

# **Draft Telecentre Stakeholders Forum 2008 Report**

**Prepared by:** CSDMS, India

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**Venue:** Hall No.8, Pragati Maidan, New Delhi, India



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## Telecentre Stakeholders Forum 2008

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### **Background**

The Telecentre Stakeholders Forum (TSF) was organised in New Delhi, India between 29<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> July 2008 by the Centre for Science, Development and Media Studies (CSDMS) in partnership with *telecentre.org*. The forum was hosted at the largest Information and Communication Technology (ICT) event in the country: eIndia2008, organised by CSDMS in collaboration with the Government of India and other national and international organisations as supporting partners. The three-day forum saw intense debates and discussions on issues related to the telecentre movement in India, Asia and parts of Africa. There was active participation from different parts of the Indian sub-continent, Asia and Africa. The participants included representatives of the governments; telecentre leaders and practitioners; experts from the academia and different organisations active in the field.

TSF 2008 was fifth in the series of telecentre forums organised by CSDMS. It provided a platform for all key stakeholders representing the government, private sector, civil society, and funding agencies to join and discuss the achievements, challenges and progress in the telecentre movement. The forum was divided into eight sessions with thematic tracks. The objectives were to create a common ground for equitable learning, knowledge sharing and emerging concrete lessons to benefit the Asian telecentre movement in particular and the global telecentre scenario in general.

### **Session I: Tracking the Indian Telecentre Movement**

The aim of this session was to bring together various key telecentre stakeholders across the country and provide them with a learning platform. The session was chaired by Ashok Jhunjhunwala, Professor, IIT Madras, Chennai, India. The panelists included Basheerhamad Shadrach, Sr Programme Officer, *telecentre.org*; Ashish Sanyal, Sr Technical Director, Department of Information Technology, Government of India; and D C Mishra, Sr Technical Director, National Informatics Centre, New Delhi.

Jhunjhunwala invited Shadrach to open the discussion with his views. Shadrach charted the course of the Indian telecentre movement in the last 15 years. He spoke of 3 distinct eras: the era of conceptualisation; the era of experimentation; and the era of implementation. The first era, in the 1990s, saw the early architects of the Indian telecentre movement, like Jhunjhunwala and M S Swaminathan, frame ideas and policies for ICTs to reach the unreached. The second era saw players like TARAhaat, Drishtee, n-Logue, etc. experiment with various programmes as they attempted to take ICTs to rural India. There were many projects in these initial stages that failed; but they hold relevant lessons. The Government of India's Common Services Centres (CSC) programme helped India to enter the era of implementation. In September 2006, the Government of India approved a flagship Scheme to establish 100,000 CSCs across rural India, with an estimated total outlay of USD 1.44 billion to be expended over 4 years. This era witnessed direct negotiations in the connectivity domain, policy inputs and Indian telecentre ecosystem. Shadrach claimed that the 4<sup>th</sup> era, that is the scale-up era, is soon to start where Service Centre Agencies (SCAs), citizens and the markets have a big role to play.



D C Misra, in his presentation, stressed the need to converge Panchayats (autonomous local governance bodies in India) and telecentres. Misra noted that Panchayats are working towards sustainable development and telecentres are negotiating with financial sustainability. Therefore, it could be beneficial if both could be brought together. The emphasis on e-Governance at grassroots level by telecentres will take time, but Misra believes that villages contain enormous data and content that has to be collated and compiled. This 'knowledge management', he believes, can be carried out by telecentres.

Ashis Sanyal spoke of three sub-elements of sustainability: operational sustainability, functional sustainability, and financial sustainability. He raised pertinent issues vis-a-vis these sub-elements in the eve of a government programme's launch. How does a village get sustained power? How can the capacity of a village level telecentre operator be built? Who will provide the basket of services and content in a village? Sanyal suggested that the SCAs can handle sustainability issues in a village to a great extent; that a concerted effort is required to encourage the usage of technology by the villagers. Sanyal concluded by noting that there is a misunderstanding of the CSC programme even at the highest levels, which is why some SCAs go for 'zero' bids.

Jhunjhunwala remarked that the rules of bidding have to undergo change. And the government has to take a pro-active step in this. He drew an analytical picture of the telecentre movement in India over the last 10-15 years. Villages have been provided with computers, but broadband connectivity has been not. India has not even begun to create and deploy cost-efficient power set-up to the telecentres. Jhunjhunwala raised the crucial point: Have Indians learnt how to manage telecentres? Individual entrepreneurs run telecentres irrespective of their abilities to run them. The corporate houses have set up several telecentres, but is there any research behind where telecentres need to be located or is there any understanding of the pulse of telecentres?

Jhunjhunwala observed that most telecentres have turned into computer training institutes. Others focus on education. The IIT Madras's Telecommunications and Computer Networks (TeNet) group has turned telecentres into coaching centres for "passing exams", catering to the Indian psyche. These telecentres are a great success. Jhunjhunwala noted that income generation is the priority in rural areas. Little has been done in this regard. He exhorted rural Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) as a means to address this aspect.

Jhunjhunwala concluded by throwing up a few points to ponder:

- Could manufacturing (which is skill-based and less machine-based) be taken to the rural telecentres?
- Could telecentres be used for irrigation?
- Could telecentres enable farmers to map the history of their product, land, etc. whereby a huge advisory would be made possible?
- Could farmers be enabled to buy and sell better?



### ***Open discussion: The current and future scenario of telecentres in India***

After the panelists made their presentations, the audience came up with several important questions and insights. What are the expectations out of Panchayats vis-a-vis telecentres? Are telecentres in a threatening position because in the South Asian context, villagers demand telecentre services but can't afford to pay for them? Why have all models been thinking of the end-user to pay? Isn't it time to start benchmarking the progress? Can mobile banking address sustainability issues? Is there too much leaning towards the business model, ignoring that telecentres evolved for social and community development? Are we moving too fast with technology, because everyone has a mobile phone but not everyone can use it for development?

The following points came up in the panelists-audience interaction. D C Misra highlighted Gujarat as a good case study of Panchayat-telecentre convergence where both the parties have benefited. As far as financial sustainability is concerned, several experiments are going on in terms of cross-subsidies. Basheerhamad Shadrach pointed out that telecentres should develop financial sustainability strategies from an early stage. Ashis Sanyal confirmed that for 4 years, the CSC programme has seen many states offsetting their share of profit so that telecentre operators can provide services at subsidised costs. Sanyal also said that in order to ensure last mile connectivity, the government is experimenting with a business model whereby private telecom players along with the government's Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) are engaged to provide broadband connectivity to all the CSCs. Shadrach pronounced that telecentre types will emerge in the future and the roles of telecentres will be duplicated by many. Information and entrepreneurship will remedy many weaknesses. He also stressed that it is time to change the status quo where governments assume omni-potent controlling power over telecentres in India.

Ashok Jhunjhunwala concluded that the future would see both mobile phones and telecentres playing important and complimentary roles in the lives of people. He stressed that mobile banking is coming up very rapidly and the onus lies with the stakeholders to ensure financial inclusion through mobile banking.

### ***Outcomes of the session***

This session saw the portrayal of a holistic picture of the Indian telecentre movement. All throughout, it was reiterated that the telecentre operator has to include the community holistically in order to run the telecentre effectively and evolve its own sustenance tactics.

There was consensus for strong partnerships between the government, private sector, and the non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The future of telecentres, it was agreed, lies in driving the income of villages as educational centres, medical centres, rural BPOs, financial institutions, centres that focus on farming, irrigation, village governance and planning issues, etc.



## **Session II: Open Conclave of Service Centre Agencies, State Designated Agencies and State IT Secretaries**

The open conclave among the Service Centre Agencies (SCAs), State Designated Agencies (SDAs) and State IT Secretaries was held to bring forth the key programme and implementation challenges in the Government of India's Common Services Centres (CSC) programme, one of the largest telecentre programmes in the world. The session was chaired by R Chandrashekhar, Additional Secretary, Department of Information Technology, Government of India. The panelists were S Abbasi, Sr Director, Department of Information Technology, Government of India; Nagendra Singhal, Assistant Vice President, ZOOM Developers, New Delhi, India; and Ravi Kumar, Executive Director, Alternative for India Development, Jharkhand, India. There were several government representatives and telecentre practitioners in the audience. The idea of this session was to provide a platform for informal and intense discussion among the stakeholders.

S Abbasi gave a brief background of the CSC programme, its implications and challenges. CSCs are broadband enabled IT kiosks in rural areas. The scheme was launched in 2006 through public-private partnership. An SCA is selected at the state level by bid process, where one who needs less support from the government wins the bid. Abbasi identified several challenges impinging the application of the CSC programme. The challenges around infrastructure, resource, finance and connectivity are enormous. What should be the minimum investment on hardware? How to handle the issue of content in local languages in a diverse country like India? How to provide government services at the grassroots level through telecentres? The whole idea behind telecentres is to provide government services to rural areas through the SCAs. But in most states (with the exception of Gujarat and Karnataka perhaps), this remains to be translated into reality. Abbasi emphasised that there is a need to understand a new service delivery paradigm.

As far as tackling the challenges around human resources goes, Abbasi suggested that it is important to identify people with entrepreneurial skills and some working knowledge of IT to act as Village Level Entrepreneurs (VLEs). Also, the VLE has to be bankable because the loan is taken in his/her name as the asset goes to him/her. Abbasi stated that financial challenges could be mitigated through revenue generation by the kiosks. But this doesn't negate the importance and revenue support derived from the government. Then, there is the challenge of meeting the interests of the village level interest groups and pressure groups.

