

## **Knowledge outside class rooms? Wisdom of Rural Sri Lanka**

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### **Abstract**

Although Nenasala Telecenters were established with the aim to provide ICT Services to the rural societies; our research shows that they created a new social education model for rural education development by serving knowledge outside classrooms and challenged existing education development paradigms. This eye opener can hope to influence educational development policy in a pro-developmental direction to encourage delivering ICT powered “knowledge outside classrooms” as a solution to rural education problems.

150 Rural Nenasala in Sri Lanka using Shilpa Sayura Local Language e- Learning platform, facilitated self learning of National Curriculum and helped over 9000 rural youth to learn outside classrooms to improve their knowledge.

This paper is based on Shilpa Sayura project and M & E assignment carried out in Uva Province, Sri Lanka during 2006 -2009 include 6 case studies; of the five priests of Thalakumbura, who passed National examination without attending a formal school; Hingurukaduwa village formed self e learning groups to increase access to education; Siyambalanduwa Nenasala created an e School using ICTs to increase inclusion in

education; A school dropped youth was helped by Mahiyangana Nenasala to pass National examination and to develop an ICT career; Nagala Nenasala bridged the gap of unavailability of ICT education in their community; Haldummulla Nenasala trained a primary teacher to teach ICT in school using Nenasala resources. These case studies showcase diverse examples of “Knowledge outside class rooms” providing new methods of ICT powered knowledge delivery to create a new “social education model” to improve rural education.

This model is enabled by individuals and organizations driven with a social purpose for the development of rural communities; and removes the need of simultaneous presence of a teacher and students to induce self and group learning outside the class rooms. The interaction, curiosity, discovery and exploration are used to stimulate learning process which enhances the accumulation of knowledge and skills with visual form of content provided as videos, animations, images and interactive elements, which creates freedom of learning giving greater degree of control to the learner which re-defines the roles teacher and students. The content is developed by teachers and developers blending together shared experiences, implemented with volunteer support to make a society driven educational model.

In conclusion, Shilpa Sayura and Nenasala combination shows that “Knowledge outside classrooms” is an emerging social education model enabled by Local e learning at Telecenters; and demonstrates innovative ways of knowledge delivery to remove disparities in access to education in rural societies; catalyzed by committed individuals and organizations which creates a paradigm shift in delivering of knowledge to every student’s learning space, to increase freedom of learning, giving wider choices of what they learn and how they learn to removes classroom bureaucracy with “knowledge outside class rooms”. Therefore emphasize the need for up-scaling, further research, development effort and social investments in this new ICT4D domain, which can help inclusion of rural people in the future knowledge society.

## **1.0 Introduction**

150 Rural Nenasala in Sri Lanka using Shilpa Sayura Local Language e- Learning platform, facilitated self learning for secondary school National Curriculum helping over 9000 rural youth to learn outside classrooms to improve their knowledge to face National examinations. The Shilpa Sayura and Nenasala combination has innovated new methods of knowledge delivery to rural youth who are challenged with poverty, education, transportation, communication and energy problems; there by helped removing of disparities that hinder developing of future knowledge societies in rural communities.

*The only way out of poverty is knowledge,  
which many of us have experienced throughout our lives.*

The purpose of Nenasala Telecentres were to provide Information and Communication Services to the rural people, however we found that they are challenging existing paradigms of education by creating a “new social educational model” to provide knowledge outside classrooms to rural students. Shilpa Sayura and Nenasala initiatives are both funded by Information and communication Technology Agency (ICTA). Although they are in early stage of maturity, demonstrate the ability of becoming an effective ICT catalyzed alternative for developing rural education.

This development is seen as an eye opener, which can hope to influence rural education development policy in a pro-developmental direction to encourage research, development and investment for serving “knowledge out side classrooms” as a “new social education model” which can be used as an effective instrument to penetrate the barriers in taking education for all.

## **1.1 Nenasala Telecenters**

Nenasala Telecenters were setup under the e-Sri Lanka project by ICTA to reduce digital divide. Their aims were to poverty reduction, social and economic development, and peace building. The Sri Lankan Nenasala concept derived from the popular

Telecenter model has some fundamental differences created by the government leadership; ownership by temples and community organizations; single network branding; parallel local content and applications development drive.

