

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE COMPLETION REPORT

Division: SANS

TA No., Country and Name			Amount Approved: \$800,000	
TA No. 4110-SRI: Community Information Services for the Poor			Revised Amount: \$800,000	
Executing Agency: Ministry of Human Resources Development, Education and Cultural Affairs		Source of Funding Poverty Reduction Cooperation Fund	Amount Undisbursed: \$4,512.31	Amount Utilized: \$795,487.69
TA Approval Date: 9 May 2003	TA Signing Date: 3 June 2003	Fielding of First Consultants: 22 September 2003	TA Completion Date Original: 31 Jan 2005 Actual: 31 Aug 2005	
			Account Closing Date Original: 31 Jan 2005 Actual: 27 Jul 2006	
Description: About 40% of Sri Lanka's population can be classified as poor or vulnerable to poverty. In a country with a high unemployment rate, disabled people have few opportunities to compete for jobs and training programs. It is believed that access to information plays a crucial role in improving living conditions of the poor. Information and communications technology (ICT) can contribute to poverty reduction by enhancing the efficiency of the economy, enabling better delivery of public services and potentially creating new employment opportunities for the poor and disabled. However, the poor and disabled have fewer opportunities to access ICT. Thus, exploring affordable and effective ways for these groups to access vital information through ICT can enhance effectiveness of Sri Lanka's poverty reduction strategy.				
Expected Impact, Outcome and Outputs The expected outcomes of the technical assistance (TA) were shared experience of affordable and effective community information services for the poor. The expected impact was a better strategy to reduce the digital divide. The outputs were pilot testing of two community information networks among district offices, schools, training institutes, job placement centers, hospitals, markets, private companies, and villages, to share vital information with the poor and disabled, using cost-effective and feasible communication modes. The TA had three components: (i) establishment of two community information networks, (ii) capacity building for managing communication information centers (CICs) and village information centers (VICs) and using ICT equipment, and (iii) provision of information services. The pilot test targeted about 2,000 poor and disabled people in Gampaha and Ratnapura districts.				
Delivery of Inputs and Conduct of Activities TA formulation, terms of reference, and performance of consultants were generally adequate and satisfactory, but weaknesses were found in the following aspects: Definition of the poor - Though the TA focused on the poor and disadvantaged, it did not have a sufficiently clear definition of the poor. That was essential to provide accurate data for the TA monitoring and evaluation, and for the case studies. Therefore, during a TA review in 2004, the following group categories were re-identified as poor and disadvantaged in the context of the three pilot areas: (i) Samurdhi recipients (monthly income of less than Rp3,000), (ii) the unemployed; (iii) tenant farmers and seasonal farmers; (iv) plantation workers; (v) unskilled and semi-skilled laborers; (vi) fisherfolk; and (vii) the disabled. These groups constituted the priority target groups of the TA. Community mobilization and outreach to the poor - The TA clearly needed to intensify its grass root level activities to provide maximum benefit to the poor. Community awareness programs should have been conducted by community mobilization experts to familiarize the poor community with information technology and its benefits. More interactive, participatory, and demand based information services should have been provided to meet the essential needs of the poor. After the TA review, a change in the field personnel was made to include more expertise and experience in designing and implementing community information services for disadvantaged communities, and social mobilization and outreach to the poor. Sustainability of the CICs and VICs - Sustainability measures should have been introduced at the earliest stage. CIC managers should have immediately started the assessment of the potential community organizations, and elaborated a business plan to sustain the CIC and VICs operations. Based on the above assessment, ADB guided the consultants and made a change in implementation arrangements to re-define the target groups, introduce more interactive, participatory services, and to establish sustainability measures in the management of the CIC/VICs.				
ADB fielded three missions: Inception mission (in October 2003) and TA Review missions (in May and September 2004). ADB provided adequate guidance to improve the TA design. The executing agency (EA) allocated adequate resources to implement the TA activities.				

Evaluation of Outputs and Achievement of Outcome

With the mid-course adjustments noted above, the TA outcomes were positive as the pilot testing of community information centers generated wider awareness of, and improved skills for, the use of ICT among the target groups. The outputs were also positive as the TA produced all required documentation and recommendations with respect to the potential for, and challenges to, expanding information service targeted to the poor. The TA results were disseminated not only in Sri Lanka, but in the region through follow-up regional seminars. However, the TA's impact on institution building was limited, as the TA counterparts changed in the course of TA implementation due to the change in the Government. Training was adequate, except in the aspects of community awareness and sustainability measures, which were lacking. Adherence with the terms of reference was satisfactory. Funds utilization was satisfactory, and reporting was timely. The EA was also satisfied with the TA outputs and their effectiveness.

Overall Assessment and Rating

The TA produced a good case study on the potential for expanding information service targeted to the poor, and therefore met its principal objective. Hence, the TA is rated successful.

Major Lessons

Though the objective of the TA was to test community information networks and to share vital information with the poor and disabled, using cost-effective and feasible communication modes, the TA should have introduced sustainability measures at the earliest stage, so that the initiative could have shown more durable results.

Recommendations and Follow-Up Actions

The reports, case study and the CIC/VICs were handed over to the Ministry of Science and Technology (MOT). It is recommended that CIC/VICs continue their activities under the support of MOT. Monitoring by MOT is warranted to assess CIC/VIC sustainability and replicability in other areas of the country. Should the Government of Sri Lanka express an interest to further explore affordable and effective ways to provide information services to the poor, and expand such in larger areas with ADB's involvement, this could be considered during preparation of the next Country Partnership Strategy.

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