As of 30<sup>th</sup> June 2008, CSC roll out is in progress in 14 states and 113,000 CSCs are coming up instead of the 100,000 CSCs conceived of in the inception stages. Abbasi stated that the government is developing an online monitoring system to check the existence and applicability of CSCs established through the SCAs.

Nagendra Singhal, as an SCA representative, had several concerns to raise. He noted that banks refrain from financing a CSC project, therefore, is there a way whereby the government can arrange for negotiations between banks and SCAs? Training of VLEs is a challenge that is often missed by the government and NGOs. Could programmes be conceived that focus on training VLEs? Could there be tax exemptions for SCAs to purchase hardware? Singhal spoke of another loophole in the CSC programme: Lack of communication among the government departments. He suggested that CSCs could collect grievance documents and address them.



Ravi Kumar provided yet another SCA perspective. Kumar has 15 months of telecentre experiences in Jharkhand, one of the first states in India where the roll out has been complete. He noted that in most rural areas, there are not enough educated people to take over the CSCs. Alternative India Development (AID), as an SCA, faced enormous challenges in finding a suitable VLE, and in educating the block level and district level operators. AID used various tools like puppet show, cycle rally, radio broadcasting, etc. to ensure people's participation. Kumar asserted that the biggest challenge in Jharkhand is the lack of ownership and responsibility for any government programme. There is tedious paperwork involved in government programmes and a lack of awareness among different government bodies about the CSC scheme and the role of SCAs. SCAs in Jharkhand face the added disadvantage of confronting Naxal groups running government programmes.

Kumar suggested that every village should have a data centre to train VLEs. Government should re-consider 12 months as the appropriate time frame for rolling out an CSC. Kumar also stressed that sustenance and digitisation of CSCs is possible only if local governments at the village level participate.

Chandrashekhar wrapped up by observing that the CSC programme is an unprecedented, mammoth and unparalleled attempt in the whole world. Its success depends on concerted efforts by the state governments, SCAs, SDAs, civil societies and concerned people.

***Open Discussion: The CSC programme, its implications, challenges and current status***

Once the panelists comprising of government and SCA representatives had made their presentations, the audience raked up pertinent questions and issues that they addressed to the panelists, and also tried to resolve among themselves. Does the CSC programme include the civil society organisations? Most of the SCAs are not civil society organisations, but the question is: How effectively have they been engaged in the programme? Has the CSC programme considered public access to kiosks as a challenge, because caste and gender biases are rampant in rural India? In India, more research needs to be done in this field, which would enable an equitable public access to telecentres across castes, gender and communities. Why is it taking so long for the connectivity issue to be resolved in India? Chandrashekhar assured that connectivity would be better by the middle of next year.

***Outcome of the session***

The open conclave provided a good view of what's happening at the ground level from different perspectives vis-a-vis the CSC programme. The stakeholders of the programme came together, shared their experiences, discussed the challenges they have faced so far, and tried to find an answer to these challenges. An important outcome was that the Government of India representatives have agreed to have a meeting with various SCAs in the country and address their concerns in the immediate future.



### **Session III: Content, Services and Connectivity: Making the Connection**

The aim of this session was to address the issues of relevant content production, availability, sharing and funding content creation, etc. The session was chaired by Rufina Fernandes, CEO, NASSCOM Foundation, Mumbai, India. The panelists were Col K J Singh, Director, Designmate India Pvt. Ltd, India; Sandra Pandi, Project Officer, ICT Applications and Cybersecurity Division, ITU, Geneva; Shahid Akbar, CEO, Bangladesh Institute of ICT in Development; Vijayalakshmi Subramaniam, Project Manager, India Development Gateway (InDG), India; and Vaibhav Magow, Director, Marketing, Hughes Net, India.

Col KJ Singh touched upon educational content. He forwarded the idea that a high school graduate in a village can teach topics through e-Content, with voice-over in local languages. Such a high school graduate can tutor children at the primary and high school levels and earn his/her own income. The content, Singh said, should be able to play on an analog TV because analog repair centres can be readily found in villages.

Sandra Pandi spoke about the recently launched ITU Global Telecentre Portal to map information about telecentres from across the world. She invited telecentre networks and practitioners in the forum to forge partnerships with this portal.

Shahid Akbar projected the status of telecentres in Bangladesh. He exhorted that content-wise, telecentres in the country need to integrate ICTs in non-ICT projects to benefit the rural people.

Vijayalakshmi Subramaniam depicted an elaborate picture of e-Content services by InDG. Pratibha Devisingh Patil, President of India, launched the InDG multi-lingual portal on 4<sup>th</sup> July 2008. The portal provides information on strategic needs of the poor and the marginalised in local languages. Rural communities can immediately access information in five important sectors: Agriculture, Rural Energy, Education, Health and eGovernance. The languages in which services are available are Hindi, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Bengali and English. In the coming days, more sectors and more languages will be covered.

The Portal is developed and maintained by the Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC), Hyderabad with support from the eGovernance division of the Department of Information Technology (DIT), Government of India. InDG networks with ministries so that information and value services can be provided to the villagers, both literate and illiterate.

The InDG portal is in the lines of the Wikipedia model, but there is a strong validation process of the data uploaded. The portal also carries an online partnership form. InDG is tying up with All India Radio to have farm-based content on the portal.

Vaibhav Magow discoursed on how to get content, services and connectivity together. Magow maintained that satellite connection is the only means to ensure connectivity in rural areas and upscale. He stated that Hughes at present runs 20,000 telecentres. The figure is soon expected to reach 25,000.

Rufina Fernandez spoke about the initiatives by Nasscom Knowledge Networks (NKN), that function in collaboration with NGOs. NKNs are converting content into local languages. Rufina emphasised on the need to focus on Master Training and Capacity Building. There should be continual engagement with this because of flux among personnels. She stated that content is available but the problem is of bandwidth/connectivity. Therefore, more



connectivity partners need to come into play. Rufina exhorted that sustainability is possible only through partnerships.

***Open Discussion: Partnerships to meet recurring costs; information through mobile phones***

The open discussion that followed the presentations raked up issues pertaining to recurring expenses, cost of setting up a satellite network, and the role of mobile technology in providing content to rural people. It was pronouncedly agreed that various partners have to work out a regular revenue-sharing arrangement to mitigate recurring expenses. Vaibhav stated that satellite connectivity could be set up within INR 35,000-40,000. As far as delivering content through mobile phones is concerned, InDG provides market information to farmers through short message services (SMS). Even the Bangladesh Institute of ICT in Development provides agriculture related information to farmers through SMS.

***Outcomes of the session: Forging Partnerships***

The session saw the emergence of several partnership initiatives. Sandra Pandi approached several Asian practitioners to tie up with the ITU telecentre portal. This will see the linking up of the ITU telecentre portal with the Thaitelecentre.org, Bangladesh telecentre network, Sri Lankan telecentre family, Mission Swaabhimaan, Grameen Gyan Abhiyan.

Rufuna Fernandez advocated everyone to become a part of United Nation's 'Solutions Exchange' community and the South Asian initiative 'BytesforAll'. Sri Kanthan, a Nanasala telecentre champion, Sri Lanka initiated discussions with Vijayalakshmi to make Azim Premji Foundation's content on education available in Sri Lanka. Sri Kanthan also urged Vaibhav to ensure that Hughes actively takes up satellite connectivity strategies in Sri Lanka as well.



## **Session IV: Telecentre Networks: Exploring the Market of Opportunities**

This session sought to acquaint the different telecentre networks and the audience with each other. The idea was to provide a platform whereby experiences and knowledge could be shared, which could act as learning lessons for each other. The session was facilitated by Vignesh Sornamohan, Community Content Facilitator – Asia, telecentre.org, Based at: CSDMS, India. The speakers were Mahmud Hasan, Chief Operating Officer, Bangladesh Telecentre Network; Kamolrat Intaratat, Thailtelecentre.org; Sudip Rajbhandari, Mission Swaabhimaan, Nepal; Angelo Juan Ramos, Chairperson, PhilCeCNet; Ganga Vidya, Co-ordinator, Grameen Gyan Abhiyan; Karim Kasim, Middle East and North African Network, Egypt; Ahmed M M Eisa, Sudan Telecentre Network; and Phan Huu Phong, Deputy Director General, Ministry of Information and Communications, Vietnam Public Utility Telecommunication Service Fund.

The moderator took the discussants through three rounds: A brief introduction about their respective networks; the challenges they face; and the future of their networks. What emerged out of these rounds is that all telecentre networks are facilitating platforms, aimed at telecentre business facilitation and sensitisation of governments and stakeholders.

### **The challenges identified by the telecentre networks are as follows**

- Challenges around issues of sustainability
- Challenges involved in sensitising the local governments and community about telecentres.
- People often fail to see that telecentres are not only about ICTs. They combine ICT and development.
- Challenges involved in making people aware of ICT tools
- Challenge of content and capacity building

### ***Outcomes of the session: Knowledge sharing***

The stakeholders from different telecentre networks in the world engaged in intense knowledge sharing. It was also clear that all the stakeholders namely, the government, civil society organisations and the private players will benefit from joining the telecentre networks. The government will serve its people effectively, the private players will reach the bottom of the pyramid market and the civil society organisations will be in a better position to advocate the development concerns of the local community. They considered the possibility of working as partners in their respective countries and in the telecentre domain.



## **Session V: Sustainability of Telecentres: A Systemic Approach**

The aim of this session was to deliberate upon the approaches, models and challenges related to the sustainability of telecentres. The session was chaired by Karishma Kiri, Director, Microsoft Corporation, USA. The speakers were Eric Spector, Executive Vice President, OneRoof, Inc., USA; Satyan Mishra, Managing Director, Drishtee, India; Col. K J Singh, Director, Designmate India Pvt. Ltd, India; Wilfred Varughese, SIFFS Community Information Centre, India; Sultanur Reza, Head of Community Information Centres, Grameen Phone, Bangladesh; Karim Kasim, UNDP ICT Trust Fund, Egypt; and Ujjwal Singh, Country Head - Sales, Hughes Communications India Ltd.

