effective, sustainable, and valuable to the communities they serve"².

The above definition talks specifically about networks of independent telecentre managers, characteristic of regions like Africa, Europe and Latin America. Before the formation of networks, the telecentre managers were coordinating everything (services, physical and technological infrastructure, content, funding) on their

A telecentre network refers to "any group of people working in telecentres whose members come together to learn from each other and cooperatively access services"

own. Gradually, the realisation that the challenges faced by telecentres could be addressed more effectively with a collective approach, led them to gather under the network umbrella. Therefore, these networks are more bottom up in nature with the telecentre managers taking



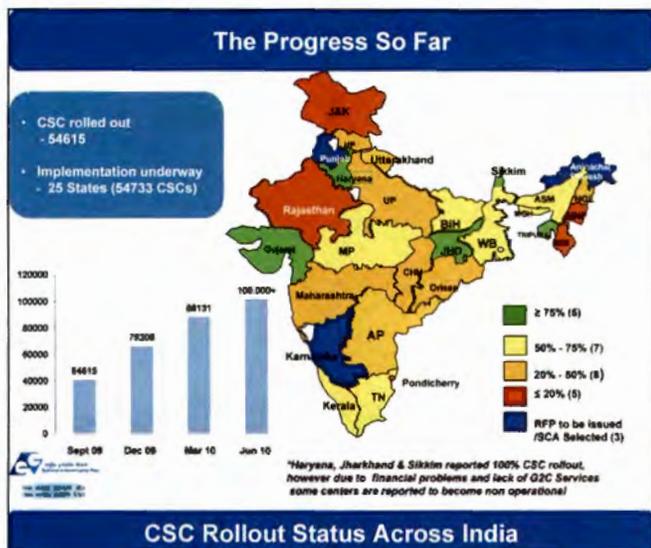
Sahaj Common Services Centre

Photo Credit: CSDMS

the initiative to form them for addressing their challenges collectively. Herein, one cannot ignore the critical role played by telecentre.org and other national or regional telecentre leaders in bringing them together and accelerating the growth of networks.

However in Asian countries organisations or the government are leading the telecentre movement. These are more top down in nature with the organisations selecting and training local telecentres Managers (mostly on the basis of some preset criteria, like education, IT skills, etc. and sometimes also in consultation with the village community). They provide technological infrastructure, content and services, skills development, etc. to them. This phenomenon is more visible in countries, like India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, etc. At another level, these organisation or government driven networks are aggregated under a national network. We can classify the existing networks into three categories: Network of individual telecentre operators; networks created and supported by Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), Private Sector companies and the government and national networks like the Bangladesh Telecentre Network (BTN).

Hence, the above discussion and available empirical evidence that there are prominent regional variations



reflected in their structure, hierarchy, management and operations. The present paper analyses the Service Centre Agencies (SCAs), an important part of the Indian Government's Common Service Centre (CSC) Programme, as emerging telecentre networks. The programme has offered them several opportunities as well as challenges, which are worth exploring and highlighting for the benefit of telecentre networks across the globe.

The network discussion is incomplete without a reference to the concept of telecentre ecosystem that comprises telecentre managers and operators, service providers and content developers, software developers, global and local IT companies, donors, CSOs, the policy makers, the government, and above all, the community. The networks help these actors to connect with each other and support the ecosystem.

Indian telecentre network scenario

As mentioned, the Indian telecentre networks are led either by organisations or the government. Each one of them have come up with their respective telecentre models, having different (but certainly not exclusive) focuses, such as e-governance, e-commerce, community development, social entrepreneurship, and so on. One of the earliest telecentre projects, the Information Village Research Project (IVRP), supported by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC)³ was implemented by a CSO, i.e., the M S Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF)⁴ almost a decade ago in 1998. Later on, the

government and private sector also joined the telecentre bandwagon. In 2003, all these individual efforts culminated into conceiving the first national network in India, i.e., National Alliance for Mission 2007: every village a knowledge centre (Mission 2007), now known as Grameen Gyan Abhiyan (GGA). The latest telecentre project spreading its network across India's rural areas is the CSC programme led by the government. The Indian networks are providing some or all of the benefits mentioned below to their respective telecentre managers: technological infrastructure; access to products, services, and content; training on entrepreneurship, grassroots marketing, services and content, etc. continuous learning opportunities; a sense of community among the telecentre managers; opportunities to learn from each other and share the same across telecentres and networks; monitoring and evaluation (M and E) of telecenters and advocacy and policy-related activities to facilitate the growth of the telecentre movement.

The Common Service Centre programme

The CSC programme⁵, launched by the Department of Information Technology, Ministry of Communication and Information Technology, Government of India in 2005, is an important step in the direction of decentralising and localising eGovernance and other public and private sector service delivery at the village level. As per the initial plans, the target was to establish approximately 100,000 CSCs to serve 600,000 Indian villages. However, after the announcement by the President of India to reposition CSCs as Bharat Nirman⁶ Common Service Centres at

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the Panchayat or local government level, their numbers are going to double in proportion to the Panchayats functioning in the country. This programme has developed a conducive ecosystem for the CSCs to take root and grow. Its main components are: National Level Service

Agency (NLSA), State Designated Agency (SDA), Service Centre Agency (SCA) and Village Level Entrepreneur (VLE). The SCA shoulder the crucial responsibility of rolling out the CSC program in the villages within their respective operational areas. They are the prime drivers of the CSC ecosystem and occupy a central place therein.

Service Centre Agencies

Apart from the existing organisation-led telecentre networks, like MSSRF, the SCAs are the new networks appearing on the telecentre radar. Their introduction has diversified this field to a great extent. The SCAs are selected through a transparent bidding process coordinated by the SDAs. The bidding is open to private and social sector companies and organisations fulfilling certain criteria as mentioned in their Request for Proposal (RFP) document⁷. Once selected, the SCAs are also supported by the NLSA and their respective SDAs in evolving their networks and supporting VLEs. Their main responsibilities are: identifying, selecting and training the VLEs to run the CSCs; setting up the CSCs (either directly or with the help of the identified VLEs); identifying relevant applications and services; aggregating, disseminating and updating contents; arranging face-to-face meetings for VLEs to share their challenges and learn from each other; harnessing the State Wide Area Network (SWAN) for connectivity; and so on. The SCAs have been implementing CSCs for almost three years⁸. Learning from their experience, they have adopted several best practices for strengthening their networks. Some of them are sharing their CSC experience regularly through newsletters available in print and/or online versions, like the CSC Khabar by All India Society for Electronics & Computer Technology (AISECT) and the Sahaj Setu Newsletter by SREI SAHAJ e-Village Limited (Srei Sahaj). In the course of programme implementation, they have found several opportunities as well as challenges.

Opportunities

By joining the CSC programme, the SCAs have got an opportunity to integrate their ongoing work within this framework. For example, besides the conventional services that the CSCs deliver, BASIX India Ltd. (BASIX) CSCs also provide micro credit and micro life insurance and livelihood insurance schemes. Similarly, Network for Information and

Computer Technology (NICT) has included their ongoing programmes in their CSC network. In addition, the SCAs have partnered with other organisations (academic, public and private sector) to diversify services and help their VLEs in running sustainable CSCs, like Srei Sahaj and AISECT taking the lead in introducing appropriate Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) courses in the villages through their CSCs⁹.

Best practices

Community sensitisation, mobilisation and service delivery are the areas where the SCAs are using innovative techniques. In countries like India, regions and areas largely determine people's perception towards technology.

Currently, there are approximately 21 SCAs implementing the CSC scheme across Indian states and Union Territories⁸. A close examination of their organisational profile reveals that most of them are working in the IT or ICT sector, but creating and supporting a telecentre or CSC network was a new opportunity for a majority of them

For example, for majority of AISECT VLEs, the desktop with CPU and an assortment of add ons is the real 'computer', not the small and simple looking laptop. The SCAs have to respect the community's vision of technology.

They are also using innovative techniques of mobilising the community and sensitising them about ICTs and the CSCs, like street plays, mobile ICT vans, songs, poetry, etc. Some SCAs like AISECT have adopted avant-garde IEC methods, like taking out "IT Yatras" (IT processions) for awareness generation about the CSCs. Approaching and inviting the community leaders and high officials from local administration to CSC functions is another way of enhancing its credibility and increasing footfalls.

They are innovative in creating need and demand-based services to make the telecentres sustainable. Taking this into consideration, NICT CSC arranged for masonry training to the tribals in Jhabua district (Madhya Pradesh), who have the aptitude for construction work. In terms of CSC sustainability also, some of the SCAs like Srei

Sahaj have a few phenomenal success stories to share. The AISECT VLEs are also making a decent living out of their social enterprise. This has been possible through a combination of Business to Consumer (B2C), Government to Consumer (G2C) and other public and private sector online and offline services.

