

Access to information and access to finance are basic services essential to all citizens to be economically and socially integrated to the society. However, inadequate access to institutional finance and lack of information among the rural low income mass are evident in most developing and least developed countries including Bangladesh. The isolated attempts for handling two separate problems of the common people are generating positive outcomes in many instances in Bangladesh. At the same time, service providers are facing challenges in enhancing coverage, reducing cost of operation and attaining financial sustainability in rural areas. On the way to handle the issues and to obtain better outcomes, there are economic potentials of integrating or linking financial and information services in rural Bangladesh.

Integration may greatly help banks and MFIs in marketing financial products, minimizing asymmetric information and ensuring better credit monitoring. Banks may also use services of telecentre networks for channelling workers' remittances to the remote areas. Telecentre in a bank/MFI premise could greatly benefit the telecentre operators as it would be possible for the telecentre staff to offer information services from a public and secured structure and they would be able to reduce operating cost by reducing cost on house rent, maintenance etc. Entrepreneurs and farmers could be benefitted using information services of telecentres and thus could ensure greater effectiveness of credit facilities by banks/MFIs. Inter linkage of banks, MFIs and telecentres can thus contribute immensely in achieving financial and economic sustainability and help attain the ultimate objectives of economic and social development of the general people.

## Ekushey Boi Mela

Ekushey Boi Mela, which merely started as a book fair, has evolved into a national cultural festival reflecting the cultural spirit of entire Bangladesh. With an objective to promote and disseminate the love and respect of Bangla language, D.Net partook in the month long Amor Ekushey Gronthomela 2008, organised in the Bangla Academy premises. This year the 23rd Ekushey Boi mela was observed with a lot of pomp and splendour offering various publications for the book lovers and visitors. D.Net presented many books, magazines, CDs and various publications at the book fair.

Prof. Mustafizur Rahman, the noted economist and the Executive Director of Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) inaugurated the bookstall of D.Net at 4.00 pm on February 04, 2008. From the range of publications that D.Net had to offer, Gunijan and Moni CDs proved to be the most popular and managed to attract large number of visitors. The Gunijan CD contained the autobiographies of about 55 'Gunijans' who served the country for peace, humanity and social justice with their creativity and talent. The CD also contained audio and video interviews, their writings and other writings about these 'Gunijans'.

Another CD was called 'MONI' – the symbolic name of the lady who visits every doorstep in the village riding her bicycle, introducing the vast field of information technology with the help of the widely used ICT tool, the mobile phone. Moni CD is a video animation series centering Moni. The first episode dealt



with the importance of land registration and also illustrated various problems and related solutions on land registration. The CD was widely appreciated by many researches and field workers.

The whole content was divided subject wise in eight CDs, namely: agriculture, non-farm activities, education, health, law and human rights, appropriate technology, disaster management and awareness. The visitors were provided with the opportunity to tour the content, sitting at the stall with the help of computers. The CDs with the content on agriculture, non-farm activities and health created much interest among the visitors.

D.Net had published 13 books and research papers of

different kinds on the occasion of Ekushey Book Fair 2008. A significant publication which managed to make a mark was the book – Bangladesh Education in Transition: Policy.Performance.Way Forward. This is a research book based on the issues related to education in Bangladesh. People interested in education research were found to be greatly benefitted from the book.

The visitors at the stall could visit other websites of D.Net as well. Some of them included [bdresearch.org.bd](http://bdresearch.org.bd), [pallitathya.org.bd](http://pallitathya.org.bd), [abolombon.org.bd](http://abolombon.org.bd) and [dnet.org.bd](http://dnet.org.bd). D.Net's participation at the Ekushey Book Fair received a lot of publicity and coverage by the media.

## Project Update: Abolombon II

A day long information fair was organised by Gono Unnayan Kendra-Pallitathya Kendra on March 31, 2008 in Panchpir village, Gaibandha.