Karishma Kiri moderated the session by asking the speakers to address the following questions. What is sustainability? Can the community identify and express its needs by itself? How important is financial sustainability as compared to social sustainability? Is it possible to have financial sustainability for the segment that makes USD 1-2 a day?

Various definitions came up about sustainability. Some saw it as a layered meaning, some spoke of it as the ability to cope with changing market conditions, while some others regarded it as the existence of a telecentre after the donor's role is over. The responses reflected the socio-historical specificity of telecentres in the region from which the speaker came. But the consensus among all of them was that the local community has to be involved in the design and planning of telecentres from the very first stages if an answer to sustainability is to be found. This is because it has been seen that the local community can identify and express the services it needs with the help of local NGOs.

As far as financial sustainability and social sustainability are concerned, the consensus was that they go hand in hand. If telecentres don't address social sustainability concerns, then they will soon lose the community's interest. Karim Kasim suggested that in order to attract people, telecentres could act as the village nodal point/hub by providing non-ICT services like tea, coffee, etc. Also, the sustainability of a telecentre depends to a great extent on the motivation, literacy and education of the entrepreneurs. The speakers, on the basis of their experiences in the field, stated that people are willing to pay for applications which otherwise are not available at their native place.

### ***Open discussion: Importance of social sustainability, information dissemination***

The open discussion round saw several questions and observations related to the importance of services over infrastructure, creation and maintenance of proper information dissemination channels; and importance of telecentres for empowering the disadvantaged and marginalised. The need for more studies to assess the social impact of ICTs was reiterated.



### *Outcomes of the session*

There were intense deliberations upon solutions for sustainability. Some working solutions identified were:

- The local/village community has to be involved in the design of the telecentre and its sustainability strategies right from the conceptual stage
- Besides the ICT based services like access to Internet, printing, photocopy, e-Government services, etc., the telecentre has to cater to non-ICT based services (provisions for tea, coffee, public space for hanging out, etc.) for ensuring sustainability
- OneRoof has developed a third-party software to run a computer centre with POS (point of sale) controls, tools to make feasible staff management with minimal IT knowledge; and a proprietary MIS (management information system) that greatly increases the sustainability of telecenters. The web-accessed MIS (in beta testing) leverages cutting-edge, graphical displays for timely, easy-to-understand and actionable management information for telecentres. For example, the following information could be derived;
  - (a) What customers (age, gender) are using the computers?
  - (b) When are the computers being used (to better determine hours open, discounted pricing encouraging non-peak usage, when to add capacity)?
  - (c) What uses are most popular (DTP, email, chat, browsing, VoIP, games – and which specifically)?
  - (d) How is maintenance help requested (with dated response tracking)?



## **Session VI: Telecentre Academy: The Way Forward**

The aim of this session was to address the issues of content, curriculum development, training modules, mode of training, etc. The idea was also to deliberate upon the key lessons and success stories. The session was chaired by Prof Rajasekharan Pillai, Vice Chancellor, Indira Gandhi National Open University, India and co-chaired by Kamolrat Intarat, Tailtelecentre.org. The speakers were Basheerhamad Shadrach, Sr Programme Officer, telecentre.org; Karishma Kiri, Director, Microsoft Corporation, USA; Melinda Bandalaria, Associate Professor and Registrar, University of Philippines Open University; Ahmed M M Eisa, Sudan Telecentre Academy; and Ganga Vidya, Co-ordinator, Grameen Gyan Abhiyan.

Basheerhamad Shadrach spoke about the *telecentre.org* academy, a partnership academy rooted in multi-stakeholder approach and interests. Shadrach stated that the academy aims to support the growing capacity needs of grassroots telecentre workers through national and regional capacity building and learning programmes. He said that the academy will coordinate resources at a global level. This calls for standardisation of the curriculum of the training programmes and for certification. At the global level, the academy will provide online programmes, fundraising aid, knowledge sharing, etc. And at the national level, the academy will proceed with a blended approach, localised curriculum, strategic revenue models, etc. But, Shadrach said that it would be a challenge to balance the global and regional needs and demands. He pointed out that the governments could always play a strong supporting role in the telecentre programme.

Karishma Kiri discoursed on Microsoft Unlimited Potential's vision, and the need for capacity building. The 'vision' is to enable sustained economic opportunities for the next 5 billion people. Karishma stressed that it requires innovation at the local level, which can happen through partners. She pronounced knowledge sharing of capacity building programmes as an underserved aspect in the global telecentre scenario. Karishma concluded that it is important to ensure continuous training, an area that the telecentre academy urgently needs to address.

Melinda Bandalaria spoke of Philippine Community eCentre Network (PhilCeCNet), one of the quickest networks to evolve in the world. Melinda also elaborated upon the role of the academia in the telecentre movement.

Ahmed Eisa launched the Sudan National Telecentre Academy website in this session. The Sudan National Telecentre Academy was born in the 5<sup>th</sup> East African Telecentre Leaders Forum (EATLF) in June 2008 and is the first telecentre academy in Africa and the Arab region. This academy will provide technical support and e-Services to the community telecentres in the region. Eisa emphasised that challenges in the telecentre movement can be solved only through partnerships.

Ganga Vidya discussed the Indian telecentre academy, called the Jamsetji Tata National Virtual Academy, which is entirely virtual. Ganga announced that MS Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) has launched the 'Rural Innovation Fund' in collaboration with Microsoft and telecentre.org to provide entrepreneurial telecentre practitioners with fellowships.

Rajasekharan Pillai dwelled on the digital learning module that has been developed by the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). IGNOU provides certificate courses on rural entrepreneurship and an MBA degree in Social Entrepreneurship – the first of its kind



in the country. Pillai asserted that IGNOU has the largest repository of educational materials/content in the world.

***Open Discussion: Standardisation of training modules and certificates***

In the open discussion round after the presentations, issues pertaining to the standardisation of capacity building training modules and certificates came up. The consensus was that it is important to work on arriving at a standardised format for the afore-mentioned. There were also discussions on whether a training module needs to be developed for the local political leader so that the latter can facilitate telecentre practices in the community/village.

***Outcomes of the session:***

The session saw immense knowledge sharing among the various participants in the panel and audience. They deliberated upon the areas that the telecentre academy needs to focus on. Awareness was generated as there were discussions on the values that the telecentre academy needs to contribute to the telecentres apart from the initial technical and financial support. The session also saw the commitment by IGNOU Vice Chancellor, Rajasekharan Pillai, to work out with the Sri Lanka Open University a capacity building training programme for Sri Lankan telecentre practitioners. In India, IGNOU helps subsidise capacity building training costs. Another special character was that the Sudan National Telecentre Academy website was launched in this session.



## **Session VII: Innovative Telecentre Initiatives**

This session sought to highlight new initiatives in the telecentre domain, which attempt to reach the bottom of the pyramid and ensure sustenance. The session was chaired by George Varughese, President, Development Alternatives and the panelists were Praveen Manikpuri, Project Manager – Enterprise Development, TARAhaat; Geeta Malhotra, Country Director, READ India, New Delhi; Joseph Thomas, Byrraju Foundation, Hyderabad; Rajesh Singh, Datamation Foundation Trust, New Delhi, India; and Siddhartha Shankar from Drishtee, Noida.

Praveen Manikpuri demonstrated the ICT based literacy programme – TARAakshar. The 30-day programme uses memory techniques with the help of graphics and animation to teach people Hindi. It is an innovative programme currently running in 6 states of India.

Geeta Malhotra spoke of READ India's telecentres and library programme. Each READ India library houses 3,000-5,000 books freely accessible to all. READ India is a part of READ Global.

Joseph Thomas elaborated upon Byrraju Foundation's role in rural India, especially 6 districts in Andhra Pradesh. The Foundation provides virtual delivery of healthcare, education, sanitation, agriculture, etc. through its 'Ashwini' centres. There are ongoing research to engage in money transfer, matrimonial alliances and animation courses as future innovations. The Foundation has 4 functional rural BPOs in 2 districts and aims to establish 100 rural BPOs in the next 3-4 years.

Siddhartha Shankar spoke of Drishtee's financial services in rural India. Their services are based on researches which led to the conclusion that spending is seasonal in rural India, but villagers do demand savings product and money transaction services.

Rajesh Singh dwelled on Datamation Foundation Trust's 'ICTs for economic empowerment of minority women in East Delhi' programme. The Foundation has, with the support of the Government of Delhi, Microsoft and UNESCO, created Gender Resource Centres (GRCs) in the area. Virtual training on innovative designs in candle making, etc. is imparted to women at these centres.

### ***Open Discussion: Issues of sustainability and quality***

After the presentations, the panelists and audience discussed about the sustainability models of the various programmes that were followed. The argument that emerged is that sustainability is possible through partnerships and sustainability models should be evolved in discussion and ideation with the local community. There were also questions raised about the quality of services in rural BPOs. It is agreed that rural BPOs need to emerge processes of quality assurance besides capacity building of the staff. The quality parameters have to be defined and based on what the customer wants and what the rural BPO can deliver.



***Outcomes of the session:***

Innovative telecentre practices were shared and debated in the session. Participants learnt from each other the nuances of such practices. There were positive thoughts towards respecting and bringing together relative strengths. It was agreed that different products need different delivery modes; that it is important to differentiate and understand the importance of awareness, initial training and handholding; that it's time to meet back-end investments.