Knowledge sharing

The SCA networks generally function independently, guided by the SDAs and NLSA. But, for the success of the overall programme, it is important that they interact with each other frequently. The implementation status of the CSC programme is reviewed regularly where the SCAs also share their problems and interact with each other. These meetings are generally convened by the NLSA¹⁰. Forums, such as the Indian Telecentre Forum, eINDIA2009, also enable knowledge sharing where they discuss their network level concerns among themselves and with officials from the Department of IT, Govt of India, NLSA, etc.

Challenges

The SCAs are facing challenges mainly related to their area of operation, services and sustainability. Some of them are working in remote and difficult terrains, which are dacoit, drought, migration and naxalite prone. For example, AISECT is working in 15 backward districts of Chambal, Rewa, and Sagar divisions in Madhya Pradesh; and in seven districts of Durg and Koraba divisions in Chattisgarh. Similarly, AID is working mainly in some Naxal infested areas of Jharkhand where lack of governance, infrastructure and connectivity poses huge problems.

Initially, G2C services were supposed to be the mainstay of the CSC programme. But at present, eLearning contributes the most to the CSC generated revenue. B2C services occupy the second place with G2C services trailing far behind them. The revenue generation capacity of the CSCs varies from region to region, depending (to some extent) on the proactiveness of the state governments in digitising services and utility bill payments.

So, in order to become sustainable, SCAs have to be innovative in providing need and demand based services, irrespective of whether G2C services are available or not. In most cases, offline services, like photocopying, photography, scanning, mobile SIM card recharge, etc.

also add to the revenue, but often go unnoticed and unmonitored.

Conclusion

Thus, the Indian telecentre scenario has become more varied after the introduction of the SCAs. Their background and core business is well reflected in the services they are delivering in their regions. Just like their predecessors, the SCAs are creating top down networks, having considerable control over VLE selection and training procedures. They are also supporting their networks members by introducing innovations in community mobilisation, service delivery, training, etc. The SCAs are, in fact, in a better position compared to some of their counterparts since their CSCs are an important component of the NeGP. They have a more conducive policy environment, which was absent earlier. After launching this scheme, the government is also taking all the necessary measures, such as extending the reach of broadband connectivity, accelerating the digitisation of administration, etc. to ensure its success. □

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- ⁹ All the SCA specific examples mentioned in this article are obtained from websites, discussions at the Indian Telecentre Forum (TLF), eIndia 2009 and by one to one conversation with the invited SCA representatives.
- ¹⁰ For example, see the minutes of one such meeting available at: <http://www.aisectcsc.com/PDF/AISECT%20CSC%20APPRECIATION%20LETTERS.pdf> (accessed on October 21, 2009)

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Telecentre Forum at eIndia 2009: Overcoming the Knowledge Island Syndrome

Shipra Sharma

"Knowledge is embodied in people gathered in communities and networks. The road to knowledge is via people, conversations, connections and relationships. Knowledge surfaces through dialog; all knowledge is socially mediated and access to knowledge is by connecting to people that know or know who to contact."

Denham Grey

The above quote perfectly sums up the main objectives of the 5th Telecentre Forum on 26-27 August 2009, held at the Hyderabad International Convention Centre, Hyderabad during eINDIA2009. It provided a knowledge sharing platform to telecentre stakeholders from Bangladesh, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Switzerland and Sweden in addition to India. The forum was divided into five sessions arranged around the themes of Common Service Centres (CSCs), digital inclusion through telecentres, strengthening telecentre ecosystem through knowledge sharing and Indian telecentre networks: the Civil Society Organisation (CSO) experience.

Implementing the CSC programme

Departing from the usual practice of sharing updates on the CSC programme; the CSC sessions focused more on the Service Centre Agencies (SCAs) and their implementation based insights and experience. CSCs, guided by the Department of Information Technology (DIT), Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (MCIT), Government of India (GoI), are the delivery points for a number of eGovernance and other public and private services at the village level.

The CSC programme is being coordinated at various levels. On the ground, the SCAs shoulder the crucial responsibility of rolling out this programme in the villages within their respective operational areas. They have been



L to R: Shankar Aggarwal, Ashis Sanyal, Anwar Sadath and Shilpi

implementing this programme for almost three years now. Hence, the sessions was focused on sharing their success stories and best practices; challenges and problems; innovations to tackle challenges; and learnings derived from their experience. The discussions led to infer that regions and areas largely determine people's perception towards technology and the SCAs have to respect the community vision of technology. They are using innovative techniques of mobilising the community and sensitising them about ICTs and the CSCs, like street plays, mobile ICT vans, songs, poetry, etc.

The challenges faced by them relate mainly to their area of operation, CSC services and sustainability. The panel discussions revealed that some of the SCAs are working in remote and difficult terrains. With reference to the services, almost all of them agreed that eLearning contributed the most to the CSC generated revenue. Business to Consumer (B2C) services occupy the second place with Government to Consumer (G2C) services trailing far behind them, although they enhance the credibility of the CSCs and increase footfalls. The SCAs have to be innovative in providing need and demand based services, irrespective of whether G2C services are available or not.

Photo Credit: CSDMS



Telecentre Forum Audience

Digital inclusion through telecentres

Telecentres use a combination of emerging and traditional technologies, such as computers, Internet, telephone, mobile phone, radio and television. As multi-technology information collation and dissemination platforms, they are playing a key role in assimilating the digitally excluded within the fold of the 'Knowledge Society'. Focusing on this unique aspect of telecentres, session II brought together experts representing ingenious application developers, like Media Lab Asia; connectivity providers, like Grameen Phone and others.

The gradual evolution from voice to Internet access for the poor is best exemplified by Grameen Phone, a Bangladeshi mobile phone company and connectivity provider. They provided voice access to the rural poor through their world renowned 'Mobile Ladies' programme. In 2006, they introduced Community Information Centres (CIC) through which they are offering shared Internet access in the rural areas of Bangladesh. CIC is supported through Multi Stakeholder Partnership with various organisations. For them, the most formidable challenge is to encourage the villagers to visit the centres in addition to the alarming illiteracy rate, connectivity problems, etc. Similarly, to address the digital inclusion challenges, Media Lab Asia has developed some ingenious applications. Starting off with functional activity areas, such as World Computer (Affordable, ubiquitous computing & access devices), Bits for All (low cost, high bandwidth connectivity) and Tomorrow's Tool (applications relevant for rural areas), it grew tremendously to include application areas, such as ICT for- Healthcare, Education, Livelihood support, Empowerment of the physically challenged, and Wireless Connectivity.

Next, telecentre aided digital inclusion was discussed against a historical backdrop with special emphasis on the genesis and growth of the Indian telecentre movement. The uniqueness of the Indian telecentre movement lies in the synergisation of various government mission mode programmes and other public access initiatives.

Strengthening telecentre ecosystem

The next session highlighted the multi-stakeholder nature of the telecentres. Telecentre ecosystem comprises of innovative technologies, knowledge resources, content and products, strong networks that contribute to their sustainability and above all, research to guide them towards achieving sustainability as well as to make them more and more relevant to the community needs.

Prominent among the products featured during the Telecentre Forum were OneRoof's 'Management Information and Reporting Software' and the 'howtopedia.org'. The OneRoof product can be used by all kinds of public access computing centres. It assures maximising sustainability and profits; better management of employees; strengthening community security; etc. Howtopedia serves as a one stop multilingual platform for information empowerment. Its main focus is on the diffusion of simple technology and practical knowledge/information to help sustainable development.

The SCA concerns were, addressing existing infrastructure, connectivity and other socio-economic challenges; innovating local need and demand based services; addressing the technical aspects of 'service tax'; requesting utility service providers to use CSCs for bill payments and standardise these across all Indian states

One of the research findings presented in the forum used SWOT analysis to determine strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of five telecentre models- family, temple, village leader, entrepreneur and company funded- prevalent in India and Sri Lanka. Another research addressed the telecentre network sustainability issue through the e3 framework. It has identified three critical areas- eLearning, eBusiness and eLeadership,

which require strengthening of telecentre and network sustainability. The Thai and Sri Lankan telecentre leaders talked about their respective networks. The Thai telecentre network is a combination of different telecentre models

The Telecentre Forum was rich with knowledge since all the presentations were based on telecentre leaders' and stakeholders' experiential learning. The CSC sessions generated a lot of discussion around CSC services and sustainability

and receives a proactive support from the academia. It operates both in urban and rural areas, catering to a variety of clients and consumers. The capacity building programme of Sarvodaya Fusion telecentre network requires special mention.

