

## Reflection of ‘access’ in ICT4D evaluation: The case of Nenasala telecenter initiative in Sri Lanka

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As the world moves towards information society, countries started to extend access to information and communication technologies to their populations. Telecenters have been seen as an important means of bridging the digital divide; providing access to appropriate information required for social and economic development. Hence development of rural information kiosks has become increasingly popular development initiative, increasing in number worldwide. In Sri Lanka, e-Sri Lanka strategy, acknowledged affordable access to ICTs will ensure more effective, citizen centered and business friendly government, empowerment of the rural poor, women and youth. It envisioned a ‘community-based open access workstations’ program called *Nenasala*, to ensure availability of affordable basic communication services, access to social services, e-commerce and mobilization of local knowledge. Evaluation work in the development sector has evolved through a revolutionary path, as a practice as well as profession. The taxonomy of evaluation is multipronged, can be seen categorized based on different perspectives, criteria, inputs used, and perhaps the phase of intervention being evaluated. But there is as yet no widely accepted systematic evaluation procedure for telecenter programs. No shortage of evaluative frameworks for ICT for Development, but, none is completely satisfactory for measuring access to ICTs. Therefore alternative evaluative frameworks are increasingly required or existing evaluative criteria should be redefined to cater to the specific requirements of telecenter initiatives, for instance to measure the extent to which beneficiary groups are effectively and meaningfully engaged with ICTs. This paper gives a brief overview on evaluation of development aid, and then moves on to discuss what is missing in evaluating ‘ICTs for Development’ initiatives. While introducing the ‘Nenasala’ telecenter initiative in Sri Lanka, it reviews the magnitude of reflection of access in three consecutive evaluations commissioned to study the telecenter program.

*Keywords: Evaluation, Access, Nenasala Telecenters, e-Sri Lanka*

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