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United Nations Literacy Decade

EFFECTIVE PRACTICE

Presented at the UNESCO sub-regional Conference *Addressing Literacy Challenges in South, South West and Central Asia: Building Partnerships and Promoting Innovative Approaches*. (29 - 30 November 2007, New Delhi, India)

Programme name: Telecentre-based Agri-clinics for Rural Farmer Empowerment in Sri Lanka

Implemented by: Sarvodaya

Basic facts

Country: Sri Lanka

Starting year: 2006

Outreach: 1140 farmers per year through Village Information Centers

Target Population: farming communities

Language of instruction: Sinhala

Operating in: Two Districts, Nuwara Eliya and Anaradhapura

Main Funding: UNESCO Bangkok

Contact: Ms Thanuja Rajakaruna - nethimeth@gmail.com

Brief Description

The Agri-clinics programme is an integrated farmer oriented ICT based information system, implemented by Sarvodaya with the financial and technical support of UNESCO Bangkok. Other project partners are the Faculty of Agriculture of the University of Peradeniya (Audio Visual Unit) and CABI.

Very popular local adult learning and communication centers, Agri-clinics, provide documentation and e-material related to agricultural problems of the area, such as pests and diseases, and prices and market information. They are staffed with competent personnel and represent thus a unique chance to enhance farmer literacy skills, learning situations and information access.

Since this is an ICT-based project, it was essential to improve the computer literacy of beneficiaries and use of ICT tools like computers and information CDs. This gives high value to rural marginalized farmers. When they find out that just by inserting a CD in the computer a world of information is at their hands distant, they are really fascinated. The knowledge and information provided to beneficiaries by the Agri-clinics are directly related to their livelihood and since the services are freely

available in a simple and applicable form that can be directly applied to the field situations, they have been very attractive to rural communities.

Rationale

Some of the factors causing low agricultural productivity in Sri Lanka include pests, diseases, inefficient farming technologies and lack of knowledge within farming communities on current situations, technologies, trends and market information. Low levels of knowledge and information flow make the situation worse and these problems are exacerbated by a relatively low level of literacy. Therefore, there is an urgent need to empower the agriculture sector of Sri Lanka with modern and up-to-date knowledge and technologies to make agriculture sector more profitable and attractive for young generations. The programme aims at empowering farmers and farmer families through raising their literacy levels to help them access and understand up-to-date agricultural information that they need.

Objectives

The overall aim of this project is to provide farmers with literacy skills and facilitate their access to knowledge through an adapted ICT infrastructure. By empowering farmers to seek knowledge and information on agricultural problems and find effective solutions, the programme increases productivity and encourages growth of local businesses and livelihoods.

Conceptual Model and Methodology

The concept of the programme is to establish a dedicated farmer-oriented IT-information system. The Clinics provide lots of documentation and e-material related to agricultural problems of the area, such as pests and diseases, and prices and market information. They are staffed with competent personnel. They are thus a unique chance to enhance farmer literacy skills, learning situations and information access.

The project divides into 3 stages. In the 1st stage, computer literacy of young farming communities including children of farmers is enhanced by given them a basic computer course that included how to handle a computer, MS Office, use of internet and email, production of simple format of audio video clips etc. 100 farmer family children who work as volunteers at Village Information Centres (VICs) from 10 villages in Anuradhapura and Nuwara Eliya districts were trained first. In the 2nd stage they were trained to teach what they have learnt to other members of VICs under supervision of the Agri-clinic field officer and Telecentre Coordinator. In the 3rd stage, farmers were trained to use available ICT tools to find the information they need to improve their productivity, through training programmes. Group discussions, workshops, computer/video based dialogs and field trials were conducted to transfer local and expert knowledge in top bottom and bottom up approaches. Leaflets, booklets CDs and e-books have been provided to farmers to use and improve their knowledge in agriculture for better productivity and to obtain information on farm management and sustainability of the agricultural practices.

Innovative features

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