## **Session VIII: Telecentres as Public Spaces**

This session sought to critically examine (a) the scope of telecentres as public spaces and (b) their social impact on the marginalised and disadvantaged communities. The session was chaired by T R Raghunathan, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India. The speakers were Ahmed M M Eisa, Founder, Gedaref Digital City Organisation, Sudan; Dalia El-Hazek, Project Co-ordinator, ICT4D Portfolio, UNDP Egypt; Melinda Bandalaria, Associate Professor and Registrar, University of Philippines Open University; Santanu Sengupta, Change Innovators Society, West Bengal; and Ratna Sudarshan, Director, Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST).

Raghunathan opened the discussion with certain ponderings: local bodies are yet to be considered as critical service delivery bodies; can telecentres act as intermediate bodies?; how accessible are telecentres to women and the disadvantaged?

Ahmed M M Eisa spoke about Gedaref Digital City Organisation's (GDCO) capacity building programmes for the differently-abled, which has benefited many so far. GDCO is a civil society organisation (NGO) established in early 2005 in Sudan. It is a non-political organisation but it has partnerships with the government, other national and international organisations, donors and supporters working for the benefit of the community.

Ratna Sudarshan provided a gender perspective to how inclusive telecentres are. Ratna made her presentation on the basis of fieldwork conducted at the Akshaya centres in Kerala. She pointed out that an absence of continued skill upgradation trainings limits women's access to employment opportunities. Many women find it difficult to run the Akshaya centres in Kerala because of the social norms and customs that predate IT inclusion in their lives. Ratna asserted that entry is not the issue; mobility at work place is. Mobility depends on computing skills and knowledge of content, and there is no continued skill upgradation training, especially for the latter. Ratna reiterated that women's participation in the workforce depends upon child/elderly care support and the social support systems; therefore, it's high time they were strengthened.

Melinda Bandalaria spoke of digital inclusion among Filipino women. Melinda asserted that in Philippines, women are in most need of digital inclusion, contrary to popular perception. She stated that digital inclusion programmes need to focus on the urban poor and the rural women. Melinda also emphasised the need for change in attitude among the Filipino women vis-a-vis uses of ICTs. It is important to sensitise the women on services that telecentres/ICTs can deliver beyond the perceivable.

Dalia el-Hazek presented the situation of the SIWA Community Learning Centre in Egypt. Siwa is a remote area in Egypt. It is an oasis in the western desert. The SIWA Community Learning Centre was started in 2004 as an UNDP, Microsoft, a Siwan NGO partnership project. A follow-up study in 2006 revealed that women were not included in the programme due to certain social norms and customs. In order to ensure sustainability vis-a-vis women's participation, the project carried out the following steps:

- training imparted to the Siwan NGO on how to deal with women
- all-women telecentres established that barred the entrance of males and outside-the-community-individuals

Despite the project's gender sensitive intervention, challenges remain. The biggest challenge is of the deeply rooted local culture's impact on women's lives, and of the



sustainability of the all-women telecentres once UNDP 's handholding is over.

Santanu Sengupta spoke of Change Innovators Society's attempts to take telecentres to the disadvantaged communities. Santanu asserted that sustainability of telecentres is possible only when people of the community come up with modes and initiatives themselves.

### ***Open discussion: Telecentres for inclusion***

The open discussion round that ensued after the presentations reflected upon sustainability of all-women telecentres, telecentres as spheres of inclusion, and the future of telecentres in a fast-emerging market for mobile phones. It was argued that, at present, all-women telecentres couldn't be profitable and have to be subsidised. But this is a small step towards larger practices of inclusion. What could help the process is lobbying, attitudinal and perception changes.

It was reiterated that telecentres are rooted in a market-driven environment, where profit underplays inclusion. But for the poorest section of society, it is not mobile phones but telecentres that will stand and benefit them in the foreseeable future. Therefore, governments should intervene and help in providing subsidies to telecentres.

### ***Outcomes of the session***

What emerged out of the session was that there is an urgent need for telecentres to include women and the marginalised. This can happen only when more studies address the matter and bring out solutions to mend the gap. Telecentre programmes also need to conduct awareness and sensitisation campaigns on including the excluded in the community.

### **Conclusion: A potpourri of ideas, knowledge, information and experiences**

The three day Telecentre Stakeholders Forum saw intense debates and deliberations on issues of telecentre innovations, sustainability, content and services; inclusion of the disadvantaged; the status of the Government of India's CSC programme; the trajectory of the Indian telecentre movement as well as the telecentre movements in Asia and parts of Africa. Knowledge, information and experience sharing benefited the participants as they took back lessons to be learnt and applied.

*telecentre.org*, in the inaugural session, announced a telecentre.org academy Curriculum Commons Grant of USD 125,000 for improving the quality and standard of grassroots knowledge workers, commonly referred to as telecentre managers. D Purandeswari, Minister of State for Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, made the announcement during the inaugural address of the eINDIA 2008 conference. Basheerhamad Shadrach, Senior Programme Officer, *telecentre.org* was present at the event. Shadrach stated that the telecentre.org academy is an initiative to support the global telecentre movement, and its objective is to meet the growing capacity needs of grassroots telecentre managers around the world, whose number is estimated to touch one million by 2010. He added that the telecentre.org academy is in the process of developing a 'curriculum commons site' as an online repository and library of curriculum



and training material in order to encourage their use, re-use, translation and adaptation across the world. *telecentre.org* is in the process of establishing telecentre.org academies in 10 nations this year. The Curriculum Commons Grant will be offered to organisations interested in developing, packaging and licensing training content for the thousands of grassroots telecentre managers engaged in creating inclusive and informed communities in both developing and developed countries. Each such organisation will be given a grant of upto USD 5,000 for a content-creation programme. A total of 25 organisations will be chosen for the grants.

The Forum also saw effective outcomes as partnerships were forged between the various organisations. Business alliances were formed between Drishtee, India and GDCO, Sudan. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed by the two parties to engage in collaborative initiatives for new projects and to collaborate for training and content inputs for the Telecentre Academy. Also, MSSRF partnered with Drishtee to replicate the rural BPO model in the MSSRF telecentres. The Government of India agreed to have a meeting with the SCAs to discuss the challenges they face and how to mitigate them. Several questions were raised in these sessions, several insights provided.

The Government of India's CSC programme went through critical analysis, and there are possibilities of follow-up studies very soon. Specific attention was drawn to the need for training in capacity building. Particularly, the government and the civil society organisations have noted the need to train village level entrepreneurs in capacity building.

The Forum also brought forth discussions on several future telecentre innovations, where scopes in mobile banking facilities, matrimonial alliances and animation training were discussed. Also, there were suggestions that the telecentre academy should engage with standardisation of training modules for telecentre operators and of certificates along with a continuous learning. ITU has forged partnership opportunity with telecentre networks across the region to actively engage in its global telecentre maps initiative. Another highlight of the Forum was that Ahmed M M Eisa, Chairperson, GDCO chose it as a platform to launch the Sudan National Telecentre Academy website.



## Annexure – 1: List of Partners

### ***Gold Sponsor: Designmate India Pvt Ltd***

Designmate is among the pioneers in India in the development and production of 3D animation educational videos, along with other 3D related projects. Founded in 1988, Designmate provides educational software in the field of science and mathematics that helps schools, educational institutions worldwide to make learning more enjoyable using pictorial descriptions and interactive simulations.

Schools choose Designmate for its advanced technical capabilities, sophisticated and superior data and user scalability. With more than 20 years of experience and numerable achievements along with a reputation for innovation and leadership, Designmate is the ideal choice.

Designmate has over 150 skilled animators out of which 25 are highly qualified subject experts. Among the animators, 60% are physically challenged and get the opportunity to work equally. Among the many awards won by Designmate, some are mentioned below:

1. World Summit Award for Best e-Learning content 2007
2. Best employer Award 2007 Gujarat from Gujarat Education Minister
3. Best employer award 2006 from the president of India his Excellency Shri Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam

Another feather will be added to their cap on the 29<sup>th</sup> October 2008 when they receive the Worlddidac Award 2008 for best e-learning content.

#### *Contact details:*

Cap. K. J. S. Brar  
CEO  
401, Hi-Scan House  
Nr. Mithakhali Underbridge  
Navrangpura  
Amhedabad – 380009

### ***Connectivity and Services Partner: HughesNet***

"HughesNet™ Fusion", is a successful network of broadband centers that Hughes® has established, providing a range of broadband services including hi-speed internet access, interactive learning, e-learning programs and e-commerce applications. There are over 2,000 Outlets operating across 500+ cities/towns in India and more are under the wings.

Based on a successful business model and Support from its partners, "HughesNet™ Fusion" is one of the largest platforms offered to the organizations wanting to reach the untapped markets. Fusion is continuing to grow further to become a one-stop solution for the reach in Class B & C towns & the Rural India.

HughesNet™ Fusion, is a part of Hughes®, the world's leading provider of Managed Network Services, Broadband Satellite Network Services and Products with more than 1,000,000 systems installed worldwide. Hughes® pioneered the development of high-



speed satellite broadband Internet access services and IP-based networks, marketed globally under the HughesNet™ brand. Hughes® is known for its entrepreneurial creativity and innovation, and has many path breaking successes in avionics, laser technology, radar, aviation, spacecraft design, telecommunications and entertainment which have changed the fields of medicine, communications, meteorology and space exploration.

Contact details:

Ujjwal Singh  
Country Head Sales  
Hughes Communications India Ltd.  
Plot No. 1, Sector 18,  
Electronic City  
Gurgaon - 122015, India  
Tel. Dir. (+91-124) – 3072528/ 3072500  
Mobile: 9313117820  
Fax : (+91-124) - 2398840  
usingh@hughes.in  
[www.hughes.in](http://www.hughes.in)

**Telecentre Network Partner: Grameen Gyan Abhiyan**

The Grameen Gyaan Abhiyan is Rural Knowledge Movement in India which has been working with an aim to achieve ICT enabling of 6,37,000 villages of India has built a multi stake holder partnership with the different ICT4D models present in India. They include the community based models, the entrepreneurial models, government models, the business models or the corporate models, the cooperative models, and the combinations of all these models in pairs or more.

