

Linking Institutional Development and Social Responsibility through Telecenters: the Information and Communication Technology Global Development Alliance (ICT GDA)



Partners: Mercantile Communications
Winrock International

Cost center: 5691

Project Duration: July 2006-March 2008

Program Description

This project works to enhance the use of information and communication technology (ICT) activities for rural development an effective vehicle to promote peace and reduce the conflict arising in rural areas of Nepal as a means to stimulate new economic activities. Project interventions include installing hardware to establish ICT telecenters in rural areas; as well as carrying out trainings, awareness and business development support activities that assist the rural population to use ICT telecenters for income

generation, government and business access, and knowledge sharing.

Objectives

The primary goal of ICT GDA is to enable the target communities in semi urban and rural locations to establish and use the ICT telecenters to improve rural connectivity, increase income and access service facilities. Specific objectives include establishment of ICT telecenters to improve rural connectivity through use of telephony, internet, email and related services; improve marketing potential and income of the small farmers, traders and entrepreneurs; improve, update and sustain the knowledge base required for the above purposes through portal and product developments; and enable rural communities to utilize ICT telecenter facilities to obtain various services with developments in e-governance, e-commerce and e-services.

Telecenter services will include a mixture of on-line as well as off-line services including telemedicine and computer-learning in rural schools.

This project conducts the following activities to meet the above objectives:

- Starting up, Telecenter Selection and Sustainability
 - a. Partnership Building with the Principle Stakeholders
 - b. Telecenter Selection and Revenue Generation
 - c. Criteria for Telecenter Selection
- Capacity Building , Mobilization and Information Dissemination
 - a. Community Interactions and Orientation
 - b. Training of ICT Focal Points
 - c. Telecenter Operators and Owner/Manager Training

- Portal, Product Development and Information Update
- Technology Management and Standardization
- The Proposed VSAT Technology
 - a. Energy Supply Options
- Financial Support to the Telecenters
 - a. Financing through a Guarantee Fund
 - b. Community Grant Fund
 - c. Additional Support to be provided to the Telecenters
- Demonstration Effect, Input to Policy Advocacy and Regulatory Framework
 - a. Demonstration Effect and Scaling up
 - b. Support to Policy and Regulatory Change

Activities

ICT telecenters are being established in various locations in semi urban and rural locations to improve rural connectivity, increase income and access service facilities. Some telecenters are semi-commercial housed in existing public service centers such as community or health centers, schools, or local government premises. Others are entirely commercial ventures established by private entrepreneurs, but continue to provide information services in a commercially sustainable manner. Access to this information and its effective utilization is anticipated to result in increased economic activities, rural inclusion into the development mainstream, and increase visibility of government services.

In order to provide services in such needy areas, the project has therefore forged strong collaborations with organizations already active in local development. These organizations support not only the start-up cost of telecenter establishment, but also ensure sustainability of services as an organizational activity in itself. This reduces the cost burden on operators to sustain services upon service-charges alone, increasing long-term viability. Furthermore, because these locally active organizations take on the telecenters an additional profile, expansion of internet coverage area, and products offered as services can be expected to be continuous. The project has secured multi-sectoral and multi stakeholder partnerships with several organizations.

Current Updates:

- Partnerships have been forged with the national level Poverty Alleviation Fund; Nepal Wireless Project; Annapurna Conservation Area Project; High Level Commission for Information Technology at the Ministry of Environment; some local government bodies; rural based computer institutes; library networks; and the Computer Association of Nepal.
- The project promotes intra-district clusters of connectivity through local organizations. Such clusters are anticipated to reduce the cost burden of bandwidth-costs on any single points alone. This will enable cost-effective connectivity in certain points in the cluster as community services, on the basis of revenue generated from other points in tourist or market centers.
- Demonstration of one such cluster has been created in the district of Solukhumbu, incorporating telecenters that serve both community and tourists. The point of

connectivity has been established through VSAT at a community hospital in Phaplu, Solukhumbu.