Indian telecentre networks

The forum also shared the Civil Society Organisation (CSO) experience in implementing telecentre initiatives in India. It delineated the critical role of CSOs in community development because of their privileged position, i.e., having close linkages with poor households on the one hand and the public and private sector organisations on the other. Datamation Foundation has taken the lead in addressing gender issues through their Gender Resource Centres. For this, they have adopted an integrated approach enriched with skill development. Another study explored the opportunity of transforming CIC of Meghalaya into Community Enabling Centres through ICT intervention and help from Indira Gandhi National Open University. The South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies' (SIFFS) Village Information Centres (VICs), set up after the 2004 Tsunami disaster with support from NASSCOM Foundation and other organisations uses a participatory approach with community ownership, need based service provision and support of traditional institutions like the Village Panchayat and Church for achieving sustainability. These concepts were further elaborated in the context of the first Indian community informatics and telecentre project, MS Swaminathan Research Foundation's Village Knowledge Centres. From the beginning, the project stressed on location specific, demand driven content

and community ownership. They also give due respect to traditional knowledge. The USP of their telecentre programme lies in the use of a combination of traditional and emerging ICTs for last mile connectivity.

Following these, the session witnessed presentations on think.com (now known as thinkquest.org), developed by Oracle Education Foundation (OEF) and the role of mobile infomediaries in disseminating information in the rural areas. The traditional postman, the sales representatives and Bangladesh's Mobile Ladies are cited as some of the infomediaries bringing information to villagers' doorstep.

Conclusion

The Telecentre Forum was rich with knowledge since all the presentations were based on telecentre leaders' and stakeholders' experiential learning. The CSC sessions generated a lot of discussion around CSC services and sustainability. There was a heated debate on G2C services, as initially these services were projected as the mainstay of the CSC programme, but currently only a few states are offering them. They inferred that e-readiness of Indian states is critical for the success of this programme. While discussing the innovations and best practices introduced by the SCAs, they also touched upon the issue of replicability. It revealed that replication is broadly determined by regional and cultural variations that also act as deterrents at times. In the rest of the sessions, matters pertaining to capacity building in new and emerging skill areas, telecentre sustainability and understanding local issues from community perspective held the attention of the participants. They found several collaboration and networking opportunities. The Forum also helped them explore the possibility of streamlining products, like thinkquest.org through telecentres. Thus, by helping the telecentre stakeholders overcome the knowledge island syndrome, the telecentre forum facilitated collaborations, networking and wider dissemination of innovative telecentre ideas and best practices. □

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Telecentres for Building Sustainable Food and Water Security Systems

Dinoj Kumar Upadhyay

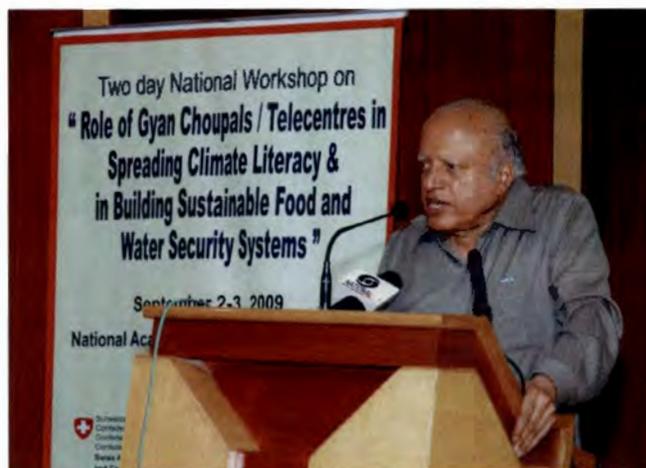
We face a true planetary emergency. It is a moral and spiritual challenge to all of humanity

Al Gore¹

Threats of climate change are real and omnipresent. Our planet earth is under continuing threat from global warming. The fourth Assessment Report of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) points out that warming of the climate system is unequivocal, as is now evident from the observations of increases in global average air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice and rising global average sea level. It further states that eleven of the last twelve years (1995-2006) rank among the twelve warmest years in the instrumental record of global surface temperature since 1850. The linear warming trend over the 50 years from 1950 to 2005 is nearly twice that for the 100 years from the 1906 to 2005. This unprecedented increase is expected to have severe impact on the global hydrological system, ecosystems, sea level, crop production and related processes. The impact would be particularly severe in the tropical areas, which mainly consist of developing countries, including India.

Falling in the same line, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) warns that the progress in human development achieved over the last decade may be slowed down or even reversed by climate change, as new threats emerge to water and food security, agricultural production and access, and nutrition and public health. The impacts of climate change could push another 600 million people into malnutrition and increase the number of people facing water scarcity by 1.8 billion by 2080. The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) estimates that there are 1.2 billion people who cannot meet their most basic needs for sufficient food every day.²

To highlight the need of building awareness about climate change and its serious implications and spread climate literacy to cope with climate induced



M S Swaminathan addressing the conference

vulnerabilities, M S Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) in collaboration with Grameen Gyan Abhiyan and Jamsetji Tata National Virtual Academy (NVA) and Training School organised a national two days workshop on the "Role of Gyan Choupals (telecentres) in Spreading Climate Literacy and in Building Sustainable Food and Water Security Systems" on 2-3 September 2009 at the National Academy of Agricultural Sciences, New Delhi. The workshop was a very timely effort considering the fact that India is passing through a difficult phase of drought and price hike, particularly vegetables, pulses and cereals. It has been recognised by the scientific communities that adverse impact of climate change is tangible and is affecting almost every aspect of human life. M S Swaminathan highlighted the acute level of water and food insecurity in India and what should be done to mitigate and adapt to the adverse impacts of over exploitation of natural resources and climate change. Since marginalised and weaker sections of the society are the hardest hit by these climate induced vulnerabilities, therefore, it is imperative that they are informed about and made aware of climate change, its implications and the adaptation and mitigation strategies that are useful to them. To do this, an effective and efficient information delivery and knowledge

Photo Credit: MSSRF

sharing system has to be established at the grassroots level of the society. Future of food security in the developing world, particularly in India, is dependent on knowledge intensity.

At the workshop, many other experts and enlightened scholars highlighted the role of space technology, universities and research institutions in adaptation and mitigation to climate change, spreading climate literacy and providing applicable research. The workshop also provided opportunities to community practitioners to share their experiences from across the country in the domains of water management, food security, promoting sustainable livelihoods and safeguarding biodiversity. Blaming the government intervention for water insecurity in the country, both Rajendra Singh and Sunita Narain emphasised on community driven approach to water management for building a sustainable water security system. Taking a swipe at the government's initiatives on the privatisation of water resources and distribution system, Rajendra Singh opined that the government had been creating a system of exploitation that would certainly lead to more water unavailability in the country.

Telecentres for information and knowledge dissemination

Advanced ICTs are offering new ways for communicating and sharing information and knowledge. The role of telecentres can be viewed in the broader framework of ICTs and climate change and as effective mechanisms to provide information at the grassroots level of society for adaptation to climate change and minimisation of risks from climate induced calamities. Since in most of the cases, projections and predicted changes in the climate are uncertain, therefore, its implications, particularly, rural and vulnerable sections of populations whose adaptive capacity is low and social security measures available to them are not adequate, could be disastrous.

There are pros and cons of ICTs with regards to climate change. On one hand, ICTs contribute to greenhouse gas emission and radiate heat, which leads to global warming. On the other hand, the use of ICTs can help in monitoring, evaluating, projecting, predicting changes in climate and providing early warning to people in risk prone areas. ICT mechanisms can also help in adaptation to the impact of climate change from the grassroots level. Bottom up

approach is required for disseminating knowledge and information about the impact of climate change and also to communicate adaptation and mitigation strategies with the populations that are vulnerable.

Another aspect of the role of ICTs in climate change is information dissemination and knowledge sharing among local people. It implies reaching the people who do not have access to any reliable source of information. During the workshop, particularly during two sessions, on the role of space technology in mitigation and adaptation to climate change and role of universities and research institutions in promoting climate literacy, it was highlighted, that there

ICTs can help in monitoring, evaluating, projecting, predicting changes in climate and providing early warning to people in risk prone areas

is a fast-growing body of information on the climate, including information about current climate variability, and improving global and regional models of the future climate change.

