

Rural farmers are accessing information through ICT

Intervention Brief- ICT



Background

Information and communication technology (ICT) has long been considered a possible panacea for alleviating poverty. Numerous models have been tried around the world to link rural entrepreneurs, including farmers, with information and a host of services via ICT.

Due to the limited reach of the services provided by the state-sponsored agriculture extension programs, the rural entrepreneurs including farmers lack access to timely and accurate information on markets, production processes, crop diseases and more. Moreover, the farmers also lack other basic services such as photography for land registration and permits, access to government regulations and relevant forms, access to the Internet and email services. While there are many other formal and informal mechanisms where information is exchanged, but the demand and need for reaching the farmers with relevant, timely and accurate information still remains to be improved in both scope and scale.



Target beneficiaries

The key beneficiaries are small and medium sized farmers, small rural enterprises and local people of different professions including students

Location

The GPCIC to be visited is located at Aral Bazar, Kapasia of Gazipur district. The center, named “Akash Mela” was established in 2006 and is owned by Mr. Mahbub Elahi Prince. The location of the CIC is in a hub of local economic activities. The centre has several computers and it provides a wide range of services including computer composing, digital studio services, and mobile top-ups etc.

Major activities

After successful accomplishment of the pilot project named “Establishing private sector led sustainable Tele-Centres in rural Bangladesh”, Katalyst started scaling up and replication of the pilot initiative with partners like Digital Equality Network (GHAT) and Broadlink (Alokito Gram). Katalyst developed a partnership with Grameenphone (GP) and Grameen Telecom (GTC) to support 502 tele-centres branded as ‘GP Community Information Centre (GPCIC)’ to help the rural farmers, entrepreneurs and general people to access relevant information.

There are 509 GPCICs all over the country and GP plans to roll out additional centres gradually. Katalyst is also working with Banglalink for their 7676 initiative to provide information and advisory services to rural farmers and SMEs through mobile phones. Unlike GPCICs which require the customer to physically visit the centres; the call centre of Banglalink has enabled the farmers to receive the necessary information by calling the

centre from anywhere in Bangladesh at any time of the day which appealed to larger segment of the beneficiaries.

Key achievements

The services offered by CICs are helping the farmers and rural entrepreneurs to do farming and businesses more efficiently and effectively. They now get critical and important information on farming techniques, diseases, right dosage of fertilizer, market prices etc. Besides farmers and businesses, general people get services like digital photography, composing, scanning, e-mail, video-conferencing, public examination results etc. which, as perceived by them, have made their lives easier. In many cases, these services also translate into businesses benefits for many rural citizens.



Way forward

Grameenphone is currently consolidating the centers for standardization and to have a better service experience of the end users. After the consolidation phase GP has planned to roll out more centres gradually. Also, new IT enabled services are being developed and made available in these CICs in response to the needs of rural farmers and entrepreneurs. Promotion of services and capacity building of centre operators are ongoing processes to reach more beneficiaries and make services better. GP-CICs are continuously innovating ways to serve the rural poor, and thus contributing significantly towards their development.

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