The fair was inaugurated by Khorshed Alam Pramanik, Chairman, Chandipur Union Parishad of Gaibandha. Four booths were installed for the rural people with an aim to provide livelihood information and direct consultation facilities. Agriculture, health, law and educational experts were present in the booths to provide the consultation services. Around 600 rural people directly received information and services from the day long information fair. Presentation of audio-visual content on agriculture and education was an attractive session at the evening where a total of 446 students registered as participants. More than 3000 rural people received livelihood information through issue based cultural event and audio-visual presentation. An essay competition on 'Amader Pallitathya Kendra' was hosted for the students and 12 participants from four high schools were awarded as the winners. Citizen charter of different ministries and government organisations were also demonstrated in the fair.

A Pallitathya Kendra is presently operating in collaboration with GOUF and Union Parishad, Chanra



in Jessore. They organised an eye camp jointly with Ad-din Hospital on March 23, 2008. A total number of 132 rural people received various facilities on eye treatment and eye care information from the camp. Shushilon-Pallitathya Kendra at Kaligonj, Satkhira organised an education camp on March 27, 2008. A total of 132 students participated in the camp to receive consultation regarding various education related opportunities and difficulties. Audio-visual contents were also presented in the education camp. Ghashful-Pallitathya Kendra at Hathajari, Chittagong organised a health camp on March 18, 2008. A total of 228 rural people received health care information and treatment facilities directly from the camp. It is also to be mentioned that thirteen Pallitathya Kendras are now in operation at the village level under the 'Abolombon Project' supported by MJF.

## Ekushey Provat Feri

Language is not only the most important tool for communication, but plays significant role in defining culture, nature, history, humanity and a civilization's ancestry.

Like every other year, D.Net observed the International Mother Language Day with due respect and solemnity. Every member of the D.Net family participated in the rally and offered wreaths at the National Shaheed Minar to pay homage to the brave and spirited martyrs of the language movement.



## Training on 'Local Language Content Development'

D.Net (Development Research Network) conducted a training workshop under Pan Localization project in collaboration with BRAC University titled "Local Language Content Development" for the information workers and local community people involved in content development from different telecentres and government institutions. The training was held at D.Net training room from March 25-30, 2008. This training proved to be useful for the people involved in content developing areas or interested to develop an information bank with local context. A number of tools were introduced to the participants which greatly enhanced their content searching and developing skills and they also had the opportunity to enrich the information bank by uploading the information of local resources and cultural heritage to the internet. It is hoped that in the long run these skilled trainees will develop a rich information bank for all telecentres and service beneficiaries.

Fourteen potential participants from different telecentre practitioners and government institutes like Agricultural Information Services, Directorate of Agricultural Marketing, Dhaka Ahsania Mission, World Net, Dhoritry Samaj Kallyan Shongstha, Digonter Dak, Gandhi Ashram Trust, Shariatpur Development Society, Ghashful, Socio Economic Development Association, Participatory Advancement Social Service and Darpan Samaj Unnayan Kendro also participated in the training.



## Inauguration of Telecentre Reference Desk

Under the umbrella of Bangladesh Telecentre Network (BTN) the 'Telecentre Reference Desk' was formally inaugurated on March 30, 2008 by Professor Jamilur Reza Chowdhury, Vice Chancellor of BRAC University with the help of the reference desk experts over Instant Messenger. Md. Masum Billah, task force leader of the desk presented the 'Telecentre Reference Desk' to the representatives of BTN members.

Telecentres in Bangladesh are struggling with numerous computer related technical problems on a regular basis. It is hoped that all telecentres will derive direct benefit from this Reference Desk. The Reference Desk is equipped to provide expert support both online and offline. The desk will also link local technical support service providers with the telecentres when only advice proves to be insufficient and inadequate.

Initially the desk offered to support computer hardware related troubleshooting, printer and scanner troubleshooting, help regarding computer software installation and maintenance, computer network troubleshooting and various assistance related to the Internet (Browsing, EDGE/GPRS modem, Handset as modem). Some of the services that are planned to be added to the pool by May, 2008 are various power (UPS, source of power, voltage issue) related problems as well as an appropriate location to establish telecentres by June, 2008. The

Telecentre Reference Desk can be reached by phone, e-mail, Instant Messenger and postal mail. The desk will run in its pilot phase until 30 November, 2008.