Contact details:

N Ganga Vidya  
Grameen Gyan Abhiyan Coordinator  
C/o M.S.Swaminathan Research Foundation  
3<sup>rd</sup> Cross Street Taramani Institutional Area  
Taramani Chennai -600113  
Telephone: 044-22542791,  
Website: [www.mission2007.in](http://www.mission2007.in)  
e-mail: [gga@mssrf.res.in](mailto:gga@mssrf.res.in)

**Grassroots Partners**

**1. Drishtee**

Drishtee is a for-profit organization incorporated in the year 2000 to create and implement a sustainable, scalable platform of entrepreneurship for enabling the development of rural economy and society with the use of ICT. Through a tiered franchise and partnership model, Drishtee facilitates the establishment of ICT nodes enabling access to information as well as local services to the rural community at nominal value. The business model is driven by the village entrepreneur, who owns the village node to operate a self-sustaining, profitable kiosk.



Contact details:

Satyan Mishra  
Managing Director  
Ground Floor  
A-11, Sector 2  
Noida  
Uttar Pradesh - 201301  
Phone: +91-120-4661000  
Fax: +91-120-4661002  
e-mail: [Satyan@drishtee.com](mailto:Satyan@drishtee.com)  
Website: [www.drishtee.com](http://www.drishtee.com)

**2. Nasscom Foundation**

NASSCOM Foundation is a trust registered under the Indian Trust Act 1883 representing Indian software industry's commitment to leverage IT for empowering and serving the under served. It has the unique opportunity of leading the ICT for development sector from a national perspective along with facilitating and strengthening the CSR space to a wider understanding of contribution to development and towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals. The Foundation's main objectives are to promote and establish the "domestic development contribution" of the IT industry, harness ICT benefits to reach underprivileged communities for improving quality of life, expand partnerships in order to improve the knowledge base that informs policy and programme formulation and influences public discourse in civil society.

Contact details:

Rufina Fernandes  
Chief Executive Officer  
NASSCOM Foundation  
301 & 302, Delhi Blue Apartments,  
Safdarjung Enclave,  
Near Safdarjung Hospital,  
Ring Road,  
New Delhi – 110029  
India  
Phone : +91 11 46019602  
Website: [www.nasscomfoundation.org](http://www.nasscomfoundation.org)  
e-mail [info@nasscomfoundation.org](mailto:info@nasscomfoundation.org)

**International Supporting Partners**

**1. D.NET**

D.Net (Development Research Network) is a non-profit organization, which envisages to use information and communication technology (ICT) for economic development of Bangladesh. Incepted in January 2001, D.Net obtained legal status under the Societies Act 1860 with the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies, Bangladesh. Working with interfaces of all development use, D.Net thrives to build up itself as a multi-disciplinary organization.

Contact details:



Dr Ananya Raihan  
Executive Director  
D.Net  
6/4 Humayun Road, Block B  
Mohammadpur  
Dhaka-1207  
Bangladesh  
Telephone: +880-2-8124976  
Fax: +880-2-8142021  
Website: [www.dnet-bangladeh.org](http://www.dnet-bangladeh.org)  
e-mail: [ananya@raihan.net](mailto:ananya@raihan.net)

## **2. FIT Nepal**

Forum for Information Technology Nepal (FIT Nepal) is a non-governmental organization established in 2001 with a slogan "IT For All" by a group of IT enthusiasts. FIT Nepal strives to take the benefits of ICT to the rural and marginalized communities of Nepal. The effort has made significant strides, especially in establishing community telecenters and capacity building of the community.

*Contact details:*

Allen Bailochan Tuladhar  
Forum For Information Technology Nepal (FIT Nepal)  
Unlimited Building, Khichapokhari,  
Opp. Pashupati Plaza, PO Box 956  
Kathmandu, Nepal  
TelePhone: +977-1-2030399  
Website: [www.fitnepal.org.np](http://www.fitnepal.org.np)  
e-mail: [allen@unlimt.com](mailto:allen@unlimt.com)

## **3. fusion**

Fusion is the ICT4D umbrella movement of Sarvodaya the largest 50 year old national NGO in Sri Lanka, serving over 15,000 villages. Fusion's mission is the 'e-Empowerment of poor communities'. Programs are delivered through telecentres, Village Information Centres (VIC) and other cross cutting community-development programs targeting children, youth, women and elders.

*Contact details:*

Dr Harsha Liyanage  
Sarvodaya-Fusion  
726, 3rd floor, Kotte Road  
Etul Kotte, Kotte  
Sri Lanka  
TelePhone: (+94)-11 2867590  
Website: [www.fusion.lk](http://www.fusion.lk)  
e-mail: [smilingharsha@gmail.com](mailto:smilingharsha@gmail.com)



#### **4. UgaBYTES**

UgaBYTES Initiative is a not-for profit telecentre support network, established since 2000. It facilitates telecentres to increase their capacity by sharing knowledge and e-discussions to create an impact to the grassroots development. The organization is also involved in building capacities of telecentre practitioners in management and technical aspects and carries out lobby and advocacy roles.

*Contact details:*

Sulah Ndaula  
Executive Director  
UgaBYTES Initiative  
Tel: +256414370163Plot 2218 Kabalagala, Ggaba Road (opp. shell)  
2nd Floor Kangave House  
P.O. Box 6081 Kampala  
Website: [www.ugabytes.org](http://www.ugabytes.org)  
e-mail: [ndaulasula@ugabytes.org](mailto:ndaulasula@ugabytes.org)

#### **5. READ India**

READ was launched in 1991 as the non-profit arm of Myths and Mountains, a cultural travel company founded by Dr. Neubauer in the 1980s. The organization – headquartered in Incline Village, Nevada – is registered as a 501(c)(3) corporation in the US and as an International Non-Government Organization (INGO) in Nepal. In the spring of 2007, READ opened its first country affiliate office in India, a country with a widely diverse population, babble of many languages, and contrasting environments - snow studded Himalayas to dry deserts, to tropical beaches and mysterious jungles.

*Contact details:*

READ India  
Geeta Malhotra  
Country Director  
D-46, Shubham Enclave  
Paschim Vihar  
New Delhi-II0063  
[Website: www.readglobal.org/india.asp](http://www.readglobal.org/india.asp)

#### **6. OneROOF**

OneRoof, Inc. (<http://www.oneroof.com>) is a US based private company having subsidiaries in Chennai, India and Veracruz & Yucatan, Mexico. It offers a distinctive model for doing business in under-served rural communities of the developing world. The organization's mission is guided by the simple phrase 'do well and do good'. OneRoof builds upon the vision, experience, networks, and local credibility of its predecessor organisation, World Corps, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) founded in 1998 at USA. As of now, there are less number of telecentres operational in India and Mexico.

*Contact details:*

Miguel Raimilla



Vice President  
OneRoof Inc.  
One Maritime Plaza, Suite 1100  
San Francisco, CA 94111  
United States  
Telephone: 415 - 391 0556  
Fax: 415 - 391 0559  
Website: [www.oneroof.com](http://www.oneroof.com)  
e-mail: [miguel@oneroof.com](mailto:miguel@oneroof.com)

### **7. Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA), Sri Lanka**

The Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA) of Sri Lanka is the single apex body involved in ICT policy and direction for the nation. Wholly owned by the Government of Sri Lanka, ICTA is the implementing organization of the e-Sri Lanka Initiative. Major donors including the World Bank will be funding a number of the Agency's initiatives.

#### *Contact details:*

Reshan Dewapura  
Chief Executive Officer  
The Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA)  
160/24, Kirimandala Mawatha,  
Colombo 5,  
Sri Lanka  
Telephone: +94-11-236 9100  
Fax: +94-11-236 9091  
Website: [www.icta.lk](http://www.icta.lk)  
E-mail: [info@icta.lk](mailto:info@icta.lk)

### **8. Nenasala, Sri Lanka**

The Nenasala Project is one of the projects implemented under the e-Sri Lanka Initiative. Formally known as the "Vishva Gnana Kendra Project (Nenasala)", ICTA has incorporated it under the "Nenasala" label to introduce several models of the telecentres or knowledge centres to be established in all parts of Sri Lanka to spread ICT services to the rural and semi-urban population.

