



Project Introduction

Opening Ceremony : Connect A School Connect A Community

3 May 2011, Akuressa, Sri Lanka

Sameer Sharma, Senior Advisor

ITU Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific

H.E. Mr. Chandima Rasaputra, Minister of Education Southern Province,
Mr. H G Sirisena former Chief Minister of Southern Province
Mr. S Sahabandu, President Counsellor, Member of the Telecommunications
Regulatory Commission,
Dr. Eun-Ju Kim, Regional Director, ITU Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
Mr. Weerasekera, Director, Zonal Education,
Mr. Zoyza, Country Manager, Intel EM Ltd,
Mr. Kodithuwakku, Chairman, Kamburupitiya Kodithuwakku Development
Foundation,
Mr. Sunil, Chairman, SLS Development Foundation,
Students, Distinguish Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Telecom Regulatory Commission of Sri Lanka for jointly organizing the opening ceremony of the PC Distribution under the ITU project “Connect A School Connect A Community” .

I have an interesting and inspirational story to share with you regarding how this project started. Once in every few years, ITU organizes TELECOM Event selecting two youth participants from each country. In 2008 Telecom Asia youth forum young Maduramga from Sri Lanka participated and shared the knowledge gained with colleagues of the Students Association of Information Technology at his University. During my mission to Sri Lanka in 2008, I met this guy and encouraged to prepare a proposal for school connectivity and providing IT education for unconnected schools and community.

As you will hear details regarding ITU Connect A School Connect A Community from Dr. Kim shortly, we conceived a project under this ITU Flagship initiative for providing 25 computers, printers, UPS to 25 schools under Akuressa educational zone in Matara

district as pilot for implementing the project. Akuressa is a remote area, and it is situated about 140 kms from the capital city of Colombo. The livelihoods of the villagers are from agriculture, tea, rubber, coconut etc. Some of the schools are located in remote areas which do not even have electricity , let alone the communication facilities.

In paddy harvesting season children do not attend school for their education, because they have to work in the paddy field. So literacy rate in this area is below national average level, and the computer literacy rate is even lower.

I realized in my last visit to Sri Lanka, when visiting this area schools how these school students and even teachers are keen to learn Information Technology as a subject. While Colombo and other urban cities are enjoying HSPA high speed wireless broadband Internet access, people are not even familiar with the Internet and its power to change the quality of life of people in this area. Based on the above factors, and in consultation with the local educational officers, selection of schools was undertaken for providing this school connectivity in this region.

We followed the criterion of select schools which do not have computers and selected 25 schools in this region which have large number of students, and also do not have computers and have made a request to the Zonal Educational Office to obtain the ICT facilities for their schools. Another reason is based on the fact that these schools are located in remote areas in the Akuressa Education Zone. If there are large numbers of students in the school, the School development society is more powerful. So they have the ability to do the maintenance of the computer lab with difficulties. The selected schools are as follows. We also received support from the SLS Development Foundation and Kodithuwakku Development Foundation who provided some computer tables and chairs for the school connectivity.

Based on the scope of the project, ITU provided 25 computers, UPS and Printers and also the initial cost of internet connection for these schools (all 31 schools). We believe that the operational and maintenance cost including the cost of Internet access can be borne by the school development society as well as with the support from the telecom operators either under Corporate Social Responsibility or under Universal Service Obligation for which I have requested the TRCSL to be supportive of this initiative that benefits teachers, children and communities at large and empowering the society.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We believe that the Internet access through school connectivity extends the ICT access to larger communities focused on meeting community needs, particularly for rural and underserved populations especially developing e-agriculture/ fishermen for weather information / forecast that would greatly enhance productivity and livelihood. The communities should be encouraged after school hours to use the access for their benefit. Training for usage of computers and Internet would be very essential for teachers as well as children and communities at large. I am very pleased that ITU, TRCSL, Ministry of Education and Intel are organizing training for the rest of the week for the teachers and I am confident that like minded service oriented citizens would join the efforts of Maduranga to spread the training to remotest villages / schools in Sri Lanka.

Thank you.