The representatives in the inauguration ceremony discussed in detail about the framework, functionality and sustainability of the desk. Nazrul Islam, Country Director of Relief International School Online, emphasised on proper adaptation of technological changes and conscious support to the current problems. General Secretary of SDFN, Md. Asaduzzaman suggested some archiving criteria and different ways of troubleshooting solutions. Dr. Ananya Raihan, Executive Director, D.Net suggested a gradual decentralisation of the desk in order to setup regional reference desks on a regular basis.



## Combating Cyclone Sidr

Hurricane Sidr hit the coasts of Bangladesh on 15 November, 2007 in the Sundarban coasts and Mongla port, Khepupara, Dublar Char, and Hiron Point in Khulna district. The cyclone gradually gained force and speed and moved through Barguna, the coastal belts of Barisal at up to 230-240 km speed and passed by Faridpur and Dhaka districts. The fierce cyclone managed to wreck havoc and destroy the south western coast, wiping out houses and schools, uprooting trees, halting transportation, disrupting electricity and causing severe shortage of food and water.

D.Net came forward to help and support the people in need and distress. The team tried to measure the losses incurred and partook in a relief work to support the communities in four districts and managed to provide help to about one thousand families suffering in misery.

The staff of D.Net donated their one day salary for the marginalized poor families affected in the hurricane; water, food, purifying tablets, and necessary medicines were also distributed with the fund. MJF also donated Tk. 1,95,444 for emergency relief distribution at the SIDR affected areas.

D.Net has been implementing a VAB-NJ (Volunteers Association for Bangladesh)-initiated programme titled 'Empowering Underprivileged Youth in Bangladesh through Computer Literacy' since 2004. As a continuation of the project, VAB-NJ took an initiative to donate USD 8000 (Eight Thousand) to D.Net for the cyclone victims relief fund.

The overall goal of the initiative was immediate emergency response to provide essential services to

the cyclone-affected people. The following steps had been undertaken as part of this initiative:

- D.Net installed five deep tube wells in some of the affected areas with the help of Faria Lara Foundation (a national NGO) in Barguna.
- About 500 sets of textbooks (class six to class nine) and 500 lamps were also distributed to the students/families in Barguna district with the help of Faria Lara Foundation in Barguna, Work Foundation in Jhalokathi, SN Trust & Dharitry Samaj Kallan Sangha in Bagerhat, Shanuhar M.A. High School (Computer Literacy Center) & local school teachers.

These initiatives of VAB-NJ & D.Net, managed to bring smiles in some faces and encouraged some children to dream again for a bright and secure future ahead of them.

D.Net also supported a USA based non resident Bangladeshi initiative namely United Bangladesh Appeal (UBA) to distribute a compensation fund of about USD 2,66472 for the families of the deceased.



## Public Access Venue Research

D.Net is currently involved in a multi-country research on Public Access Information and Communication Venues. The research is commissioned by Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and coordinated by University of Washington.

This research programme focuses on the public access to information and communication landscapes in 24 countries, with specific focus on the information needs of underserved communities, public access to information and communication venues, and the role of ICT. Building on the notion of 'Real Access', the research examines the physical infrastructures and human resources of such venues, information content and services usage patterns, communication & knowledge production, as well as environmental factors such as government policies, geography,

ethnic and linguistic differences, among others. Through field research in 24 countries conducted by local research partners, and cross-country comparative analyses based on common research design elements, the project aims to contribute to the knowledge in the field of information and ICT for development. The main areas of interest and value include: the comparative look at the key venues (libraries and others), and the mix of depth of in-country knowledge with breadth of global comparison to elicit success factors and scenarios to understand how diversely populations can and do access the use of ICT to improve their lives. The research will end in August, 2008 and all outputs of this research will be broadly disseminated to interested stakeholders and placed in the public domain.

