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Shilpa Sayura Foundation - The Shilpa Sayura e-School

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SHILPA SAYURA FOUNDATION

The Shilpa Sayura e-School

Beneficiary country: Sri Lanka



The chief priest and teacher is using Shilpa Sayura to teach a history lesson to children who don't have computers (Sri Shesahramaya Telecentre, Kandewinna, Monaragala District, Sri Lanka) - *Photos by Niranjan Meegammana*

In a country like Sri Lanka ravaged by decades of civil war, access to educational resources for an ethnically diverse population is scant at best, leading to disproportionate failure rates among high school students. The Shilpa Sayura team proposes to transform 600 existing tele-centres that facilitate e-learning and self-learning of the national curriculum to a new domain of digital knowledge that develops rural education in Sri Lanka.

THE THEORY/PROBLEM

People in Sri Lanka's rural areas lack teachers, books and educational resources leading to unemployment and poverty. While the government provides free schooling, only 2.7% of the national budget is apportioned to education. It also does not meet the needs of an ethnically and linguistically diverse population. As a result, failure rates for the GCE O-level ranges from 50-70%, leading to early school drop-out and a lack of employment and higher education opportunities.

The team proposes to transform 600 existing telecentres that facilitate e-learning and self-learning of the national academic curriculum to a new domain of digital knowledge that develops rural education in Sri Lanka. The system facilitates

better learning amongst rural youth. Research has also shown a positive impact on examination results amongst rural youth who use the e-learning centres.

The system focuses on the weakest academic areas for students, which include Math, Science and English. It also expands the topics of study to include sustainable agriculture, renewable energy, health and environment.

THE INNOVATIVE IDEA

The project will bridge the gap in communicable curriculum and will motivate youth and adults to engage in learning using information and communication technology. This will be done in an open, participatory manner that sidesteps logistical constraints and reaches the grassroots.

Organisation Bio

Shilpa Sayura is a non-profit organisation dedicated to using information and communication technology (ICT) and online tools to educate and empower Sri Lankans. The organisation uses e-Learning, develops the national curriculum, provides local language training, self-training programmes and tele-centres to reach out to the poorest with no access to educational resources.

<http://www.shilpasayura.org/uniportal/news/info.asp?xi=457>

HOW IT WORKS

Months 1-6 focus on project formulation, equipment and software upgrade, as well as Tamil and Sinhala content synchronisation. Months 7-12 will focus on integration, testing and deployment in 50 centres. The project originated with the e-SDI Shilpa Sayura Project that was funded by the Sri Lankan government's Information and Communication Agency (ICTA) and implemented in 150 centres with 8000 lessons as its content base. The team proposes to upgrade the existing curriculum by adding 14000 lessons with new subjects, video lectures and Tamil content. The system is provided free to Telecentres in a manner that enables e-learning in rural communities. For their part, Telecentres provide these learning tools at a subsidised rate, thus generating sufficient revenue to remain sustainable. The content creation and development process takes place on an on-going basis, taking into account changes to the national curriculum and community needs.

STEPS TAKEN TO IMPLEMENT PROJECT

- With the Lien i3 Award, Shilpa Sayura has gone on to set up a new entity called "Shilpa Sayura Foundation", mandated with streamlining and focusing its vision, as outlined above.
- The Foundation team conducted a needs assessment by visiting 100 telecentres and obtained feedback and operational data.
- The team has reviewed existing educational content at these telecentres and is in the midst of creating new content, as well as training content developers to use new technologies.

IMMEDIATE CHALLENGES TO PROJECT

- The new social model symbolised by the formation of Shilpa Sayura Foundation has diverse key stakeholders living in areas that are geographically far apart. The Foundation has moved from a single office model to one which allows for a wider distribution of human resources. While working with new technologies allows for greater breadth and reach, this transition has been a challenge.
- From the feedback the team has received, there is a need to improve the current content base and create more interactive content.
- Technology used in the Shilpa Sayura project is being improved and needs to keep up with current methods of instruction.
- Although the focus has been on Telecentres, the team has found that there is potential in engaging Tamil communities who live in estates and in the post-conflict areas of northern and eastern Sri Lanka.
- Budget limitation for hardware has also been a problem.

PLANS FOR ENGAGING WITH COMMUNITY

- The Foundation has already been actively engaged with the community through Shilpa Sayura 1 and 2 – initiatives that focus on education in Sri Lanka.
- New content will be distributed in August 2010.
- Research is being carried out as a part of the implementation phase to obtain feedback from the community on the impact of the system and future needs.
- Telecentres are being identified to act as regional leaders as the project expands its scope.

COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO THE PROJECT

- The communities have responded by acknowledging that the current project is innovative.
- A survey we conducted among 150 telecentres found that over 9000 students have used Shilpa Sayura e-Learning. They would like the project to expand.
- As a result of the existing use of the Shilpa Sayura programme, telecentres have grown in popularity and their revenue has increased as a result.
- Some telecentres are now engaged in content development for Shilpa Sayura.
- The newly created content on Modern and Sustainable Agriculture has benefitted rural farmers, especially women engaged in agricultural work.
- There is a growing demand from telecentres island wide to replicate the project in their communities.

COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTION OR PARTICIPATION IN PROJECT

- Revenue opportunities have been created for unemployed volunteers working in the telecentres, content developers, teachers and telecentre operators who provide local support services.
- The Shilpa Sayura Community contributes by creating content, implementing programmes and providing support.
- Students who use the content provide feedback, leading telecentres provide implementation support and some of the telecentres are coordinating creation of content with teachers.
- An open forum has been set up so that participants can discuss and contribute to Shilpa Sayura's efforts towards developing content.
- The project is also providing opportunities for telecentres to derive micro revenue from the project, which has increased their participation and sustainability.