Understanding of climate systems and the ability to forecast short-term and medium-term weather and seasonal climates has also improved over the past few decades. However, this information needs to be well targeted, well-timed and disseminated at the grassroots level. In this context, the role of telecentres seems to be quite significant. They can effectively disseminate the requisite information to the people in villages and remote areas. It will not only help to minimise the losses, but also will help to avert risks in advance. Telecentres can be instrumental in providing not only means of connectivity to isolated communities in the remote areas to get information, but also help them in knowledge sharing and social networking, such as local community can provide local or indigenous knowledge and can also get the information on advance research and technologies.

Improving linkages: telecentre movement in India

There has been a growing realisation that rural and other isolated areas of the country must be connected in order to provide access to prompt information and other

public services to people. Now knowledge connectivity is understood to be an integral part of the development process. The efforts of M S Swaminathan were appreciated

Adaptation and promotion of sustainable development requires both top-down and bottom up approaches. Top-down approach is required for projection and prediction and bottom up approach is warranted to promote sustainable development and adaptation

during the MSSRF workshop as it was due to his vision and perseverance that the Government of India incorporated knowledge connectivity as a focus in the nation's Eleventh Five Year Plan, which eventually snowballed into the telecentre revolution in India. These centres can be the platform for promoting sustainable development and adaptation with help of local government institutions. With the help of CSC, local government can share knowledge, information and become aware of the advance research, which could minimise the risk of climate induced calamities and also promote the adaptation to climate change.

Challenges to disseminating information

The adverse impact of climate change are tangible, as they are projected in the study of various intergovernmental organisations. But little has been done yet to adapt to and mitigate climate change at the grassroots level. Adaptation and promotion of sustainable development requires both top-down and bottom up approaches. Top-down approach is required for projection and prediction and bottom up approach is warranted to promote sustainable development and adaptation. Despite the revolution in the ICTs in India, the reach of these technologies is still limited. People are not aware of the uses of these technologies and services provided through them. Basic facilities in terms of electricity, connectivity, skilled human resources, etc., for the deployment of ICTs in rural areas are still inadequate or almost missing in some cases. Providing information in local languages is another complicated process, though a lot of efforts are being put in this direction, which will bear fruits in the near future.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the adverse impact of climate change is far reaching and has the potential to alter the current course and pace of development. Since the poorest of poor are on the edge because they have very limited capacity to cope with the many faces of climate induced calamities, their capacities to adapt to these impact must be built up with knowledge, information and skills development to understand the changes that are taking place in their ecosystem as also to recognise and report the initial signs of impending calamities, which can act as advance warning for the nearby communities, nations and for the world. Correct information at the appropriate moment and effective dissemination are crucial for coping with climate change. In this context, the role of telecentres is quite effective and relevant. CSCs can be very effective medium to strengthen local governance, community participation, empowerment, spreading climate literacy and so on, which are fundamental for coping with climate change in India. To overcome it's challenges, India needs to take some policy measures as proposed by Basheerhamad Shadrach, IDRC during the Valedictory session of the MSSRF workshop. His recommendation was to make 'knowledge connectivity' a realistic and implementable activity of the Bharat Nirman programme of India, encourage convergence among government agencies implementing this programme, provide skilled workers at the grassroots level, and create 6000 community colleges who's primary goal would be skills development in rural areas, and develop telecentres as knowledge repositories of rural India. □

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Telecentre - Europe Summit 2009

Laia Fauro Gual



Photo Credit: Espai Foundation

The participants of the Telecentre - Europe Summit 2009

The Telecentre-Europe Summit 2009 took place on 14th and 15th October in Istanbul, Turkey. It brought together 90 telecentre network leaders from across the world. The event was managed by the Telecentre-Europe Steering Committee and Youth for Habitat, and was sponsored by Microsoft. The summit took forward the success of the Telecentre Leaders Forum, held in Riga in April 2008.

The summit provided a wonderful opportunity to discuss and share information and knowledge about European telecentre networks and other related themes. The programme included parallel workshops with open floor discussions, interaction and plenary sessions in which interesting presentations were made. In addition, the participants found a lot of time for networking during social events, like welcome reception and the Bosphorus boat tour. The first day of the summit started with a very warm welcome from Telecentre-Europe Steering Committee. The session provided a brief overview of European network's background, challenges and outcomes. Afterwards, the participants were addressed by three keynote speakers: Akhtar Badshah, Senior Director, Community Affairs,

Microsoft; Richard Fuchs, Country Director, International Development Research Centre, South East Asia Office, Singapore; and Paul Timmers, Head of eInclusion, European Commission. Florin Lupescu, Director, Directorate "ICT Addressing Societal Challenges", European Commission Directorate General for Information Society and Media, also addressed the participants through a very short video speech.

On the first day, the workshops on Accessibility, Employability and Citizenship were organized twice during the day so that most of the participants got a chance to attend them. In the afternoon, the participants had a chance to share and listen to eInclusion best-practices across Europe during Euro Café presentations. Representatives from Learn More Network, Denmark; International Aid Network, Serbia; and Youth for Habitat, Turkey briefed about their respective organizations' projects and activities. During the session, the audience witnessed grassroots implementation process interspersed with real and practical examples. To make the session more lively, the participants were given short question and answer break with speakers after their presentations.

Last session of the first day brought to attention the second round of staff exchanges that will be organized by Telecentre-Europe in near future and introduced a couple of useful web-applications, namely thematic resources repository and members directory developed lately to increase the network's efficiency. Telecentre-Europe's Steering Committee wanted to launch these applications during the summit, taking advantage of the "face to face" meeting, when every new idea appeared to be clear and quite easy to share among the members too. It was also thought that the summit was an appropriate platform to begin a debate on this. It intended to make sure that members understand the real meaning and utility of the repository and the directory and the need of their contributions to make them relevant for their daily work once they are back home.

The first tool was built to collect good practices and to directly address staff issues in the context of telecentres. Tools were analysed before being presented on the platform and a description of their objectives and requirements was intended to develop an understanding about them. They are divided into five general themes, namely employability, accessibility, sustainability, capacity building and citizenship.

The second application launched at the Summit was the members' directory, a database that contains information about networks operating in Europe. They are trying to collect information about as many networks as possible. Every user will be able to edit his/ her own information and only Telecentre-Europe members will be allowed access to it. The profile information and other knowledge about the networks will facilitate partnerships, exchanges and project collaboration across the continent. The day ended with a boat trip on Bosphorus, one of the Turkish straits, where participants enjoyed great dinner, music, local drinks and a wonderful view of the city lights.

Speeches by Daniel Ben Horin, TechSoup Global and Ramazan Altinok, Head of e-Government Advisory Group from Turkish Prime Ministry were delivered on the second day of the summit. Shortly after the plenary session, Capacity building and Sustainability workshops were also held. Melissa Pailthorp, Microsoft Learning Resources - MS Learning; Florencio Ceballos, Telecentre Academy - telecentre.org; Daniel Ben Horin, TechSoup Global and Miguel Raimilla, OneRoof discussed various tools and

services that could be advantageous for telecentres and telecentre people.

In afternoon, the impact analysis session explained the rationale behind inclusion. Paul Timmers and Gabriel Rissola, DOT, Spain explained different case studies and various methods to analyse the work done to turn any project into really relevant activity day by day. This session was followed by another Euro Café with two presentations. Florencio Ceballos moderated the final talk show with three guests, namely Tess Camba, telecentre.org 2.0-PhilCecNet; Rufina Fernandes, NASSCOM Foundation; and Hansin Dogan, Programme Manager, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The summit concluded with a slew of ideas from the Telecentre-Europe Steering Committee to take the next steps.

The summit proved to be very inspiring for everybody. More than 80 people stayed together and shared their ideas, concepts, methods, etc. The Steering Committee and collaborators are really proud of the summit outcomes and conclusions. Feedbacks were also collected to improve the organisation of future summits and serve better the members next time.

The summit also found the same amount of online following thanks to the web streaming system and other applications. This is something really valuable and it is going to be contemplated for the next editions of the summit also. It will enable all those interested members to participate, who cannot join it in person. The summit also provided an opportunity to share the advances made by the telecentre networks across Europe. It was well recognised that telecentre Europe network has made considerable progress in improving organisation, collaboration and idea exchange in the network. Active collaboration, exchange and engagement with multiple players and sectors is also part of the natural behavior of any successful Social Enterprise. □

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Unlocking Telecentre Networks' Potential to Reach Low Income markets in Latin America

Jimena Betancourt

Telecentre network plays a critical role in addressing the challenges that the average telecentre manager faces in his quest for making his telecentre sustainable and relevant to the community it serves. It also helps him connect with each other and other players of the telecentre ecosystem like service providers, donors, experts, community based organisations, and so on. Telecentre networking also facilitates the diversification of telecentre services through partnering with public and private service providers.