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## National Workshop on ‘Community Radio Awareness in Bangladesh’

A national workshop on Community Radio Awareness was held on 02-04 March, 2008 at Bangladesh Open University (BOU) campus. This was jointly arranged by D.Net (Development Research Network) and Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC) in collaboration with Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) of Commonwealth of Learning (COL) and Bangladesh Open University(BOU). The workshop took place at the Media Centre in Bangladesh Open University, Gazipur, Dhaka.

The workshop was inaugurated by the Hon'ble Vice Chancellor of Bangladesh Open University, Professor Dr. M Farid Ahmed. During the inauguration, Dr. Farid stated "Our day to day life is now highly influenced by technology. And this particular workshop is going to contribute a big stake in the social and economic development of Bangladesh". Rumkini Vemraju, the Programme Officer of CEMCA and Firoj Ahmed, Joint Director of BOU jointly supervised the entire workshop for the period of three days. Dr. Rumkini opined in the inaugural ceremony that "CEMCA is working closely with more than 30 Community Radio Stations in India." She shared her experience of India and showed her interest to contribute in Bangladesh in the field of community radio. AHM Bazlur Rahman, Chief Executive Officer of BNNRC and Dr. Ananya Raihan, Executive Director of D.Net were present as the special guests in the inaugural session. They hoped that CEMCA and BOU would endlessly contribute in emergence of Community Radio in Bangladesh. Higher officials from the Media Centre and the Regional Directors of BOU as well as the senior officials of the NGOs working in the remote and coastal areas of Bangladesh participated in the workshop. The participants from the commercial phone companies who had established the internet outlets in the rural areas in Bangladesh also joined the workshop. Technical aspects and content making, studio designing and maintaining, radio station management and broadcasting were all taught in the

workshop with a lot of care and practical demonstration. Amit Chakrabarty, former high official of the Indian TV Channel 'Tara Bangla'and Programme Director of World Space Radio; Monoranjan Das, the advisor of Radio Today and the former Additional Chief Engineer of Bangladesh Betar; and Jamal Uddin Mawla Newaj the consultant of ABC Radio facilitated the workshop. The perspective and social aspects of the Community Radio was demonstrated by AHM Bazlur Rahman, CEO of BNNRC.



At the end of the three-day workshop, certificates were distributed to the participants in the gala closing ceremony. Honourable Vice Chancellor and the Treasurer of Bangladesh Open University were present among others in the closing ceremony. The Vice Chancellor in his closing speech opined that BOU would support in the skill development of the station managers for the forthcoming Community Radio in Bangladesh in future.

The workshop further expected that the government of Bangladesh would soon open up the pilot basis Community Radio programme. As the direct result of the workshop the participants were fully prepared to run more than 50 CR stations after the approval of the government.

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## Research on ‘Potentials for Trade in Services under SAFTA Agreement’ concluded

With the presentation of country papers in an inter-governmental meeting in Delhi, the research on 'Potentials of Trade in Services under SAFTA Agreement' was concluded during February 6-7, 2008. The meeting was organised by RIS under the auspices of SAARC-Secretariat. It is to be mentioned that Dr. Ananya Raihan was nominated as the country focal point for the research and produced the

Bangladesh country paper. Based on the country papers a consolidated paper will be prepared by RIS which will create a basis for the framework agreement on trade in services under the SAFTA agreement. The agreement will be presented in Colombo during the SAARC summit, which is to be held in August, 2008.

## Inauguration of another Computer Learning Centre!

Bangladesh Muktiyoddha Sangsad, Mehendiganj unit, Barisal, inaugurated a computer learning centre, as part of the independent day celebration on Wednesday, 26th March, 2008. Khan Nurul Amin, the thana nirbahi officer (TNO) inaugurated the centre while unit commander Abdul Baten presided over the function. A lot of enthusiasm was observed amongst the freedom fighters present in the inauguration ceremony.

Ajoy Kumar Basu, director operations, D.Net, and some veteran freedom fighters like Maheb Hossain, Abdus Sattar Dewan, Yusuf Chowdhury, Fazlul Haq, Abdul Alim and Sarder Arif Hossain also spoke on the occasion.