## **1.2 ICTA e-Society Development Initiative (e-SDI)**

ICTA e-SDI is a funding mechanism for innovative ICT4D projects aimed at increasing participation, developing rural societies, creating partnerships, increasing economic opportunities and equity in agriculture, health, education, business, including empowerment of women and youth, in which the local language content and applications received a high priority. ICTA e-SDI has funded 215 diverse ICT4D projects with the value of Rs. 250 million.

## **1.3 Shilpa Sayura Project**

Shilpa Sayura means “sea of knowledge”; is a research initiated by e fusion pvt ltd with the partnership assistance of ICTA e-SDI to create a new social education model with the vision “To empower rural students with ICT based education to improve self learning”. (Meegamma, N., e-India 2007). Shilpa Sayura developed a new knowledge delivery channel through Nenasala Telecenters to help marginalized students in rural communities to self learn the National Curriculum in local language.

One important feature of Shilpa Sayura is using web technologies to deliver an interactive content base hosted locally, which does not depend on internet connectivity. Therefore Shilpa Sayura has the ability to deliver knowledge penetrating poverty, transportation, communication and energy barriers faced by remote, rural societies. Shilpa Sayura piloted with 20 Nenasala communities in 2006, expanded to 150 Telecenters in 10 districts by 2009; and recognized as a global ICT4D example winning 7 international awards.

## **2.0 Aim**

The aim of this paper is to present “new social educational model” created by Shilpa Sayura and Nenasala combination for developing of rural education, in order to improve

the understanding of delivering of “knowledge outside class rooms” and to emphasize how ICT powered local language self learning at Telecenters can help developing of rural societies.

### **3.0 Previous studies**

In Sri Lanka the Shilpa Sayura project has provided content in local languages which is extensively used and appreciated. (Critical Issues for e-Learning Telecentres in Sri Lanka and India, Gaiani, S., Hansson, H., Meegamma, N., Mozelius. P., M-2009)

Significant contribution of telecentres can also be seen in including the rural people in the knowledge economy both directly and indirectly. (Critical Issues for e-Learning Telecentres in Sri Lanka and India, Gaiani, S., Hansson, H., Meegamma, N., Mozelius, P., M-2009)

Therefore the need of the hour is to find an alternative path to get a tertiary qualification; this could be done only through the use of Distance Mode. Today, Sri Lanka, at this given point in time, has to ensure a more efficient use of public resources to open more opportunities for higher education. (Warnapala, 2009, p 80)

The telecentre initiatives in Sri Lanka can be seen as a modern follow up to the successful Free Education Scheme introduced in 1944 in Sri Lanka (Warnapala, 2009).

Nenasala are quite common in infrastructure but unique by location, ownership and technology skills and the community they serve has a special significance in their uniqueness. (Impact Monitoring & Evaluation for Developing of Sustainable Tele Center Networks, Meegamma, N., Sampath, R., SLEVA 2009)

Poor education facilities in Uva Province has caused poor examination results and early school drop offs increasing unemployed youth. This is an opportunity for Nenasala to rise as a complementary education institution. (E3 - Framework for Telecenter Network Sustainability Development, Meegamma, N., e-India 2009)

National Curriculum available in local language improved Nenasala position in education, increased usage and improved economy. (E3 - Framework for Telecenter Network Sustainability Development, Meegamma, N., e-India 2009)

Lack of Teachers was the main problem. Many remote schools didn't have electricity, libraries or laboratories. Although we found talented students, poverty prevented them accessing quality education. Enabling interactive self and group learning using digital content would be a method to overcome their education problems. Creating a local language education platform will change how rural communities learn. (Shilpa Sayura - Localized Self and Group e-Learning System for Marginalized Students in Remote, Rural communities of Sri Lanka, Meegamma, N., e-India 2007)

Self learning "... in which individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes." (Knowles 1975: 18)

people who take the initiative in learning (proactive learners) learn more things, and learn better, than do people who sit at the feet of teachers passively waiting to be taught (reactive learners). 'They enter into learning more purposefully and with greater motivation. They also tend to retain and make use of what they learn better and longer than do the reactive learners.' (Knowles 1975: 14)

Technology can facilitate learning by providing real world contexts that engage learners in solving complex problems (Duffy & Cunningham, 1996; Honebein, 1996; & Cognition and Technology Group at Vanderbilt, 1992).

Tell me, I forget.

Show me, I remember.

Involve me, I understand.

(Chinese proverb)

### **3.0 Material and Methods**

The methodology used in this paper is to be classified as case study research (Benbasat et al. 1987, Yin 1994). Interviews, questionnaires and observation methods were used as means for collecting information during a 17 month M & E Assignment carried out in Uva Nenasala Telecenter network.