#### *Contact details:*

Gavashkar Subramanian  
Nenasala  
160/24, Kirimandala Mawatha,  
Colombo 5,  
Sri Lanka  
Telephone: +94-11-236 9100  
Fax: +94-11-236 9091  
Website: [www.nanasala.lk](http://www.nanasala.lk)  
E-mail: [gavash@icta.lk](mailto:gavash@icta.lk)



### Annexure – 2: List of TSF Participants

No	Name	Contact details	e-mail	Country
1	Hasan Mahfuz Chowdhury	Head-eHut Telecentres	<a href="mailto:hasan.chowdhury@bracmail.net">hasan.chowdhury@bracmail.net</a>	Bangladesh
2	Mahmud Hasan	Chief Operating Officer, BTN	<a href="mailto:mahmud@d.net.org.bd">mahmud@d.net.org.bd</a>	Bangladesh
3	Dr Kamolrat Intarat	Thaitelecentre.org,	<a href="mailto:kamolratchim@hotmail.com">kamolratchim@hotmail.com</a>	Thailand
4	Kessara Amornvuthivorn	Kenan Institute Asia	<a href="mailto:kessaraa@kiasia.org">kessaraa@kiasia.org</a>	Thailand
5	Dr Angelo Juan Ramos	Chairperson, PhilCeCNet	<a href="mailto:ajoramos@gmail.com">ajoramos@gmail.com</a>	Philippines
6	Melinda Bandalaria	Univeirsity of Philippines Open University	<a href="mailto:mbandalaria@upou.edu.ph">mbandalaria@upou.edu.ph</a>	Philippines
7	Ganga Vidhya	Grameen Gyan Abhiyan	<a href="mailto:gangauidya@mssrf.res.in">gangauidya@mssrf.res.in</a>	India
8	S Srikanthan	Director, Kosalanda Rural Knowledge Centre	<a href="mailto:koslanda.rkc@gmail.com">koslanda.rkc@gmail.com</a>	Sri Lanka
9	Sudip Rajbhandari	Mission Swaabhimaan, FIT Nepal	<a href="mailto:sudip@unlimit.com">sudip@unlimit.com</a>	Nepal
10	Doan Thi Thu Hien	National Project Manager, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Vietnam	<a href="mailto:hiendt.vp@mard.gov.vn">hiendt.vp@mard.gov.vn</a>	Vietnam
11	Phan Huu Phong	Deputy Managing Director, VTF/MIC	<a href="mailto:phphong@mic.gov.vn">phphong@mic.gov.vn</a>	Vietnam
12	Nguyen Manh Thinh	Officer, Planning and Finance Department, MIC	<a href="mailto:nmthinh@mic.gov.vn">nmthinh@mic.gov.vn</a>	Vietnam
13	Nguyen Thi Dien Trang	Officer, International Cooperation Department, MIC	<a href="mailto:ndtrang@mic.gov.vn">ndtrang@mic.gov.vn</a>	Vietnam
14	Nguyen Hoai Thu	Directorate for IT Application Promotion (DIAP), MIC	<a href="mailto:nhthu@mic.gov.vn">nhthu@mic.gov.vn</a>	Vietnam
15	Puttachat Siributr	Head, TH Telecentre, Ministry of Information and Communication Technology, Thailand	<a href="mailto:puttachart@hotmail.com">puttachart@hotmail.com</a>	Thailand



**Annexure – 3: List of Speakers**

	<b>Authors profile</b>	<b>Contact details</b>
<b>Session - I: Tracking the Indian Telecentre Movement</b>		
Chair: Ashok Junjhunwala	Prof, IIT Madras	<a href="mailto:ashok@tenet.res.in">ashok@tenet.res.in</a>
Basheerhamad Shadrach	Sr Programme Officer, telecentre.org	<a href="mailto:bshadrach@idrc.org.in">bshadrach@idrc.org.in</a>
Ashish Sanyal	Sr Director, DIT, GOI	<a href="mailto:asanyal@mit.gov.in">asanyal@mit.gov.in</a>
D C Misra	Sr Technical Director, NIC, GOI	<a href="mailto:dcmisra@nic.in">dcmisra@nic.in</a>
<b>Session - II: Open Conclave of Service Centre Agencies, State IT Secretaries and State Designated Agencies</b>		
Chair: R Chandrashekar	Addl Secy, DIY, GOI	
S Abbasi	Sr Director, DIT, GOI	<a href="mailto:syedain_sabassi@mit.gov.in">syedain_sabassi@mit.gov.in</a> , <a href="mailto:abbasi7pr@yahoo.com">abbasi7pr@yahoo.com</a>
Nagendra Singhal	Asst Vice President, Zoom Developers	<a href="mailto:nagendra.singhal@zoomdevelopers.com">nagendra.singhal@zoomdevelopers.com</a>
Ravi Kumar	Ex. Director, Alternative for India Development, Jharkhand	<a href="mailto:ravi.kumar@dtinternet.com">ravi.kumar@dtinternet.com</a>
<b>Session - III: Content, Services and Connectivity: Making the Connection</b>		
Chair: Rufina Fernandes	CEO, NASSCOM Foundation	<a href="mailto:rufina@nasscomfoundation.org">rufina@nasscomfoundation.org</a>
Col. K J Singh	Director, Designmate India	
Sandra Pandi	Project officer, ITU, Geneva	<a href="mailto:sandra.pandi@itu.int">sandra.pandi@itu.int</a>
Shahid Akbar	CEO, Bangladesh Institute of ICT in Development	<a href="mailto:shahid_ictdpb@yahoo.com">shahid_ictdpb@yahoo.com</a>
Vaibhav Magow	Director, Mktng, Hughes Net, India	<a href="mailto:vrmagow@hughes.in">vrmagow@hughes.in</a>
Vijayalakshmi	Project Manager, India Development Gateway (InDG)	<a href="mailto:vijayab@cdac.in">vijayab@cdac.in</a>
<b>Session - IV: Telecentre Networks: Exploring the market of opportunities</b>		



Facilitator: Vignesh Sornamohan	Community Content Facilitator - Asia, telecentre.org, Based at: CSDMS, India	<a href="mailto:vignesh@csdms.in">vignesh@csdms.in</a>
Mahmud Hasan	COO, Bangladesh Telecentre Network	<a href="mailto:mahmud@dnet.org.bd">mahmud@dnet.org.bd</a>
Dr Kamolrat Intaratat	Assoc Prof, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open Univ., Bangkok	<a href="mailto:kamolratchim@hotmail.com">kamolratchim@hotmail.com</a>
Sudip Rajbhandari	FIT, Nepal	<a href="mailto:sudip@unlimit.com">sudip@unlimit.com</a>
Angelo	Chairperson, PhilCeCNet	<a href="mailto:ajoramos@gmail.com">ajoramos@gmail.com</a>
Ganga Vidya	Coordinator, Grameen Gyan Abhiyan	<a href="mailto:ganga.vidya@mssrf.in">ganga.vidya@mssrf.in</a>
Phan Huu Phong	Depy Director, Vietnam Telecommunication Funds, MIC	<a href="mailto:phphong@mic.gov.vn">phphong@mic.gov.vn</a> , <a href="mailto:phphong@vtf.gov.vn">phphong@vtf.gov.vn</a>
Karim Kasim	Egypt ICT Trust Fund	<a href="mailto:karimkasim@gmail.com">karimkasim@gmail.com</a>
Ahmed Eisa	Chairman, GDCO	<a href="mailto:ahmed22digital@gmail.com">ahmed22digital@gmail.com</a>
<b>Session - V: Sustainability of telecentres: A systemic approach</b>		
Chair: Karishma Kiri	Director, Microsoft Corporation, USA	<a href="mailto:kkiri@microsoft.com">kkiri@microsoft.com</a>
Eric Spector	Executive Vice President, OneRoof, USA	<a href="mailto:eric@oneroof.com">eric@oneroof.com</a>
Satyan Mishra	MD, Drishtee	<a href="mailto:satyan@drishtee.com">satyan@drishtee.com</a>
Capt KJS Brar	CEO, Designmate India	<a href="mailto:brar@designmate.com">brar@designmate.com</a>
Wilfred Varghese	Manager, It, SIFFS	<a href="mailto:wilfredvarghese@gmail.com">wilfredvarghese@gmail.com</a>
Sultanur Reza	Head, Community Infomations Centres, Grameen Phone, Bangladesh	<a href="mailto:sreza@grameenphone.com">sreza@grameenphone.com</a>
Ujjwal Singh	country head, sales, Hughes	<a href="mailto:usingh@hughes.in">usingh@hughes.in</a>
Karim Kasim	Egypt ICT Trust Fund	<a href="mailto:karimkasim@gmail.com">karimkasim@gmail.com</a>
<b>Session - VI: Telecentre Academy: The way forward</b>		
Chair: Prof Rajasekharan Pillai	VC, IGNOU	<a href="mailto:vc@ignou.ac.in">vc@ignou.ac.in</a> , <a href="mailto:rajasekharpillai@gmail.com">rajasekharpillai@gmail.com</a>
Dr Basheerhamad Shadrach	Sr Programme Officer, telecentre.org	<a href="mailto:bshadrach@telecentre.org">bshadrach@telecentre.org</a>
Karishma Kiri	Director, Microsoft Corporation, USA	<a href="mailto:kkiri@microsoft.com">kkiri@microsoft.com</a>



Melinda dP. Bandalaria	Assoc Prof and Registrar, Univ of Philippines Open Univ	<a href="mailto:mbandalaria@upou.edu.ph">mbandalaria@upou.edu.ph</a>
Ahmed M M Eisa	Chairman, GDCO	<a href="mailto:ahmed22digital@gmail.com">ahmed22digital@gmail.com</a>
N Ganga Vidhya	Coordinator, GGA	<a href="mailto:ganga.vidya@mssrf.">ganga.vidya@mssrf.</a>
<b>Session - VII: Innovative telecentre initiatives</b>		
Chair: George Varughese	President , Development Alternatives	<a href="mailto:gcvarughese@devalt.org">gcvarughese@devalt.org</a>
Praveen Manikpuri	Project Manager – Enterprise Development, Tarahaat	<a href="mailto:pmanikpuri@tarahaat.com">pmanikpuri@tarahaat.com</a>
Pichandi Krishnamoorthy	Team Leader, Centre for Development Communication, DHAN Foundation	<a href="mailto:pkrishnamurthi@gmail.com">pkrishnamurthi@gmail.com</a>
Geeta Malhotra	Country Director, READ India	<a href="mailto:geeta.malhotra16@gmail.com">geeta.malhotra16@gmail.com</a>
Joseph Thomas	Byyraju Foundation, Hyderabad	
Rajesh Singh	Datamation Foundation Trust, New Delhi	<a href="mailto:csharma@qiasdl01.vsnl.net.in">csharma@qiasdl01.vsnl.net.in</a>
<b>Session - VIII: Telecentres as public spaces</b>		
Chair: T R Raghunathan	Joint Secretary, Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India	
Ratna M Sudarshan	Director, Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST)	<a href="mailto:ratna@isst-india.org">ratna@isst-india.org</a>
Ahmed M M Eisa	Chairman, GDCO	<a href="mailto:ahmed22digital@gmail.com">ahmed22digital@gmail.com</a>
Dalia El-Hazek	Project Coordinator, ICT4D Portfolio, UNDP Egypt	<a href="mailto:dalia.elhazek@undp.org">dalia.elhazek@undp.org</a>
Melinda dP Bandalaria	Assoc Prof and Registrar, Univ of Philippines Open Univ	<a href="mailto:mbandalaria@upou.edu.ph">mbandalaria@upou.edu.ph</a>
Santanu Sengupta	Secy, Change Innovators Society, West Bengal	<a href="mailto:santanusgster@gmail.com">santanusgster@gmail.com</a>



