

Partnership Facility Final Report

Sri Lankan Telecentres Project

1.Strategic Theme (Goal)

Knowledge for Development – Rural Knowledge Systems

2.Project Manager

Philip Edge

3.Period of Project

January to December 2007

4.Budget Total

£15,374

5.Project Code

DR60001

1.Executive Summary

CABI has worked in 2007 with the Sri Lankan NGO Sarvodaya and the project staff in Sri Lanka to further develop the skill base and resources of the Telecentre Project. The project has been developing momentum under local Sarvodaya management and direction and CABI's role has become essentially one of providing advisory input. CABI has assisted with the provision of expert information tools (the Compendia), input to a proposal for new funding from SDC (not yet resolved), and more significantly in guidance based on international best practice for farmer-facing knowledge management techniques and M&E approaches. The project is well equipped to move on and grow and CABI's direct interventions from the UK will largely cease. However, the project officers in Sri Lanka will now have the opportunity to become knowledge-sharing partners in CABI's rural knowledge system (RKS) initiatives in South Asia – to the benefit of both sides.

2.Project Background

PF funding in 2005 and 2006 enabled CABI to work with Sri Lankan NGO Sarvodaya and other Sri Lankan stakeholders to initiate a pilot project which manages agricultural knowledge for the benefit of poor farmers. Partnerships have been formed, involving Sarvodaya, the University of Peradeniya, and the Department of Agriculture. CABI has used PF to catalyze this situation through stakeholder and capacity-strengthening workshops and through field visits and discussions with stakeholders, including farmers.

The pilot project now being implemented, funded by UNESCO and Sarvodaya, reaches 5 villages each in Anuradhapura and Nuwara-Eliya districts with an agrclinic serving each of the groups of villages. Each of these locations was already established

as a local regional centre for Sarvodaya's social networking within the communities. An Information Processing Unit (IPU) has also been created in Kandy which is coordinating the provision and management of agricultural information which cannot be accessed at village or agriclinic level.

The agriclinics, staffed by qualified agricultural scientists, are operating and establishing themselves in the social and communication networks of the farmers. First steps have been taken towards creating a farmer database which will include a number of parameters relating to agricultural activities, general and specific problems and indigenous or exotic solutions adopted, and finally the degree of success.

3. Project Purpose

It was agreed with the Sri Lankan partners that it is important to work with the project staff:

- to address key areas of learning which are already arising within the project,
- to analyse, with an objective eye, ways in which the project can be helped to progress more effectively
- ways in which the project can be monitored, both qualitatively and quantitatively, into the long term.

A work plan for 2007 was developed which addressed all of these factors. Further, it was understood that lessons being learned from this project can help to inform the development of other ICT4D readiness work being carried out by CABI in other parts of the South Asia region and China.

4. Brief description/outline of the Project activities, and/or methodologies

Work carried out by CABI in partnership with the Sri Lankan stakeholders in 2007 included:

- Inputs to a proposal invited by SDC developing a concept for the next stage of the project to include communication by mobile phone networks;
- The provision of CABI's Crop Protection Compendium for use as a reference resource in Agriclinics and the IPU;
- A fact-finding visit to the telecentres and associated village information centres to assess the nature of the interactions between project staff and the everyday issues of the farmers;
- A capacity-building workshop with project staff to focus on working methods, planning for sustainability, and measurement and evaluation;
- Participation of a key Sri Lankan partner in a CABI knowledge-sharing workshop on rural knowledge systems. This workshop was used to build a picture of CABI's overall experience and capabilities in the development of farmer-facing agricultural knowledge services;
- Assessment of a range of questionnaires used by CABI in farmer-facing projects in Africa and Vietnam with the aim of identifying a viable way ahead with this approach.

5.Statement of the project outputs/achievements

The project has further developed the capabilities of the Sri Lankan project staff to assess ways of working with the users of agriclincs, as well as enhancing the information resources at their disposal. M&E methodologies have been discussed, including Most Significant Change as well as questionnaire-based approaches to the capture of farmer-related data. The project staff are now in a position to develop an M&E system of their own choosing based on knowledge of international best practice.

6.Project Beneficiaries (immediate and longer term)

The poor rural farmers of Sri Lanka who have been starved of relevant, reliable information which can contribute to the improvement of their farming practices and hence their livelihoods.

7.Contributions to CABI Partnership Facility Goals and subsequent Programmes/Actions

The aim of the Telecentres project – to improve the livelihoods of the rural poor using CABI's agricultural knowledge management resources and skills – is at the core of CABI KFD strategy. Small amounts of PF funding have been used to leverage a larger project which has now attracted funding from UNESCO (and is attracting attention from elsewhere) to develop activity further. At each stage of growth of the project CABI has itself learned and is using this new knowledge to help to develop other regional initiatives in Pakistan, India and China.

8.Dissemination of Results

Sarvodaya in Sri Lanka, and through its national and international organization Fusion, is disseminating knowledge about the project and its' impact. This has, so far, been integrated into the report 'Noise at the last mile', published by Fusion Publications.

9.Follow Up

Follow up is planned to take place through the integration of knowledge of these Sri Lankan activities into a broader regional CABI initiative in Pakistan and India. Sri Lankan experience will both inform and learn further from these other initiatives in the region. This process was begun at the CABI workshop in 2007 referred to above. Direct interventions from CABI UK will largely cease.