6 Case studies involved structured questioners and informal discussions, observations and a survey was done among students. The visits were documented with videos and photos. Discussions held with Nenasala operators, students using Nenasala, Teachers in near by schools and parents of the students.

### **4.0 Data & Results**

#### **4.1 Secondary school education problem in Sri Lanka**

It's important to understand the nature of the rural education problems, addressed by Shilpa Sayura and Nenasala, to assess the importance of delivering "knowledge outside class rooms" as a "new social education model" for development of rural societies.

Sri Lanka's population has a literacy rate of 92%; the highest in South Asia; achieved through free education. It is compulsory that all children go to school till grade 9 (age 14). The education structure is divided into five parts of primary, junior secondary, senior secondary, college and university. Students who wish to pursue tertiary education must pass the General Certificate of Education (G.C.E) Ordinary Level (O/L) in order to enter the G.C.E Advanced Level (A.L) and study for another 2 years before the university entrance exam.

In Uva province 60.02% of the candidates failed in G.C.E O/L examination in 2006, among them 12.6% failed all subjects. (Table 1.0) The National overall failure rate was 51.3%. 56% failed in Math and 63.8% failed in English. The failure rates in educational zones of Wilgamuwa, Teldeniya, Walapane, Bibile, and Dimbulagala were 73.3%,

63.7%, 74.2%, 66% and 69.7% respectively. The failure rates in cities were 27%-35%; which clearly show the critical issue poor secondary education in rural Sri Lanka.

The school drop offs starts after grade 5 (primary education) and increases during grade 6-11 (junior secondary); and sharply increases at grade 11 due to G.C.E O/L examination failures. (figure 1.0). We estimate that about 55%-60% students dropout from rural areas during their teenage. These youth who are deprived of higher education, become unemployed, resulting more social problems i.e. drug and alcohol addiction, conflicting with law, teen-age pregnancy--, finally become burden on society.

Rural students have a disadvantage in National examinations due to lack of necessary education resources, teachers, labs, libraries, electricity, computers and books; many miss classes having to assist parents in fields and looking after younger children.

Poverty, transportation, communication and energy problems are key issues that restrict their access to better education in cities.

## **5.0 Case studies**

We address this burning issue common in most of the rural communities using Shilpa Sayura and Nenasala combination. Following six case studies showcases the impact and lessons learned in creation of a “new social education model” to deliver “knowledge outside class rooms” to develop rural education.

### **5.1 Five Priests of Thalakumbura passing National Examination without attending School**

Thalakumbura Nenasala, lead by Rev. Keeriyagolle Dhammasara, helped five young priests to pass National examination without attending a formal school. Among them, Rev. Babaragalapathane Gnanaseela became a junior priest at the age of 9 and studied in temple; Temple curriculum included Math, Science, Sinhala but not in depth as in National curriculum taught in schools. Determined to pass National examination, the five young priests used Shilpa Sayura at Nenasala and passed in G.C.E O/L examinations

to enter advanced level.

### **Impact of Nenasala and Shilpa Sayura**

The Telecenter was open when they wanted to learn; and had the freedom of self learning.

### **Lessons Learned**

Delivering of knowledge outside class rooms for self and group e learning can help rural youth to achieve educational goals.

## **5.2 Hingurukaduwa e Village self learning groups**

Hingurukaduwa Nenasala, lead by Janaka Srimal, formed an e learning village with 30 self learning groups using Shilpa Sayura and shared computers housed in village homes and also introduced a blended learning program to learn ICT and English at Nenasala, which improved student knowledge and examination results. They operated on volunteer assistance and established two more e learning centers to replicate their experiences of delivering “knowledge outside class rooms”.

### **Impact of Nenasala and Shilpa Sayura**

The e village helped students to form self learning groups, which improved their subject knowledge and examination results.

### **Lessons learned**

Delivering of knowledge outside class rooms can help inclusion of small groups to increase access to education.

## **5.3 Siyambalanduwa e School increased access to education**

Siyambalanduwa Nenasala, had been closed at the time of Shilpa Sayura arrival. Chaminda Nishantha, a committed community teacher transformed used Shilpa Sayura

to transform Nenasala to an e School; and taught Math, Science, ICT and English to over 100 students. He used Skype to teach Math and Science to remote students of Lahugala Nenasala to increase access to education.