**Annexure – IV: List of Participants**

No	Name	Designation	Address	e-mail
1.	Sudip Rajbhandari	Programme Coordinator, Mission Swaabhimaan, FIT, Nepal	Kathmandu, Nepal	sudip@unlimit.com
2.	Praveen Manikpuri	Project Manager, TARAhaat	TARAhaat 111/9-2, Kishangarh, New Delhi - 70	pmanikpuri@taraahaat.com
3.	S Sri Kanthan	Director, Nanasala Koslanda	103, VC Road, Kosland, Sri Lanka	koslanda.rkc@gmail.com
4.	A Ratnayake	IT Consultant, Nanasala Koslanda	103, VC Road, Kosland, Sri Lanka	bandarawela.rkc@gmail.com
5.	Mohemmed K Hassan	Sudan Academy of Sciences	Khartoum, Sudan	
6.	Rajat Joshi	IT Trainee, Railtel		rajatjoshi@aol.in
7.	Deepika Gupta	Manager, Programme Development, YES Fund	28 Institutional Area, Lodhi Road, New Delhi - 3	deepika@yesweb.org
8.	Mamta Malik	Manager, YES Fund	28 Institutional Area, Lodhi Road, New Delhi - 3	mamta@yesweb.org
9.	Swaraj Mitra	Student	Jalgaon	swarajmit@gmail.com
10.	Gurdeep Singh	Student, IIT Roorkee	IIT Roorkee	gurdeepgsg@gmail.com
11.	Sandra Pandi	Project Officer, ICT Applications and Cybersecurity Division, ITU, Geneva	ITU, Geneva	Sandra.pandi@itu.int
12.	F Newman	Secretary, Mountain Forum	Kathmandu, Nepal	fnewman@mtforum.org



13.	Pulkit Jain	Lakshya, Patiala, India		pulkit.iitr@gmail.com
14.	Shehzaad Shaw	Consultant, Katalyst	Dhaka, Bangladesh	shehzaad.bd@yahoo.com
15.	Emma Collingbourne	Volunteer, READ India	Delhi	emmacollingbourne@hotmail.com
16.	Smita Rai	Programme Manager, READ India	Delhi	smita@read-india.org
17.	Nahid Jubair	Field Coordinator, READ India	Delhi	nahid@read-india.org
18.	Phan Huu Phong	Deputy Director General, Ministry of Information and Communications, Vietnam Public Utility Telecommunication Service Fund	MIC, Vietnam	phphong@mic.gov.vn
19.	Nguyen Thi Dien Trang	Officer, International Cooperation Department, MIC, Vietnam		ndtrang@mic.gov.vn
20.	Nguyen Hoai Thu	Directorate for IT Application Promotion (DIAP), MIC, Vietnam		nhthu@mic.gov.vn
21.	Nguyen Manh Thinh	Officer, Planning and Finance Department, MIC, Vietnam		nmthinh@mic.gov.vn
22.	Doan Thi Thu Hien	National Project Manager, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Vietnam		hiendt.vp@mar.d.gov.vn



23.	John Bosco Lordusamy	Assistant Professor, IIT Madras	Dept. of HSS, IIT Madras, Chennai-6000036	jbl.hss@gmail.com
24.	A Flox	UP Open University, Philippines	Los Banos, Philippines	aflox@upou.net
25.	Prabhat Kumar Thakur	Student, IIT Roorkee	IIT Roorkee	prabhat.thkr@gmail.com
26.	Ahmed M M Eisa	Chairman, GDCO, Sudan	Sudan	ahmed22digital@gmail.com
27.	Amit	Programme Manager, Microsoft		amit_gurung@hotmail.com
28.	Deepak M	Programme Manager, Microsoft		deepakm1402@hotmail.com
29.	Mohammed	SSIT		sudanhost@gmail.com
30.	Ayman Taha	SSIT		ayman12436059@yahoo.com
31.	Mohammed Khida	SAS		eng_mohammedkhida@hotmail.com
32.	El Bashier Sahal	GDCO, Sudan		yasahal@hotmail.com
33.	Dalia El Hazek	Programme Coordinator, UNDP, Egypt		dalia.elhazek@undp.org
34.	Nazul	ITTIO, Sudan		inttio@gmail.com
35.	Ganga Vidya	Coordinator, GGA	Chennai, India	gangavidya@msr.res.in
36.	Melinda Bandalaria	Associate Professor, UP Open University, Philippines	Philippines	mbandalaria@upou.edu.ph
37.	Wilfred Varghese	IT Manager, SIFFS	Thiruvananthapuram, India	wilfredvarghese@gmail.com
38.	Akram Moh.	SOFIT, Sudan		akram1970@gmail.com
39.	Salu Cherian	Sr Manager, Community Healthcare,	Bangalore, India	saluc@healthhiway.com



		Apollo HealthHiway		
40.	Jyotsna Dikshit	Deputy Director, IGNOU	New Delhi, India	jdkshit@ignou.ac.in
41.	Moumita Das	Assistant Director, IGNOU	New Delhi, India	moumitadas@ignou.ac.in
42.	Puttachart Siributr	Project Manager, MICT, Thailand	Bangkok, Thailand	puttachart@hotmail.com
43.	Kessara Amornvuthivorn	Manager, Kenan Institute Asia	Bangkok, Thailand	kessaraa@kiasia.org
44.	Dr Kamolrat Intarat	Thaitelecentre.org	Thailand	kamolratchim@hotmail.com
45.	Kongtan Mitdamrong	MICT, Thailand	Thailand	sakol_m@hotmail.com
46.	Basheerhamad Shadrach	Sr Programme Officer, Telecentre.org, IDRC	New Delhi, India	bshadrach@idrc.org.in
47.	Dr Angelo Juan Ramos	Chairperson, PhilCeCNet	Philippines	ajoramos@gmail.com
48.	Miguel Raimilla	OneRoof Inc., USA	USA	miguel@oneroof.com
49.	Ankur Seth	Product Quality Specialist, Adobe	India	aseth@adobe
50.	Vijay Jesudassan	AGM, NFCL/IKISAN	Hyderabad, India	vijay@ikisan.com
51.	G Bora	Executive, teleservices, Rural Development Initiatives, HIHT	SR Nagar, HIHT, Dehradun	hihtrdi@gmail.com
52.	Shahid Uddin Akbar	CEO, BIID	Dhaka, Bangladesh	Shahid.akbar@biid.org.bd
53.	A Jothi	IT Manager, OneRoof Services Ltd.	Chennai, India	jothi@oneroof.com
54.	P Praveen Kumar	MD, OneRoof Services Ltd.	Chennai, India	praveen@oneroof.com
55.	Mahbub	MD, TIBL	Bangladesh	mahbub@wintil



				bd.com
56.	Michael Riggs	Information Management Specialist, FAO/UN	Bangkok, Thailand	
57.	AV Dubey	TA, IARI	New Delhi, India	avdubey@iari.res.in
58.	S K Rath	Director, HR, Power Transmission Corporation of Uttarakhand Limited (PTCUL)	Dehradun, India	santanu.k.rath@gmail.com
59.	Manish Dalmia	Almighty JCHSERU	810/95, Nehru Place, India	dalmiagroup@vsnl.com
60.	Tushar Abraham	Programme Manager, South Asia, UNDP IOSN	C-DAC Chennai, India	tusharm@cdac.in
70.	Deepa A	CEO, OneRoof Services Pvt Ltd	24, I Street, Somasundaram Ave, Sakthi Nagar, Porur, Chennai-116	deepa@oneroof.com
71.	Dwight Wilson	CEO, OneRoof Inc.	One Maritme Plaza # 1100 SF, CA 94110 USA	dwight@oneroof.com
72.	Sriram N	TNAU		sriram.na@gmail.com
73.	Kaisla	Manager BD, IL&FS		kaislakans11@yahoo.co.in
74.	Siddhartha Shankar	Drishtee	A-11, Sec-2, Noida, India	Siddhartha.s@drishtee.com
75.	Col KJ Kang	Director, Designmate	Ahmedabad, India	kang@designmate.com
76.	Reema Singh	Programme Assistant, IDRC	208, Jor Bagh, New Delhi, India	rsingh@idrc.org.in
77.	Satish Nanla	Intel	Bangalore, India	Satish.nanla@intel.com
78.	Rajagopal	Intel	Bangalore, India	
79.	Dr Rajeev Sharma	Project	6, USO House,	atalsharma@ya



