Internet School for Farmers (http://agri.info.lk)
Internet Society Community Grants Programme
Implemented by Shilpa Sayura Foundation, Sri Lanka

Final Report
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Description of the activities undertaken by the project during the reporting period
Internet School for Farmers Internet School for Farmers aims to enable the creation of e-learning courses for local farmers to learn about sustainable agriculture practices. An online community portal is being created with content covering topics including; sustainable agriculture, soil erosion, water pollution, livestock and composting and linking agriculture knowledge and help desk services from the government, and finally promoting to rural farmers to improve their access to e-Agriculture.

This project was implemented in January 2011 to December 2012, with funding assistance of Internet Society and effusion pvt ltd by Shilpa Sayura Foundation. The project created a local language content web portal (http://agri.info.lk) for e learning sustainable agriculture and awareness sessions conducted for rural farmers do not use Internet for learning. The beneficiaries of the project are mainly youth and women from farming families.

Following are project activities conducted.

1. The project communicated with private sector, government organizations and non-profits engaged in sustainable agriculture and environment conservation to become promoting partners and sponsors.
2. A local language e-learning portal on sustainable agriculture was developed to educate farmers on best practices on sustainable agriculture. The content obtained form publications of agriculture Department, University of Peradeniya and Information and communication Technology Agency publications including School Curriculum. The content is published at http://agri.info.lk

3. The Agriculture Department agriculture helpdesk was integrated to the http://agri.info.lk website also giving information on toll free phone based farmer assistance service.

4. A promotional community video was produced and uploaded to youtube community video services Youtube  
(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kJJ6nR-F86g) and metacafe  (http://www.metacafe.com/watch/8116447/internet_school_for_farmers/)
and shared on Facebook and Kaputa.lk (http://kaputa.lk/content/view/947) social networking sites and Telecentre.org. The site also promoted to School net which connects over 3000 schools and Island wide Telecentres. A mobile phone version shared through blue tooth.

6. 6 Stakeholder workshops at rural Telecentres and Schools in Siyambalanduwa, Piyavara 2, Lahugala, Mahaoya, Hulan Nuge and Magul Pokuna in Monragala, Ampara and Badulla Districts were conducted to created project awareness and educating rural farmers on sustainable agriculture.
7. An assessment of farmers and students awareness on e-agriculture was done during the workshop. The assessment was done interviewing farmers and students and collection of data.

8. An event for assessing impact of e-agriculture web portal was done after 8 months introducing the project to rural farmers. This photo was taken by James Morgan, ISOC photo journalist James Morgan.
Discussion of the performance to date against the goals of the project

Year 2011 and 2012 were incident full year in Agriculture sector in Sri Lanka. The torrential rain started in January 2011 destroyed 80% of the agriculture lands eastern province where project was implemented. This delayed the starting of the project.
Another setback resulted from use of Arsenic and Mercury contained fertilizer conflict in Sri Lanka. It created a division between private sector and farmers. Mass protests were conducted by farmers against agriculture companies. The conflicts also resulted several law suits between public and agriculture companies. Carefully evaluation of the situation the project committee decided not to obtain sponsorship from agriculture companies.

Despite these problems the project main goal of the web site was completed and activities of the project were completed with a time delay. The project team made dynamic changes to the project plan, found alternative paths to reach the project goal which we think as a successful implementation of the project. The change of project critical path helped realizing the project goals with in budget although time factor was affected.

**Outcomes & achievements**

[http://agri.info.lk](http://agri.info.lk) e – learning portal was established for developing sustainable agriculture practices among farmers.

Internet is promoted to farmers as a useful resource through the local seminars and workshops, which resulted farmers using internet for agriculture information.


Usability of rural Telecentres and internet increased through local language e learning services to farmers and by making local language content on sustainable agriculture available on internet.

A local language community platform for promoting sustainable agriculture in Sri Lanka developed through [http://agri.info.lk](http://agri.info.lk). This platform will be up-scaled through internet.

Impact on environmental conservation through sustainable agriculture practices expected through useful information obtained from “Internet School for Farmers” [http://agri.info.lk](http://agri.info.lk)
With “Internet school for farmers” we were able to create an local language platform on internet for educating women farmers on sustainable agriculture at Telecentre. The project sessions helped them improving house hold agriculture.

The project pioneering local language e content for learning sustainable agriculture in Sri Lanka, influenced other knowledge providers to provide local language content on internet for farmers. We observed an increase of local language agriculture content on internet in Sri Lanka during the project.

The project website [http://agri.info.lk](http://agri.info.lk) has become a valuable resource for students studying agriculture. The content following national curriculum needs helps student learning and revision online for their exams.
Lessons learned and disappointments

Conflicts in private sector and farmers effect education of sustainable agriculture. Hence community projects need consideration of resulting social impact when creating stakeholder partnerships with private sector whose objectives of engagement could be commercial.

Rural farmers appreciate local language content available on internet on sustainable agriculture. They encouraged their children to use internet for e learning of agriculture and other subjects. Supporting creation local language knowledge help establishment of internet as a useful common good.

Women in farming families who had no formal agriculture education were mostly benefitted by the project. The project created opportunities for them to take part in sustainable agriculture e learning sessions conducted at Telecentres. They were able to improve their household agriculture and produce.

Future Work

We found this project as an important platform for educating rural farmers on sustainable agriculture as an independent source of information for farmers. The independence from commercial and political domains help farmers make better choices in their decision making on agriculture practices helping environment conservation. The project requires assistance of agriculture professionals and journalists for creating content.

Enabling mobile access to web portal can help increase farmers at a faster rate. Hence require development of local language mobile technologies and optimized content.

The mobile business application can enable rural farmers to obtain current commodity prices and access business opportunities online. A research has been started with kaputa.lk to develop a sustainable agriculture business application.

As the project found women in farming families and youth are the prime beneficiaries, hence resources needed to be provided to telecentres to conduct e learning sessions on sustainable agriculture for women.

In order to scaling up, project needs to obtain additional resources. The prime resource needs are hosting and maintenance of the website and conducting of promotional activities in rural areas.

The project needs resources for technology development, hence require seeking of collaborations with funding agencies in social sector for scaling up.