In Asia, many telecentre networks are successfully delivering value-added products and services to their clients while achieving balance between social mission and financial sustainability. Business models like that of One Roof, e-Chaupal and Drishtee are among the best demonstrations of the role that telecentres can play through Public Private Partnership in identifying and catering to the needs of the low-income markets.

Low income or Bottom of Pyramid (BoP) market was a hitherto neglected segment since it was assumed that they have no or very little income to spare beyond fulfilling their basic necessities of food, clothing and shelter. Telecentre initiatives have not only helped in leveraging upon this market segment, but they have also contributed to its development. As shown by the telecentre networks mentioned above, they help in delivering services and products to the underserved people, who make up the BoP consumers. Serving the BoP segment has also contributed to their sustainability to a great extent.

In Latin America, the story is a little different as networks in this region remain dependent on traditional grants funding, in particular government and international funds, and networks have not yet developed entrepreneurial initiatives to increase their financial sustainability and social impact. Telecentre networks still have a long way to go until they develop win-win partnerships with public and private service providers so that they can realize their full potential and become drivers of low income markets' growth and development.



Photo Credit: Tony Knox

All partners mid project meeting in Medellin, Colombia, July 2009

Recognising this gap in the market and looking to unlock telecentre networks' potential, telecentre.org, Nonprofit Enterprise and Self-sustainability Team (NESsT), TechSoup Global and three telecentre networks, i. e., Asociación de Telecentros de Información y Negocios (Association of Information and Business Telecentres), known as ATN of Brazil; Fundación Empresas Publicas de Medellin (EPM) of Colombia; and Comité para la Democratización de la Informática en Chile (Committee for the Democratization of Information Technology), known as CDI, Chile, launched "Project 360 Latam" in February 2009.

The goal of 360 Latam is to help telecentre.org-affiliated networks distribute products and services that member telecentres can use to generate revenue and deliver value. Specifically, these products and services should: generate revenue for the telecentre networks; generate revenue for

telecentres by plugging them into the supply chains for the distribution of products and services; and provide useful benefits to the communities served by the telecentres.

360 Latam reflects a new understanding of the role and potential of telecentres in a knowledge economy offering an effective way for providers of innovative content and services to reach larger communities through telecentre facilities and telecentre network social capital. Also, the project enables telecentres to add value and achieve economy of scale through larger association of peers.

360 Latam's objectives

Project 360 Latam objectives are to:

1. Increase awareness about the potential of telecentre networks to increase their sustainability and impact by becoming channels of distribution for third-party providers of content and services.
2. Identify and develop products and services to channel: Assess current network products and services and identify new ones to develop through the channel concept.
3. Increase the ability of ATN, CDI and EPM to become effective distribution channels by developing their social enterprise capacity and channel management capabilities: Provide coaching, mentoring, capital and infrastructure assets to assist networks in the piloting and implementation of channel's products and services.
4. Develop a business process infrastructure for channel's end-to-end processes: Build on existing platform and



Photo Credit: Tony Knox

Telecentre Punto Comun in Moravia, 360 Latam partners visit July 2009

systems through which products and services can be efficiently delivered to rural, excluded communities through networks and telecentres.

5. Document and systemize lessons learned: Report on the successes and limitations of the channel concept and develop templates/toolkits for replication.

360 Latam: unlocking the potential of networks

Few will doubt when it comes down to using information and communication technologies to serve marginalised and underserved markets, a telecentre is in a better position to succeed than many other actors. Financial services, education and training, transportation and e-government services are just a few examples of the products and services that could, and in fact are already being channeled into underserved markets by telecentre networks in other regions. Supporting telecentre networks in the development of distribution channels, and building social enterprise capabilities is the approach that the project 360 Latam is taking to unlock the possibilities that the telecentre movement has in developing and growing low income markets in the region.

To unlock this potential, NESsT is replicating its venture fund methodology, which has trained more than 2000 organisations globally on concepts of sustainability and social enterprise, to provide technical assistance and financial investments to CDI - Chile, ATN and EPM for the development and implementation of channel products and services. NESsT's specific role is to support the networks

Fundación epm



Photo Credit: Tony Knox

Florencio Ceballos speaking at all partners mid project meeting

to assess and test the viability of products and services and to evaluate whether these have the characteristics for successful replication.

TechSoup is leveraging upon its expertise and technology channel that has delivered more than 3.1

Supporting telecentre networks in the development of distribution channels, and building social enterprise capabilities is the approach that the project 360 Latam is taking to unlock the possibilities that the telecentre movement has in developing and growing low income markets in the region

million products to nonprofits and libraries in nineteen countries. TechSoup brings its methodologies, systems and expertise to help assess the channel's readiness and develop the channel concept. TechSoup will also support the networks to incorporate new products and services by developing and piloting the distribution channel concept.

On the networks side, the new market role is demanding a 360° transformation. Eight months into the project, all three networks have introduced critical organisational and managerial changes following in-depth assessments of their capacity to develop products and services and training and mentoring from NESsT and TechSoup.

The networks are committing time and resources to developing long-term business and channel plans to increase the potential and efficiency of their products and services.

Project partners

ATN – Brazil

With 1,250 telecentres, ATN states its mission as follows: To promote participation in inclusive processes by expanding telecentres and guiding and training operators, users and the general public in managing and utilising technological tools to access or generate information that enhances community integration.

CDI – Chile

CDI is a member of the social franchise of CDI Internacional and operates 22 telecentres. Its mission is to promote

educational activities through the use of information technology (Information Technology and Citizenship Schools), in order to integrate members of low-income communities and reduce levels of digital exclusion.

Fundación EPM - Colombia

The mission of Fundación EPM, a public-private partnership which operates 11 telecentres, is to develop a knowledge-based culture that promotes active citizen participation in urban development through the use of information technologies.

NESsT

NESsT is an international nonprofit organization working towards solving critical social problems in emerging market countries through the development of social enterprises. NESsT uses the term social enterprise to refer to businesses designed to solve a critical problem. NESsT invests in a portfolio of 40 social enterprise activities in Latin America and Central Europe. Since 2006, NESsT has supported the development of social enterprise activities by telecentre networks and their members in Latin America, Africa and Asia.

TechSoup Global

With a model founded upon building partnerships among a range of different actors, TechSoup Global is a recognized leader in technological empowerment and the channeling of philanthropic resources toward social benefit organizations. With over six years in operation and 31 partners – software and hardware suppliers – TechSoupStock has used its donation channel to distribute products valued at more than \$1 billion. In 2006, TechSoup Global launched a global donation programme to expand the benefits of this model to 18 countries. □

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Concluding the Telecentre Debate

Thanks to all the readers who have stayed with us through the Telecentre Debates. In this issue, we are going to conclude the series. In our introductory essay, we proposed that a reasonable definition of a telecentre was the following...

"Telecentres are those entities, which exist primarily to provide the general public access to computing and/or the Internet with the explicit intent to serve a developmental purpose." This definition was specifically crafted to distinguish telecentres from public phone booths, from computer classrooms, from rural data-entry centres, from computerized post offices, and from Internet cafés – all entities that share some attributes of telecentres, but are, nevertheless, not generally considered telecentres. (There are some who subscribe to alternate definitions, which are undoubtedly valid in other conversations. The key lesson here is not necessarily to insist on a particular definition universally, but to fix a definition for the duration of a particular discussion).

The proposed definition appears to have survived the test of five debates: Authors have not quarreled with the definition itself, and nothing they've claimed has challenged the definition.

Unlike this definition of telecentres, however, telecentres themselves have received some critique in the course of the debates. The strongest indictment came from Rohan Samarajiva, founding CEO of LIRNEasia, who championed mobile phones as the channel for ICT-delivered services to rural areas. His primary argument – increasingly heard in ICT4D circles – is that with the tremendous penetration of mobile phones in the world (4.5 billion accounts and counting), even many of the poorest communities have access to inexpensive real-time voice and data communications. With such ubiquity, what, he asked was the point of trying to push connected PCs into rural areas?

In our fourth edition, Chris Coward, founder of the Center for Information and Society at the University of Washington, overviewed existing research in telecentre impact. He quotes an article by Araba Sey (a research

associate at the Center for Information and Society) that asserts that telecentres "are not fulfilling their potential in achieving self-sustainability, reaching disadvantaged populations or bringing about noticeable socio-economic change." Even strong proponents of telecentres, such as Ashok Jhunjhunwala of the Indian Institute of Technology, Chennai, and founder of n-Logue, conceded that so far, telecentres have not yet yielded the development returns that were touted in the early years of telecentre activity. He suggested that greater policy support was required for telecentres to succeed.