		Coordinator, Foundation for MSME Clusters	Sp. Institutional Area, New Delhi-67	hoo.com
80.	Ranjan Singh	Project Coordinator, Foundation for MSME Clusters	6, USO House, Sp. Institutional Area, New Delhi-67	sathanranjan@gm ail.com
81.	Nitin Gachhayat	Co-founder, Drishtee	A-11, Sec-2, Noida, India	nitin@drishtee.c om
82.	Anant	Mgr-BD, Telibsahma	BSK III Stage Bangalore	anantkumar1@ gmail.com
83.	Navneet	Manager, Rural Strategy, ICICI Prudential	Eros Tower, Nehru Place, New Delhi	navneet.gambhi r@gmail.com
84.	Sultanur Reza	Head of GPCIC, Grameenphone , Bangladesh	Bangladesh	sreza@grameen phone.com
85.	Parminder Singh	Director, eGovServices	New Delhi	parminder@ego vservices.org
86.	Girdhari Bora	Executive, Teleservices, RDI, HIHT	HIHT, Dehradun	Girdhari.bora@ gmail.com
87.	J Suresh	Area Manager, OneRoof, Chennai	Chennai	jsuresh@oneroo f.com
88.	VR Periyannam	Area Manager, OneRoof, Chennai	Chennai	periyannam@one roof.com
89.	Karim Kasim	Project Manager, UNDP Egypt	Cairo, Egypt	<a href="mailto:karimkasim@gmail.com">karimkasim@g mail.com</a>
90.	Remizius Rem	Win Inc.	3/15B Iqbal Road, MO.Pur, Dhaka 1207, Bangladesh	remizius@gmail .com
91.	Sajan Venniyoor	Coordinator, New Delhi, Community Radio Forum	M-34, Lajpat Nagar II, New Delhi, India	venniyoor@gma il.com
92.	Hasan Mahfuz Chowdhury	AGM, BRACNET	Dhaka, Bangladesh	hasan.chowdhu ry@bracmail.ne t
93.	Jasjit Singh	Team	E-25, Hauz	jasjit@cdac.in



		Coordinator, C-DAC	Khas, New Delhi, India	
94.	Santanu Sengupta	Change Innovators, Kolkata	Kolkata, West Bengal	santanusengupta@gmail.com
95.	Md. Aminur Rehman	Consultant, WIN Incorporate	Dhaka, Bangladesh	aminur@ccanvas.net
96.	Md Ahasan Khan	Consultant, WIN Incorporate	Dhaka, Bangladesh	ahasan74@yahoo.com
97.	Kanchana Ravichandran	Business Development Executive, OneRoof	Chennai, India	kanchana@onerooft.com
98.	Satish Nagaraj	Coordinator, OneWorld South Asia	New Delhi, India	Satish.n@oneworld.net
99.	PK Arya	JTA, DSIR, M/O S&T	Technology Bhavan, New Mehrauli Road, New Delhi, India	pk.arya@nic.in
100.	Aruna	NASSCOM Foundation	New Delhi	aruna@nasscomfoundation.org
101.	Dr HK Misra	Professor, IRMA	Anand, Gujarat	hkmishra@irma.ac.in
102.	Gitanjali Sah	Research Associate, UN Solution Exchange, UNESCO, New Delhi	UNESCO, New Delhi	g.sah@unesco.org
103.	Rajen Varada	Research Person, UN Solution Exchange, UNESCO, New Delhi	UNESCO, New Delhi	r.varada@unesco.org
104.	Kemo Lollen	Director (IT), Govt of Arunachal Pradesh	Vivek Vihar, Itanagar	klollen@yahoo.co.in
105.	CD Mungyak	Deptt of iT, Govt of	Vivek Vihar, Itanagar	cdmungyak@gmail.com



		Arunachal Pradesh		
106.	Md Arafat Hossain	Business Consultant, Katalyst	Dhaka, Bangladesh	arafat.hossain@swisscontact-bd.org
107.	Ravi Kumar	Director, Alternative India Development (AID)	Chennai, India	ravi.kumar@blinternet.com
108.	Nagendra Singhal	Assistant Vice President, Zoom Developers	Safdarjung Enclave, New Delhi	nagendrasinghal@gmail.com
109.	Mr Barnari Mawlong	Deputy Secretary, Information Technology Deptt., Govt. of Meghalaya	Ground Floor, NIC building, Secretariat Hill, Shillong, Meghalaya, India	barnari@yahoo.co.uk
110.	MVR Murthy	Faculty, C-DAC	Bangalore, India	
111.	Mizaji Lal	Scientist 'E', DIAT	Pune, India	mizaji@yahoo.com
112.	Rajendra M	Sr Consultant, DIT, Govt. of India	CGO Complex, New Delhi, India	rm_swm@yahoo.com
113.	Mahmud Hasan	COO, BTN	Dhaka, Bangladesh	mahmud@mission2011.net.bd
114.	Ankur Gupta	SE, Zoom Developers	Safdarjung Enclave, India	ankur@zoomdevelopers.com
115.	B Vijayalakshmi	Project Manager, C-DAC	Hyderabad, India	vijayab@cdac.in
116.	Shashi Bharat	Alternative India Development	Jharkhand, India	India.action@yahoo.co.uk
117.	Amit Dasgupta	GM, IBM	Bangalore, India	adasgupta@in.ibm.com
118.	David Fosberg	Manager, Intel	Singapore	david.fosberg@intel.com
119.	Ashok Jhunjunwala	Professor, IIT Madras	Chennai, India	ashok@tenet.res.in
120.	Mukesh Hajela	CEO, NICT	Indore, India	michthoin@yahoo.com



121.	DVSP Srivastav	IGNOU, New Delhi	India	
122.	DC Misra	Sr Technical Director, NIC	New Delhi, India	dcmisra@nic.in
123.	S Sengupta	Scientist 'E', NIC	CGO Complex, Lodhi Road, New Delhi, India	ssengupta@nic.in



### **Annexure V: Feedback from the Participants**

Vignesh,

Thank you for setting this up. I had a great time and appreciated the kind invitation and support you / Juanita gave me throughout the event.

Karishma

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Karishma Kiri  
Director  
Emerging Market Strategies and Incubations  
Microsoft Corporation  
U.S.A

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Congrats Vignesh,

Back in action..

Morning Sudan Team was here for Panipat visit and they were impressed by your effort and were telling that this will soon become an international event. Also Ahmed will recommend more people for next year.

Best

Nitin

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Nitin Gachchayat  
Co-Founder  
Drishtee, India

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Congrats to the CSDMS team for putting up such a great event. I enjoyed participating in it.

Regards

Rufina

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Rufina Fernandes  
CEO  
NASSCOM Foundation, India

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On behalf of all my fellow colleagues at OneRoof we also like to extend our congrats to all at the CSDMS.

For OneRoof was a great experience and we like to thank both Ravi and Vignesh for all their hard job and thanks for having us.



Best and have some rest!!!

Miguel

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Miguel Raimilla  
Vice President  
OneROOF, Inc.  
U.S.A.

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Dear all

I too need to thank Vignesh, Juanita and Ravi for their marvelous efforts in getting the TSF discuss the issues of critical importance. I was glad to launch the Curriculum Commons Fund at eIndia which emerges to be a good platform for ICT4D issues.

Despite my limited participation, I enjoyed interacting with colleagues as much as I could. I am sorry not to have spent more time with colleagues, especially with the Vietnamese delegation, Miguel and Iftikar due mainly to the stomach viral that kept me away from eIndia, especially the best moments there.

Cheers  
Shaddy

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Dr Basheerhamad Shadrach  
Sr Programme Officer  
telecentre.org

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Dear Vignesh,

Many thanks for your mail.

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on organizing the event at this big a scale!

An efficient management with sound organization.

Best of luck in all your endeavours.

Warm Regards  
Parminder Singh

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Parminder Singh  
Director  
eGOV Services, India

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Dear Vignesh and others,



It was a great opportunity to participate in e-india. Thanks to CSDMS for their marathon efforts.

Yes, Telecentre Forum was a was not only good platform for to learn more about the challenges but also provided insights for addressing the challenges being faced by the organisations who are working with grassroots and strengthening the telecentre movement.

Once again, thanks to Ravi, Jaya and the dedicated team of CSDMS.

Best regards  
Geeta Malhotra  
Country Director  
READ India  
Delhi

---

Vignesh, hi

Glad to know it all went well.

Unfortunately, I could not participate. Looking forward to the detailed report.

Best, Meddie

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Meddie Mayanja  
Sr Programme Officer  
telecentre.org  
Canada

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Dear Vignesh,

You are a very super -hero...I do appreciated very much in all your talent..... please let me know if I could do anything return to your goodness & hardwork....

And also ths to all your team too..... they are very intelligent and warm as a great host.....

e-India let me learn a lot especially the global telecentre academy.org....

Do ths so much and take care as ever,

kamolrat

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Dr Kamolrat Intaratat  
Founder  
Thaitelecentre.org

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Dear Vignesh Jee and Juanita Jee



Namaste

I reached home safely on Friday around 3 o'clock. And today I am at office now. Sorry that I couldn't mail you yesterday and day before.

I heartly thanks you both for your kind cooperation and hospitality. Also thanks for the invitation.

I believe that I learnt more from the event that will be more helpful for me to my job responsibility. I also believe that we can work together in different initiative regarding telecentre in Nepal.

Thank you  
Sudip Rajbhandari  
FIT Nepal, Kathmandu

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Dear All,

It is a great opportunity to attend the e-India 2008 from Bangladesh Telecentre Network. It is our pleasure to attend the event and present Bangladesh telecentre movement with global and Indian leaders. I am thankful to the organizers especial thanks will go to Vignesh, Joya and Juanita who make the telecentre forum a success. Thanks to Ravi for organizing such a beautiful and successful event which inspires us a lot. My special thanks to Shaddy whose support is enormous for attending the event as well as sharing experiences.

Best wishes,

Mahmud

-----  
Mahmud Hasan

COO  
Bangladesh Telecentre Network

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