

e-SRI LANKA PROJECT

Using ICT to Build Capacity and Foster Social Integration

Background and Aims of the e-Sri Lanka Project

An island nation in South Asia, Sri Lanka has a literacy rate of over 90%, which is one of the highest in the region. However, the digital literacy of the country fell far behind, at less than 10% in 2004 (which was the last year such a survey was undertaken), according to its Department of Census and Statistics. Therefore, it was imperative for the Government of Sri Lanka to find a quick but affordable solution to introduce basic digital literacy skills to state employees as well as to its citizens.

In the context of this national objective, the Sri Lankan government also recognised the vital importance of developing these skills amongst teachers, as the education system acts as a medium for reaching wider society.

In November 2002, the Government of Sri Lanka launched 'e-Sri Lanka', a national development initiative, with the objective of using ICT to foster social integration, peace, economic growth, and poverty reduction. The principal development outcomes of 'e-Sri Lanka' are anticipated to be:

- More developed leadership and skills in ICT
- Job creation through ICT industry, ICT-enabled services, and enhanced competitiveness of user industries and services
- More effective, citizen-centred, and transparent government
- Empowerment of the rural poor, women, and youth through increased and affordable access to information and communication tools

The Information and Communication Technology Agency of Sri Lanka (ICTA), which became operational in July 2003 under the Information and Communication Technology Act, is the implementing organisation for this initiative. To structure the ICT HR Capacity Building Programme, ICTA has developed a unique 'ICT Skills Framework' identifying the specific skills needed at different staff levels and categories, namely: senior managers, project managers, IT managers, and general staff. The modules in the framework are grouped under three categories:

- General Skills
- ICT Management and Technical Skills
- Strategy and Leadership Skills

Both projects, 'ICT Skills Training for Government' and 'ICT Literacy for Citizens', fall under 'General Skills' category of the framework, which covers ICT awareness and literacy. The overall objective of the two projects is to raise the ICT literacy level in the public sector and in society at large.

ICDL's Role in the e-Sri Lanka Project

ICTA worked with ICDL Sri Lanka first in formulating the framework of ICT skills for the country, by getting a number of industry and academic consultants to work together, under the auspices of the international ICDL certification.

Once the framework was accepted by the decision makers as well as industry, ICDL was immediately seen as the right solution for implementing 'e-Sri Lanka'. The two certification programmes, e-Citizen and ICDL (Start), fitted with the framework very well at the ICT foundation level and ICT certification level respectively.

ICDL Sri Lanka signed a landmark agreement with ICTA in 2005, sponsoring 10,000 ICDL examinations for state employees and 100,000 e-Citizen examinations for Sri Lankan citizens¹. In order to encourage citizens to qualify in both certification programmes, the government not only reimbursed the full examination costs for candidates who successfully complete the programme, but also reimbursed the training costs for the first 1,000 candidates.

In 2006, the Ministry of Education of Sri Lanka formally adopted ICDL as the required standard for ICT skills training for its principals and teachers. With teachers taking these qualifications, more and more young students are interested in the programmes as well.

Funding Details

The Ministry met the cost of the training and certification through the Secondary Education Modernisation Project, funded by the Asian Development Bank.



¹ For a detailed description of the ICDL programme and the e-Citizen programme, visit: www.ecdl.org

So far, over 1,000 school directors from all parts of the country have undergone training, and over 2,000 teachers have been trained in ICDL.

At a recently concluded certification distribution ceremony, Hon. Susil Premajayantha, the Minister of Education, said that in providing ICT skills training to principals and teachers, they offered nothing short of the best by offering ICDL qualifications. He said that these qualifications are accepted anywhere in the world. He went on to say that, due to the quality and the recognition of these qualifications, ICTA, the apex body of ICT policy in Sri Lanka, has recognised ICDL to be the standard required for ICT for state sector employees and the general citizens. The Ministry of Education has made this programme even more relevant to teachers with the use of ICDL for Educators course material. The Minister mentioned that with this experience he expected the principals and the teachers to introduce ICT to their schools with the objective of improving the quality of overall education through the use of ICT as a tool for learning and teaching the prescribed subjects of the school curriculum.

