

Pallitathya Help Line



A Precursor to People's Call Center

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of the report on “Pallitathya Help
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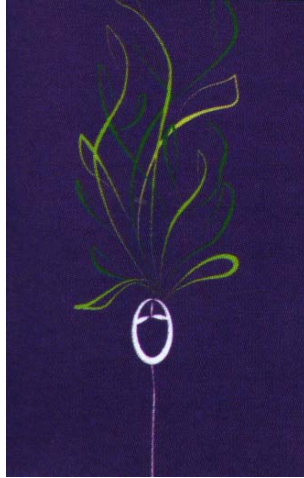
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This book is based on the research findings of an action research titled “Pallitathya Help Line”. This action research was conducted during August 2004–March 2005. The research was supported by the Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP) under its Small and Seed Grant Award.

During a time when there is disproportionate hype around using computers and Internet for tackling issues of economic deprivation and social injustice, this book presents the concept of using a relatively less ‘fashionable’ technology—the mobile phone—as an effective ‘last-mile solution’ to take information to the poor. The global wave of information and communication technology (ICT) revolution has not left Bangladesh untouched. With increasing zeal, government and non-government organizations have taken steps over the last few years to create relevant digital content for the poor. However, due to lack of adequate infrastructure facilities with very low teledensity and Internet penetration, it is often seen that the target groups are not getting access to these information. This scenario is in fact contributing towards worsening of the digital divide, since only a limited section of the populace are getting access to the information that are available through the Internet, CDs or other print media. For example, market price information about agricultural products in different markets are currently available through the Internet but they are accessible only to a handful of people and the target beneficiaries in rural areas are mostly left out.

Under such circumstances, this book suggests using the mobile phone that has had remarkable success in Bangladesh with more than 80% of geographical coverage, to bridge the gap between information providers and the target beneficiaries. Questions from rural areas can be handled through ‘Help-Line’ personed by subject matter experts who are equipped with ICTs to respond to specific queries within a short time. It is important to recognize that not all queries can be handled through this service since many problems require physical inspection for a meaningful solution.

This book represents an innovative idea of incorporating available technology to deliver information for better livelihood of the villagers and thus attempt to reduce the digital divide and to accelerate the process of poverty alleviation. In this book, the concept of “People’s Call Center” is proposed which can serve a specific set of information need of the total population of Bangladesh based on a sustainable business model. The idea can be replicated elsewhere, given that the respective government builds necessary infrastructure in a “pro-poor fashion”.

This book was an outcome of an action research conducted by D.Net and supported by GKP under its Small and Seed Grant Program. I would like to acknowledge the contribution of Ms. Angela M. Kuga Thas, Rinalia Abdul Rahim, and Ms. Kwan Lio of GKP for their whole-hearted support. My sincere thanks go to Ms. Cheekay Chikoo from APC whose guideline on incorporating Gender Evaluation Methodology (GEM) within this research. Acknowledgement goes to Sabrina Khandaker Shayla Parveen, Shuvashish Karmakar, Selim Ahmed, Nazrul Islam, Abdus Salam, Angshu Jyoti Fouzder, Nadia Sattar, Majedur Rashid, Mahmud Hasan Talukder, Mahabul Alam, Ashrafal Alam, Ani Biswas, Tariqul Islam, Humayun Siddique, Rashed Hossain, Shekh Ruhul Amin, Anjan Kumar Roy Sharmin Jahan Khan, Ashraf Sishir and Probal Bkattacheya for their research support in operating the Help Line project.

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I would like to take this opportunity to share the joy of receiving the Gender and ICT Award 2005 sponsored by APC WNSP and GKP. This award is a significant recognition for us in realisation of the dream of mainstreaming ICTs in poverty alleviation. Based on the successes produced in the first few months of operation of Help Line D.Net plans to replicate this initiative across Bangladesh in next few years.

Ananya Raihan
September, 2005

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LIST OF BOXES

APC	: Association of Progressive Communications
BARI	: Bangladesh Agriculture Research Institute
BFRI	: Bangladesh Fisheries Research Institute
BINA	: Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Agriculture
BJRI	: Bangladesh Jute Research Institute
BLRI	: Bangladesh Livestock Research Institute
BM	: Business Model
BRRRI	: Bangladesh Rice Research Institute
BSRI	: Bangladesh Sugarcane Research Institute
DAE	: Department of Agriculture Extension
DAM	: Department of Agriculture Marketing
GEM	: Gender Evaluation Methodology
GKP	: Global Knowledge Partnership
HSC	: Higher Secondary Certificate
ICT	: Information and Communication Technology
KM	: Kilometer
LF	: Local Facilitator
MOL	: Mobile Operator Lady
NGO	: Non-Government Organization
RIHL	: Rural Information Help Line
RMA	: Rapid Market Appraisal
SRDI	: Soil Resources Development Institute
SSC	: Secondary School Certificate
Tk.	: Taka (Bangladeshi Currency Unit)
UP	: Union Parishad (Local Government)