National Workshop on

Community Information and Service Centres:
A New Village Institution for Governance and Democracy

May 30-31, 2011 – Bengaluru

AGENDA

The workshop is proposed as a space for open but intense and purposive discussions on the role of information and communication technology (ICT) enabled village information and service centres (hereafter referred to as telecentres) for improving rural governance and deepening democracy at the local level.

The purpose of the workshop is two fold:

(1) To visit the experience in this area, provide inputs and direction for policies and programmes of governments, as well as to conduct an appraisal of what we really want to achieve from telecentres, and from the governance and community development processes and structures being built around them

(2) To develop a group of interested actors – both within governments and from civil society – who feel that this has become an important area of governance and development work, and would like to collaborate on shaping perspectives and advocacy positions for positive changes in this area

The workshop will not be based on presentations, but on open, moderated discussions among a relatively small set of participants. However, the workshop will need to be be structured towards achieving its stated objectives. We plan to use the first day of the workshop to examine the experience with relatively large scale telecentre initiatives, and also revisit the basic objectives that are expected to be achieved through such initiatives. The second day will be on 'looking forward', and the participants will be expected to contribute to a discussion on how policy and programmes should be shaped in this area. If possible, we would like to come up with a set of guidelines or policy principles. It will also explore the possibility of setting up a network of interested actors for knowledge and perspective sharing as well as undertaking advocacy.

Below is a tentative agenda, which can we changed during the workshop to reflect the interests of the participants.

DAY 1: Monday, May 30

Registration: 0900 to 0930

Opening session: 0930 to 1015

The workshop organisers present the vision and objectives for the workshop, followed by a round of introductions by all participants, and short inputs to the vision, purpose and structure of the workshop.

Morning session: 1015 to 1300
(All sessions during the two days will have due tea/coffee breaks)

The experience till date of large scale village telecentres initiatives (with a special emphasis on the roles and expectations of the various involved actors)

While the session will mostly be an open moderated discussion, some participants directly involved with

large scale village telecentre initiatives, like the Common Service Centres (CSC) scheme, e-Gram, Akshaya, etc. will be asked to make short, relatively informal presentations. The presentations will however be focussed on the objectives of the workshop, and should flow into the overall discussions. To ensure this, the moderator may be required to direct leading questions to the presenters, to which they will be requested to respond.

Lunch: 1300 to 1400

Afternoon session: 1400 to 1700

What governance and community development objectives are sought to be achieved?

Within the open moderated discussion format, some participants may make informal presentations of their work that highlights how specific governance reform and community development objectives are being achieved through telecentre initiatives. Again, it will be less about going into the details and merits of each initiative and more about what we can learn about the different objectives being pursued through these initiatives, and how to do so.

DAY 2: Tuesday, May 31

Morning session: 0900 to 1300

How do we shape large scale village telecentre initiatives that meet our governance and community development requirements?

Open moderated discussion with no formal presentations

On the second day, participants will start thinking ahead to what needs to be done at policy and programmatic levels. It is likely that for such an exercise, the context and role of different actors will be a significant issue for discussion; like that of the village level telecentre worker, *panchayats*, key organisational bodies operationally driving the initiative (such as corporate bodies, NGOs, specialised government agencies), state level departments, other development related departments, etc.

(If found useful by participants, in the second half of the session, the workshop can break into 3-4 small groups around specific topics)

Lunch: 1300 to 1400

Afternoon session: 1400 to 1700

Moving forward: Overall principles and specific suggestions for various large-scale village telecentre initiatives

Open moderated discussion with no formal presentations

The participants will specifically look at existing or planned village telecentre initiatives, and offer inputs for shaping them in a manner that best serves our rural development objectives. The group may also attempt to capture the overall principles that must guide all such initiatives – such as laying out the role of *panchayats*, emphasising community involvement, etc.

(The option for using a part of the session for group-based work remains a possibility)