On the other hand, these critiques are countered by debaters who remained firm in their faith in telecentres, and who take the value of telecentres for granted. Sriram Raghavan, president of Comat Technologies, argued that telecentres are sustainable as long as they are established by for-profit companies who own and operate them. Indeed, Comat itself is an example of such a company, as it provides the front face of the widely hailed Bhoomi land records system in the state of Karnataka, India.

Others, such as Subbiah Arunachalam, distinguished fellow of the Centre for Internet & Society, Bangalore, and Dwight Wilson, founder and Sr Vice President of OneRoof, Inc., debated the merits of for-profit and publicly supported telecentres, but agreed wholeheartedly that telecentres provided value to their communities, either as a profitable business for entrepreneurs, or as viable community hubs for rural villages.

The most passionate case for PC-based telecentres came from Sarah Nalwoga Mpagi, of UgaBYTES, a non-profit telecentre support network based in Kampala, Uganda. She raised a frequently observed fact that in learning about PCs, both operators and telecentre clients experience an increase in pride and self-confidence. The PC has an association with much that is desired by low-income communities: wealth, knowledge, education, and prestige. Excitement and enthusiasm are the result, therefore, when novices discover to their surprise that they have the capacity to operate PCs. The capacity to use PCs also provides a practical value in employment, since

increasingly, office jobs require PC usage. Both of these qualities are not typically ascribed to the mobile phone – people don't seem to gain any self-esteem in being able to use a mobile phone, nor does it make them more job-ready.

In the middle of the extremes, between those who question the impact of telecentres and those who don't doubt their positive impact, are some who have begun to consider variations of telecentres as a way to support other development work. In our fifth Telecentre Debate, Bindhu Ananth, Gautam Ivatury, and Ignacio Mas discussed the potential for "branchless banking" – where without formal bank branches, clients could nevertheless avail of financial services through micro-entrepreneurs, who would enable

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banking transactions, assisted by an electronic device that would allow them to record transactions digitally. Both sides conceded that the jury was still out – that more experimentation is needed, but that there was potential for something along these lines to work, and to support the growth of micro-finance.

We hope that the readers have enjoyed these debates, and as we end the series, we suggest a few things that, we hope, will move forward the dialogue on telecentres.

The first point is to do more to measure telecentre impact, to analyze costs and benefits carefully, and to gain an understanding of opportunity costs. As Coward noted in his article, this kind of careful evaluation is still lacking, despite many, rigorous qualitative evaluations. Qualitative evaluations are good at identifying what kinds of impact are seen; the next step is to find out how much impact it has, especially in relation to other development efforts.

(Note that "how much" does not necessarily need to be in monetary terms. If increased self-confidence is the impact, how does a telecentre compare with other interventions that also see a boost in self-confidence?)

Telecentre proponents, on the whole, seem to avoid quantitative evaluations or comparisons of their projects with other interventions, but if they really believe that there are effective impact, they should welcome attempts to prove it. The IDRC-Gates Foundation joint project to understand the impact of public access to the Internet is a great step in this direction. Controlled trials, such as those performed by groups like Innovations for Poverty Action provide policy-makers with information to make critical decisions. Without that, why should a donor choose to fund telecentres, over say, a youth leadership program whose costs are lower, but with similar benefits in terms of rising self-confidence and employability? It's often heard that these questions shouldn't be "either-or," but the world has limited funds for aid – the question of its optimal disbursement cannot be shirked.

A second point is to stratify our understanding of telecentres by situating results with respect to their socio-economic context. It seems unlikely that a telecentre will have the same impact in an illiterate community whose residents struggle to feed their children each day, compared to a telecentre in a neighborhood whose well-educated, middle-income residents routinely organize protests and political campaigns. It's not unusual, in international workshops, to overhear brisk arguments about telecentres, only to find that one person is talking about PCs in refugee camps in Sudan while the other has in mind a middle-class community in urban Chile.

One thought experiment to consider is the following: For a person drawn from a given community, imagine if that person were given free access to an e-mail account – how much money could that person raise for their charity of choice, using nothing other than e-mail? Note that the answer will be very different for you, the reader of this article, and an illiterate person from one of India's remote tribal communities. And, it will be different in spite of the fact that the technology is kept constant – just e-mail. This simple question immediately touches on questions of literacy, education, (non-digital) social networks, political savvy, and so forth that provide some intuitive grasp of what a telecentre might do for a community.

Finally, we end with some open-ended questions, since it helps us to step back from the daily challenges of operation, and ask the larger questions that underlie our efforts... Is the goal- sustainability of telecentres- for their own sake or genuine development? If so many telecentre case studies end with an ambivalent statement such as "we are seeing some positive benefits, but solid, sustainable impact is not yet clear," might there not be a larger lesson to learn? And, lastly, are there even more meaningful successors to telecentres that build on their strengths and minimize their weaknesses? □

Author



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telecentre.org photo contest results!

The telecentre.org photo contest received overwhelming response from all the members. The pictures submitted for the contest captured all the moments and emotions that are so unique to the telecentres, very beautifully. The contest also reaffirmed the popularity of photography among our members. We received 47 entries in total out of which 17 were selected and forwarded to an esteemed panel of judges for their opinions. The judges represented a good mix of people from ICT4D, telecentre and photo journalism sectors. They judged the photos on the basis of theme relevance, creativity and technical quality. The panel of judges included Christophe Devolder/ Europe: Management Information Systems Manager Interface3, Belgium; Martha Mans/ Europe: from Fundación Esplai, Spain; Yamuni Rashmika/ Asia: Photo Journalist, Department of Government Information, Sri Lanka; Munir Uz Zaman/ Asia: Photo journalist, Agence France-Press (AFP), Bangladesh; Paul Barera/ Africa: Executive Director NTC-RWANDA, Chairman Rwanda Telecentre Network, Africa Knowledge, Network (AKN) – Rwanda; Dean Mulozi/ Africa: Connect Africa Manager, ZAA-ICT/SATNET Regional Facilitator, Zambia and Adel Yassin Mubarak/MENA : Technical Manager, ICT Trust Fund, U N D P, Egypt.



1. eLearning for village students



2. Tamil children playing Yodigo



3. Farmers and telecentre in Bangladesh



4. Creating leadership for grassroots development



5. Connecting Slaga wirelessly

www.telecentre.org

Photo Credit: 1. WMCRRK Disanayake, Sri Lanka 2. Oliver Zielke, Canada 3. Mohammad K I Bhuiyan, Bangladesh 4. Niranjan Meegammana, Sri Lanka 5. Agbenyo J Stephen, Ghana

Community Information Centres in Meghalaya: A Telecentre Model

Ananya S Guha

The Community Information Centres (currently known as Community Service Centres or CSCs) have been established in all districts of North Eastern States of India to address the needs of community. They function as extensions of the block resource centres. The rationale of this initiative is to provide access to information, vocational training, distance learning programmes to community. Hence, the CSCs can be the nodal point for communal participation as well as creative thinking and learning. They can become the pivot of community enabling centres where the community gathers to learn, discuss needs, and play an active role in decision making. Since CSCs are a part or an extension of the block resource centres, the Block Development Officers (BDOs) play a significant role in formulating extension-based activities.

To add to their value, Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) has started a computer literacy programme in the CSCs for functionally literate people. There are 32 CSCs in the Indian state of Meghalaya, a tiny state endowed with luxuriant greenery, nestled in North East India. The programme is encountering a slew of problems in terms of skilled human resources, electricity, communication gap between CSCs and IGNOU Regional centres, adhocism and so on. In such a context, the main objective of the paper is to see how these CSCs can effectively function as community learning telecentres where people can participate in skill development programmes, such as tailoring, weaving, making handicrafts, fruit and vegetable processing and so on. The paper would also analyse the bottlenecks impeding the growth of these centres.

Area of study and methodology

The project covers only two districts of Meghalaya state, namely East Khasi and Ribhoi and out of 32 existing CSCs, seven have been selected for the pilot project. The methodology employed for data collection primarily includes interviews with local villagers, headmen,



Photo Credit: IGNOU

Vocational Training on Electrical Wiring held in Common Services Centre, Meghalaya

youth, BDOs, NGOs as well as counsel from the State Department of Information and Technology, National Informatics Centre, Government of India. The interviews were designed to seek advice from the selected respondents on creating the ideal community centres where knowledge is based not on commodification, but on participation and interaction.