The 'Dalia Aziz Computer Learning Centre' was set up with the sponsorship of 'Volunteers Association of Bangladesh' New Jersey, USA and would be conducted by D.Net (Development Research



Network) Bangladesh. The centre plans to provide opportunities for the promotion of computer education, training and learning in the remotest parts of the country. The Mehendiganj uapzila unit of Muktiyoddha Sangsad further plans to set up a library with a rich collection of books, containing ballads of the heroes of the great war of liberation.

## The Executive Director attends the BCO Learning Workshop on Impact Assessment

Dr. Ananya Raihan, Executive Director, D.Net participated in an impact assessment workshop hosted by Building Communications Opportunities, a global partnership to increase impact and enhance learning (BCO) alliance of partners. The workshop was held in London from 18-19 March, 2008. The Executive Director joined the workshop as a delegate of APC (Association for Progressive Communication) an international network of civil society organisations dedicated to empowering and supporting people working for social justice and sustainable development through the strategic use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), including the internet. APC is working towards a world in which all people have easy, equal and affordable access to the creative potential of ICTs to improve their lives and create more democratic and egalitarian societies. Some of the other renowned organisations that participated in the workshop included Amarc, APC, IICD, Panos South Asia and OneWorld South Asia.

The objective of the workshop was to explore how

BCO partners might improve their impact assessment work and share experiences of development organisations, comparing the particular challenges posed in the media, communications and ICT fields with that of other development agencies. The workshop also intended to develop a framework to assist BCO partners to build on their existing practice towards contributing more substantive evidence to overall understanding of ICTs within development.

The workshop further stimulated an environment of enhanced learning and knowledge sharing amongst the BCO Alliance participants; promoted cooperation and understanding on content and financing among the donor members and NGO partners; and also created an increased association between all BCO Alliance partners and their networks. The workshop proved to be a total success and the dynamic interaction of donors and implementing partners were underpinned by a spirit of learning and exchange; multi-stakeholder open dialogue; flexibility; coordination and synergies.

## Development and Promotion of Handbook on 'Technology for Women'

D.Net (Development Research Network) signed an agreement with CIDA-PSU (Canadian International Development Agency - Program Support Unit) with a view to play a positive role and contribute in the technology oriented development agenda. The basic aim was to re-emphasise the role of women and help them understand the role of domestic stakeholders and technology in empowerment of women and poverty alleviation.

In this context, it was found that it is important to attract the attention of the relevant stakeholders, particularly the government and the institutions who are working for mainstreaming gender in the development process in Bangladesh through publication of a handbook on 'Technology for Women' as well as on women-friendly technologies and organisations for wider dissemination. The

experiences in other countries related to technology use by women and their changing life-style could be an important factor to encourage the stakeholders in Bangladesh. This one year project aims to bring together national stakeholders in a national workshop in Bangladesh, in order to share experiences on the impact of technology integration in the livelihood of poor women and launch the handbook on 'Technology for Women'.

Handbooks of other countries based on technologies could be useful to practitioners and women leaders in Bangladesh. It is hoped that this handbook on 'Technology for Women' followed by a workshop may trigger interests among the stakeholders and government and important women organisations will develop interest on important technology issues.

## MCC Develops 15 Livelihood Multimedia Content for UNDP

The main objective of 'Multimedia Content and Communications' is to integrate innovative communication methodologies into development and social change programmes and initiatives as well as to equip communities and NGOs with an understanding of communication techniques and technologies.

MCC basically specialises in creating an integrated communications support system for various development projects. Keeping this in mind UNDP and MCC came up with a plan to develop animated multimedia contents targeting the rural people.

Following long discussions and dialogue sessions on the application and sustainability issues on policy levels, MCC finally agreed to provide professional services to UNDP for the 'Creation and digitization of content for CeC Component eGovernance Cluster' on 11th October, 2007. It is to be mentioned that MCC could successfully commence and complete the delivery of all service specified in the contract, long before the stipulated timeframe of 120 days. The contents consisted of 15 animations on various development issues in relation to their effective solution through the use of the telecentres. These animations were based on the knowledge of Jeeon IKB for the rural illiterate farmers.