- A wireless extension of internet from Phaplu in Solukhumbu to the nearby village of Salleri, also in Solukhumbu. This stretch is funded by the ICT-GDA project in entirety.
- Another wireless extension of connectivity has been extended to the village of Junbesi, also in Solukhumbu. Junbesi is a stopover village along the tourist trail to the Everest Region. The ICT-GDA has supported part of this extension; the remaining three quarters of the total cost of extension will be shared out between several parties active in the locale.
- Connectivity through VSAT has been established in Jufal of Dolpo district. Connectivity was originally planned for the district headquarters, Dunai; the mountainous terrain impeded satellite signals there, necessitating relocation of equipment to Jufal, where the airstrip is located. The bulk of telecenter service is in Dunai.
- A wireless extension from Jufal to Dunai has been carried out. Connectivity through VSAT was established in Jufal of Dolpo district in 2007
- One telecenter each have been established in the insurgency afflicted districts of Accham and Bhajyang. These sites are to be established in partnership with the Poverty Alleviation Fund (PAF), and access to information and communication in these places is expected to bring about direct impacts upon the local communities. PAF plans to fund extension of connectivity to other areas through Wi-Fi, creating local clusters.
- One telecenter has also been established in Rukum, one of the heartlands of the recent insurgency. This is one location where access to information and basic services is anticipated to bring about positive impacts on the local community. A local computer institute, CIT and HLCIT are partners in this venture. The VSAT operates as a rural internet service provider (ISP) at this site; it is currently providing internet lines to a college, a computer-institute operates, as well as to the community-run telecenter.
- The semi-commercial telecenter in Rukum has lead to the establishment of a commercially-operated telecenter deep in the forests within the buffer zone of the Bardiya National Park in Bardiya district. This telecenter has dial-up connectivity, and is managed by the same team that operates the VSAT services in Rukum.
- One VSAT telecenter has been established in Beni bazaar in Myagdi district. This telecenter was a collaborative effort with the Myagdi-CAN (Computer Association of Nepal) Chapter. The local partners are operating as rural internet service providers (ISPs) by providing internet lines to 4 places in the town, including 2 cyber cafes, one school, and one computer-training institute. The cyber café operators have switched over from using dial-up internet because of better speed and connectivity. The Chapter has plans to extend internet-connectivity out to nearby villages in the countryside soon.
- The ICT GDA brings with it an additional two telecenters as leverage from Winrock International. These telecenters were established through Winrock's internal funds. One of these telecenters is at a local school in Syafrubesi in the district of Rasuwa. The VSAT-based connectivity from this site has been

extended via wireless links to reach Dhunche, the district headquarters. This wireless link has been enabled through ICT GDA funds in collaboration with a locally-based entrepreneur, and serves to give access to connectivity to the major segment of internet service-seekers in Dhunche. Dhunche does not have NTC telephone lines, and were previously dependent on the CDMA network. The local entrepreneur plans to extend connectivity in the other direction towards Langtang National Park as well in the near future.

- The district of Palpa in mid-Nepal would normally not be classified as a remote district. This district has a comparatively good road infrastructure, and access to the NTC, CDMA, as well as cellular networks. Yet in terms of connectivity, the undulating terrain of this district has created certain pockets in low-lying areas that are completely devoid of any form of electronic communication. The ICT GDA project has established a wireless network to give three such settlement in Palpa access to internet services to enable communication and information services. In an effort to minimize longterm service costs to be borne by these communities, connectivity has been sourced at the nearest point of wireless internet services – Tansen. The three villages of Jalpa, Rigneraha, and Rampur in this network are accessible by dirt road 2 hours, five hours and close to seven hours from the nearest trunk on the metalled highway.
- A telecenter has been established in the walled city of Lo Manthang in Upper Mustang. This activity is in partnership with the Annapurna Area Conservation Project, an NGO long active in the environmental project of the area.
- This project is one of two representatives of the INGO sector in the national Rural Telecenter Coordination Committee (RTCC) at the High Level Commission of Information Technology (HLCIT). HLCIT is a body in the Ministry of Environment, Science and Technology (MoEST). RTCC is a panel of representatives from the government, INGO, NGO, internet provider, and software developer sectors.

The other INGO, UN's Rural Urban Partnership Project has recently been completed, making the ICT-GDA the sole INGO representative in RTCC. The project has been active in this role, providing feedback for interlinking telecenter services with other factors in the value chain, including access to energy.
- The project has advocated for, and contributed to the successful revision of VSAT related government policies both independently, as well as in the capacity of a RTCC member.
- In tune to universal need of a platform for rural users to gain access to web-based services, the project has commissioned Nepal's first Rural Information Gateway portal. This portal will be in Nepali as well as in English, and will contain cross-sector links to information and services provided to rural communities. This activity is expected to bring about direct impacts on all telecenter users throughout Nepal, and is to be conducted with co-funding with the HLCIT.