The idea of project

The project seeks to present the idea that community centres can also be envisaged as learning centres. It is conceived as a model where, as a first step, the computer literacy programme of IGNOU will be implemented. The project will attempt at the radicalization of community based knowledge networks. Technology will be the means to an end, not an end in itself where its integrated use will benefit the community. This reinforces the views of AW Khan, former Vice-Chancellor of IGNOU, who opines that "Distance Education programmes should take a humanistic approach, focusing on people rather than on technology". Such a 'people centered' approach will be the paradigm of the project, which is understood as a practical necessity, not simply as a theoretical repository.

Community Centres with a media mix of 'traditional' and 'new' are germane to the essential concepts of open and distance learning. Hence, these CSCs can serve the purpose of vocational education and training centres. The project is proposed as a model for village community centres as nodal learning centres at the village or block level. It can be extended later to neighbouring states of Assam, Mizoram and Nagaland.

Literacy and its adjunct will be the focus of this study, which is envisaged as an action research. The findings of the study will also be submitted to the university, state government, government departments like information technology, education and social welfare for possible implementation, once its construct has been framed. The National Information Centre, Meghalaya has provisions for content creation, where content on social, economic and cultural matters can be uploaded. Such potentiality of the CSCs in content creation will also be vigorously explored in this research.

Theoretical perspectives of the project

Delors Commission Report (1996) popularly known as "Learning The Treasure Within" posits four pillars of learning: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together. The epistemic processes enunciated here are singularly complex. While first two relate to 'knowing' and 'doing' that is 'knowing how to apply it'; the last two spell out a vision for education in the 21st century. That is, in a world saddled with aggrandizement and personal rights, can education be a

Media plays a significant role in entertaining masses, but in countries like India where level of literacy is low, media should be a catalyst for educational purposes. It acts as a contiguous force. Such foundation makes us view education as an holistic component in life and an integral part of our cultural and social values

fount of unity? In other words can education impel us into an ethical commitment taking us out of the backwaters of jingoism? It is true that today there is a pull of cultural

forces between that of individual identity and world consciousness. But Ethical goals must also be actualized in educational paradigms. Education must be a prophylactic for divisiveness and sectarianism.



IGNOU Institute for Vocational Education and Training, Shillong

Training is an important component of education. Training is cybernetics and an ongoing process commensurate with the quality of life. Education is also community based and a transaction at a one to many level.

Media plays a significant role in entertaining masses, but in countries like India where level of literacy is low, media should be a catalyst for educational purposes. It acts as a contiguous force. Such foundation makes us view education as an holistic component in life and an integral part of our cultural and social values. In this context, fullness and tangibility of media may be grasped. Apart from being a source of entertainment, it can also be a subtle mix of educational value. It has been essentially attempted to show how learning goals and objectives may be attained in our corporate life, taking into account developing nations such as India. Furthermore the academic nuance between knowledge and information based societies is a critical pointer here. Learning to learn is a new paradigm in our learning process and typifies the ethical model of education.

The project model: Telecentre perspectives

Social responsibility implies community involvement and the telecentre model envisaged here considers it in

the context of education and, in particular, the distance learning mode. In this section, nature and distinguishing characteristics of a distance learner as well as models of such learning are described. Further, it elucidates how distance education can make learning more community based. For me, this represents a radicalisation of educational ontology, when the premium is on literacy, numeracy and computer literacy.

Distance education techniques should be perceived holistically. They can be applied to literacy campaigns. Illiterates, semi-literates and neo-literates are distance learners. The first generation of distance education, which organised and sustained the print media, has been used very effectively for literacy measure in the form of primers, practicing writing / numeracy skills, etc. In fact, the learning material prepared for literacy purposes is an indicator of distance education methodology, as the print material, which is the basic medium of instruction in distance education, is used for learner to be literates and neo-literates.

The fourth and current generation is computer and web based and mobile learning. The media application in distance education should be used in literacy campaigns to make learning processes complex, but interesting, auditory and appealing to the senses. Interactivity too is a must

The second generation of distance education integrated audio and video cassettes with the print material. The third generation witnessed emergence of audio-video conferencing to supplement judiciously teaching and learning processes. The fourth and current generation is computer and web based and mobile learning. The media application in distance education should be used in literacy campaigns to make learning processes complex, but interesting, auditory and appealing to the senses. Interactivity too is a must. How will the primal learner respond to teleconferencing and how will such interaction take place, are issues which need to be seriously addressed.



Photo Credit: IGNOU

Participants are undergoing Skills Training Programme

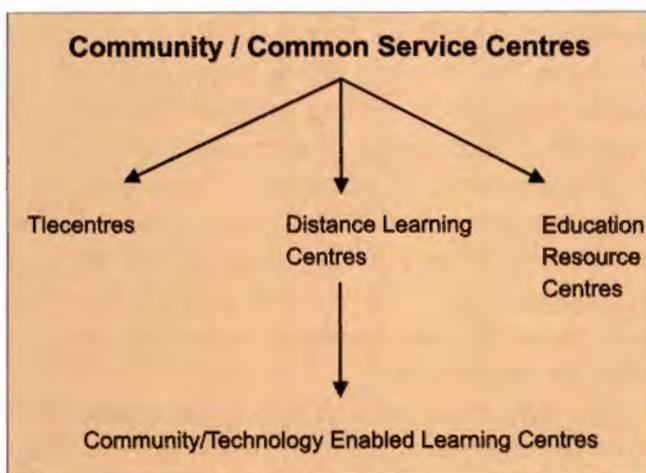
The revolution brought about by technological innovations in the field of education in general and distance education in particular, should be applied progressively and logically to all spheres of human resources, mobilization and development. A total learning situation is our paradigmatic understanding of the intricate question of education. Distance education is rapidly developing into a model of education, which can be applied logistically to training, extension and traditional education. The application of distance education with its ontologies focusing on technological intervention is one prima facie evidence of its innovation, quality assurance and flexibility. In fact, such methodologies have the air of technocracy about it, but what is important is that it has given the learner scope and width. The learning resources today are inexhaustible.

The utility of the media as a source of entertainment has been fully responded by the masses in India. What they will also have to comprehend is media application in knowledge-related areas. This will be a source of both instruction and entertainment. The sixty-odd per cent of people in India whom we consider to be literate can just about sign their names. The progression from neo-functional to irreversible literacy is vital. These are the challenges to literacy, which point towards educational growth for masses. A learning environment can thus be pragmatically sustained, keeping in mind the distinct and evolutionary phases of literacy growth, the determinants being functionality and application orientedness.

Undoubtedly, computer literacy is necessary. This means being not only computer literate but also being literate in

an international language, i.e., English. These CICs/CSCs, should be viewed as community enabling centres, where the access to computer should, ideally speaking, enhance the quality of life. And, as the UNESCO document on education in the 21st century states with clarity (i) Learning to Know (ii) Learning To Do (iii) Learning To Be, and (iv) Learning To Live Together.

One of the missions of the IGNOU is to spread computer knowledge especially in rural areas, in association with the CSCs. Technology is advancing at a breakneck speed, let us not forget the hapless victims of poverty and literacy. The true meaning of information technology in the third world economy points towards developing rural areas to provide easy and cheap access to it. Therefore, its utility has to be comprehended specifically in this context: that it is a means to educate, and create impromptu classrooms in the villages and the remotest towns, let alone the cities. Otherwise, the yawning gap between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' will continue to persist. Functional literacy,



numeracy and information technology literacy are key skills, they are major determinants of progressions and success in higher education and subsequently to success in work and day-to-day life. Developed countries, like the United Kingdom, do have extremely high levels of literacy, numeracy and information technology skills, but they are not universal.

Today technology is a rapidly erupting and proliferating force knowing no boundaries. Computers have been effectively used for imparting literacy to adult illiterates through innovative programmes by international firms like IBM. These measures will be used for adult and continuing

Today technology is a rapidly erupting and proliferating force knowing no boundaries. Computers have been effectively used for imparting literacy to adult illiterates through innovative programmes by international firms like IBM. These measures will be used for adult and continuing education as well in the very near future

education as well in the very near future. However, we must also determine what technology is going to be appropriate in a particular situation. Technological appropriateness is the key factor here as well as a convergence of the radio, television and computer.