It is hoped that this project will play a positive role in educating the people through audio-visually animated presentations, create more awareness and help them become more knowledgeable, so that they are able to know the art of maintaining their crops in a better way.



This project has proved to be yet another milestone in the short journey of MCC; to provide key inputs and support in important development initiatives, both at the policy and planning level, making MCC's partnership with the national and international development agencies all the more vital.

## D.Net Signs MOU with CARE Bangladesh

CARE Bangladesh and D.Net (Development Research Network) signed a MOU for a period of 12 months. The signatory parties agreed to address the information needs targeting the rural communities situated in the remote parts of Bangladesh, by jointly facilitating the establishment of telecentres in the Haor region.

These telecentres are based on the 'Pallitathya' model of D.Net and deals with empirical and action research for building sustainable information and knowledge system for the poor. Both CARE Bangladesh and D.Net shared a common belief that lack of information has been a major impediment towards economic progress of the poor and



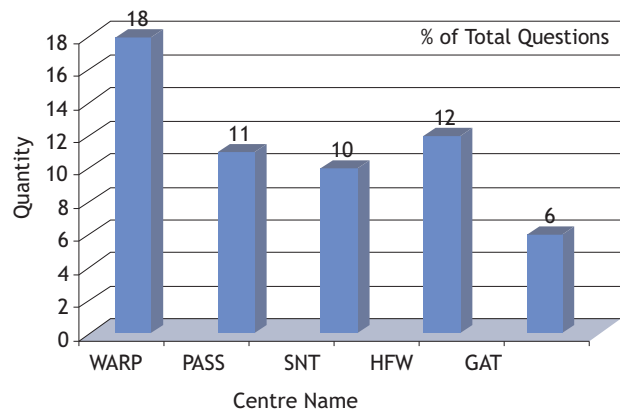
marginalised. It was therefore felt that an intervention was necessary to design a way to focus on creating access to information through latest technologies and approach to enhance social benefits.

Each telecentre focuses on the use of digital technologies to support the community, economic, educational, and social development and strives to reduce isolation, promote health issues, bridge the digital divide, raise awareness regarding the rights and privileges of the poor, reduce living costs and create economic opportunities. Under the collaboration, D.Net is to provide technical support and training, whilst CARE is to select areas, document and share lessons learnt, mobilise resource needs, create linkages with service providers and ensure all other infrastructural needs. With local entrepreneurship in place it is believed that the initiative has tremendous potential for scale-up in many remote parts of riverine Bangladesh, alongside a promise to address poverty eradication in a sustainable manner.

## Demand for Helpline Queries on the Rise

The queries received by the helpline are increasing every day. It was found that health was the main subject of interest for the general people using the helpline. Other fields of interest included agriculture, education, live stock & poultry; questions related to which are all on the rise. In the past 3 months helpline had received about 2,504 questions from the telecentres; where 46% (1,153 questions) was health related & 18 % (439 questions) from the agriculture sector. It was found that if this helpline could be run for all the telecentres in Bangladesh with the support of different organisations it would surely make a significant impact on the livelihood of the rural people. The top 5 centres are:

1. Grameen Janakalyan Shangstha (WARP)
2. Participatory Advancement Social Services (PASS)
3. Shamsuddin Nahar Trust (SNT)
4. Hunger Free World (HFW)
5. Gandhi Ashram Trust (GAT)



January - March 2008 Helpline Question Status (Category Wise)

Category	January	February	March	%
Health	401	503	249	46
Agriculture	185	75	179	18
Education	61	35	114	8
Dairy & Poultry	103	45	89	9
Government Services	74	47	76	8
Non-Farm	10	4	49	3
Law and Human Rights	77	26	41	6
Fisheries	2	24	35	2
Sub Total	913	759	832	100
Total	2504			

**D.Net**

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