In conclusion, the IGNOU project has attempted to answer how distance education can make learning more community based. This is a radicalization of educational ontology, where the premium is on literacy, numeracy and computer literacy. This will be a breakaway from our fixed notions of higher education, which is degree-centred and based on the assumption that, the target group already possesses learning skills. To start from scratch and to critically examine how distance education as a model can be used for the above-mentioned issues, that is literacy, numeracy and IT literacy are the objectives of this project vis a vis the CSCs in Meghalaya. The CSCs now function as telecentre model, a growing concept in East Africa and in some parts of India where community comes to participate in the corporate life of the society; whether to participate in a meeting or to browse Internet, gather information, purchase tickets or simply to interact with people or groups. The CSCs must not degenerate into 'cyber cafes'. This will be a serious mission drift. □

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Awakening Telecentre Movement in Malaysia

Pusat Internet Desa (PID), a telecentre initiative in Malaysia has grabbed the attention of entire country as well as global communities. The stories about PID activities were featured in various newspapers nationwide. PID was noticed globally during eAsia 2008, where the managers actively participated in the event and successfully promoted their community products. Furthermore, PIDs implemented over 400 activities across the nation during the Global Entrepreneurship Week in November 2008, putting Malaysia among the top five most active countries in the World.

PIDs were established in 42 rural Malaysian villages since 2003 by the Ministry of Energy, Water, and Communication (now the Ministry of Information, Communication and Culture). Prior to the "awakening", the PIDs offered only free ICT access and ICT training

to the communities. Since 2008, however, a wide variety of demand-driven services are being provided and there has been an increase in their activities. It has helped in connecting the PIDs with the communities.

The PID initiative has awakened the telecentre movement in Malaysia to not only concentrate on access to technology, but also to capacity building of the telecentre managers, development of demand-driven services, community facilitation and to the overall support for the telecentre network, which are the base for achieving telecentre sustainability.



Training with community



Exercise connecting pids



SE Club launch



Daily plan



Products exhibition

Photo and Text Credit: Zulfikar Mochamad Rachman, Azul

The Huaral Valley Agrarian Information System, Peru

Huaral valley is located on the coast of Peru, 90 Km north of the capital city, Lima. Since majority of its population is dependent on agriculture for livelihood, which is largely irrigation based, therefore, management of water resources is of utmost importance. Consequently, the Centro Peruano de Estudios Sociales (CEPES), in partnership with the Chancay-Huaral River Basin Irrigation Board (Junta), a local community-based organisation (CBO) set up and owned by farmers, initiated the Huaral valley Agrarian Information System (Sistema de Información Agraria, (SIA) project in 2000.

Under this project, they have introduced affordable Internet access and telecommunication services to district Irrigation Commissions and poor farming communities. The development of the SIA has directly benefitted the farming communities by providing improved water resource management. The Yacu system is an integral part of the

SIA. "Yacu" means water in Ayacucho's Quechua, but in the SIA context, it refers to the computer system, which allows information management on agricultural issues, such as water resources and agrarian production.

This project has tried to merge CBO ownership, wireless and open software technologies, and telecentres. The design and development of the system involved the participation Junta representatives and personnel, government officers and NGO system designers.

The system has already become a fundamental tool for Irrigation Board functioning. Its database is maintained by telecentre operators and Irrigation Board personnel. The information on water resources is used for monitoring and the agrarian production information is used for national statistics. The Yacu system has helped the SIA project by giving a new purpose to the telecentres and the possibility of being recognised by the commissions as valuable.

Photo and Text Credit: Juan Fernando Bossio



Delivery ceremony



Computer installation



Antenna installation



BOZA commission telecentre



Telecentre operator at Chancayllo

Uganda Development Services (UDS) Book Box Project

Rita Mujimbi Epodoi



Photo Credit: Rita Mujimbi Epodoi

The Kamuli District Inspector of Schools handing over the UDS book box to the Head Master Kabukye S S

The Book Box project is an outreach programme of the Uganda Development Services (UDS) Library Service to extend services beyond the walls of the library. It was initiated in 2007 as a means to provide reading materials to students for boosting their performance and reading habits. Whereas government aided schools in Uganda are supported with books and other reading materials, private schools have to fend for themselves. The objectives of the UDS book box project are to ensure that pupils and teachers in private secondary schools in the remote areas of the country have access to books on the curricula and other suitable reading materials and to create a reading environment that will lead to the nurturing of a reading culture.

The project targets remote area private secondary schools and involves the selection, acquisition and processing of fifty to one hundred books suitable for all levels within the secondary school. The books range from science to arts subjects and are aimed at all pupils and teachers in a school. The boxes are sent to the schools at the beginning of the first term. Since its inception, the project has benefited 14 schools in Kamuli district. Based on the periodic monitoring carried out, the introduction of the book box project has not only improved performance, but also stimulated schools to create their own library

Why to replicate?

The survey carried out by UDS in Kamuli district revealed that most private and community secondary schools had an overwhelming need for books and reading materials. There are 1666 private and 328 community secondary schools in Uganda. According to Ministry of Education (Uganda Educational Statistics 2008) educational statistics, 37.8 per cent schools, which are generally secondary schools, are based in rural areas. The assumption is that a big number of students do not have access to suitable reading materials; hence the need to replicate the book box project.

Who can do this?

Telecentres can do this kind of project and also the ministry of education through the national library.

How to proceed

The district education office and the inspector of schools should be contacted for a list of needy schools and a survey should be carried out to verify the information. They should discuss with the schools about their book needs and compile a book list. The next step is for the proponent to put together a proposal for funding. Finally, the books and boxes are purchased and transferred to the schools.

facilities. The project has stimulated reading, creation of libraries, boosted confidence amongst the teachers with regard to reference materials, created awareness about the need in private schools and improved performance of students. For UDS, the benefits of the project have been immeasurably more than we anticipated.

Sahaj Network of Rural Kiosks: The Art of Effective Modelling

Usha Mishra Hayes



Photo Credit: Sahaj Staff

Karthik is seen sharing his experience with fellow VLEs during a SAHAJ training session at T V Malai

Srei Sahaj has a unique business model. A Common Service Centre (CSC) is operated by a Village Level Entrepreneur (VLE), hailing from that particular gram panchayat (rural local government), in an arrangement aimed at supporting direct and indirect employment generation in rural India.

Apart from being beneficial to the VLE, it also has great revenue earning potential for its associates. In most cases a successful CSC ends up employing at least two additional village youth. The local enterprise drives the business and ensures that local customers are served almost 24X7. As the CSC is owned and operated directly by the VLE or the investor, the stakes in the success of the CSC are clearly highest. Again, as the investor or the VLE hails from the local community, he or she brings in additional element of compassion, service and understanding and overall an enhanced sense of social responsibility in serving the rural customers.

This understandably often spills, in most cases welcome, into social advocacy particularly with local political and administrative leadership for bringing in more Government to Consumer (G2C) services to the CSCs and also in business advocacy directly with Sahaj for bringing in an increasing range of services and products to the CSCs.

Why to replicate?

CSC project is an important arm of the National eGovernance Plan (NeGP) aimed at providing common access point to the citizens to modern technology and through that to various government, business and social services and products. Sahaj eVillage Limited takes this hallowed objective on to a yet higher plane, by sharing the ownership, the problematic, the agony and the ecstasy and the achievements of the process with the rural citizens. In an unprecedented drive to enlist committed local enterprise, Sahaj has established a digital, human and physical network of 16,000 VLEs within a span of a year and half. 10,000 of them are already reaping normal profits of Rs 5000-6000 and another 4000 have just broken even. The economic infrastructure being set up is facilitating some 120 million people to participate in services like insurance, distance higher education, computer education and even development reporting on their village and block.

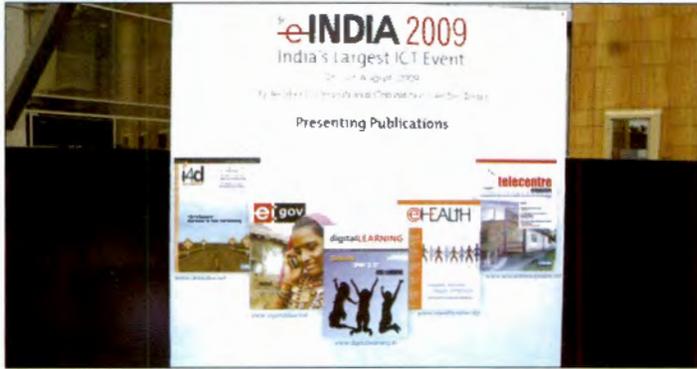
Who can do this?

Any one who meets the criteria of domicile in a particular GP, (where a CSC does not already exist) in the states of Assam, Bihar, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal and holding an undergraduate degree, with capacity to arrange for a down payment (varying from Rs 40,000 to Rs10, 000).

How to proceed

Please contact your nearest Sahaj E village Limited Office in your district if you happen to be from the Sahaj states and the districts within that or write to enquiries@sahajcorporate.com or media@sahajcorporate.com. Alternatively you can also visit <http://www.mit.gov.in/default.aspx?id=968> for details on who to contact for further information.

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