### **Impact of Nenasala and Shilpa Sayura**

Shilpa Sayura and Innovative use of ICTs, helped Siyambalanduwa and Lahugala village students to become benefited with increased access to education.

### **Lessons learned**

Shilpa Sayura increases sustainability of Telecenters and help inclusion of isolated communities in education and the role of committed individuals are important in social innovation.

## **5.4 Mahiyangana Nenasala helped school dropped youth to develop an ICT career**

Deemal Sasith had dropped from school; and his parents wanted him to become a shop helper. Gayan Padeep, manager of Mahiyangana Nenasala created an opportunity for Sasith to join his team and learn ICT and use Shilpa Sayura free of charge. Using Shilpa Sayura he passed National examination and now developing an ICT career.

### **Impact of Nenasala and Shilpa Sayura**

Shilpa Sayura and Nenasala helped school dropped youth to pass National examination and to develop a career in ICT.

### **Lessons learned**

Shilpa Sayura and Nenasala can help develop ICT careers of school dropped youth, providing knowledge outside class rooms.

## **5.5 Nagala Nenasala bridged the gap in ICT education.**

Nagala Nenasala, lead by Saman Sisira Kumara served Madagama rural community, where good ICT education was a luxury. He used Shilpa Sayura to teach ICT to local teachers and students and also help them to take ICT subject in National examinations.

### **Impact of Nenasala and Shilpa Sayura**

Shilpa Sayura helped Nenasala to teach ICT for teachers and students needing to take ICT subject in National examinations.

### **Lessons learned**

Shilpa Sayura and Nenasala can help develop ICT education in rural communities where ICT teachers are unavailable.

## **5.6 Haldummulla Nenasala trained a primary teacher to teach ICT at school.**

Haldummulla Nenasala, lead by Murali Krishna, without charging a fee, trained Shirani Malar, a primary school teacher to teach ICT in her school. She brought her students to Nenasala for practical lessons as they had no computers. The students use Shilpa Sayura to learn ICT at Nenasala and prepare for National Examination.

### **Impact of Nenasala and Shilpa Sayura**

Haldummulla Nenasala became an ICT training and resource center for the government school, which helped teachers and students.

### **Lessons learned**

Shilpa Sayura and Nenasala can be used as a resource center for ICT teacher training in rural communities.

## **7.0 Shilpa Sayura and Nenasala Social Educational Model**

Shilpa Sayura and Nenasala combination creates a society driven education model to effectively deliver knowledge for improving rural education. This model is enabled by individuals and organizations driven with a social purpose.

In Shilpa Sayura Model, learning is an outcome of the different experiences of a participating learner; which removes the need of simultaneous presence of a teacher and students in a class room. Instead, it links up the student with content created by teachers to induce self and group learning outside the class rooms.

This new social education model experimented with Shilpa Sayura has distinct components of "Self Learning" and "Group Learning". Self learning helps accumulation of knowledge through one's own experiences to understand real world in depth. Group learning develops knowledge through shared experiences and help testing of what's learned. Collaborative and cooperative learning in a group help exposing the learners to peer viewpoints. The photo tour of Sigiriya and animation of "How dynamo works?" are best used in group learning, while interactive math is designed for self learning.

Shilpa Sayura uses interaction, curiosity, discovery and exploration to stimulate learning process; which is a challenge for development of pedagogies to induce better learning experiences.

The content in Shilpa Sayura are organized hierarchically; includes essential theory, demonstrations, activities, exercises and tests to encourage self analysis, self reflection and self awareness. In depth content help students learn beyond the limits of the curriculum to enhance their ability and skills.

Shilpa Sayura content can be accessed by learners when they want, and maintain their own pace of learning; Rural students are more comfortable with visual aspect of learning constructed with animations, videos and images, which are not possible their class rooms.

The learner plays a central role in Shilpa Sayura to seek knowledge independently to meet their learning goals. Multiple representations of content and interconnection of disciplines widens the learning space of the learner i.e. studying Math and 3D Art, studying Buddhist culture and India history-- . The real world experiences are represented in content, so that learning to sing “Hindustani Bilaval raga” with a virtual teacher is a live experience.

Self assessment is a part of Shilpa Sayura learning process; Over 3000 test questions help students to improve; math questions show steps of how the solution is worked out. Interactive and timed exercises increase speed of math of the learner.

The content development done through collaboration of teachers and developers, blending shared experiences. The role of the teacher although not present in the learning environment; embedded in content. Nenasala operators help students as e learning facilitators. This model does not take out anyone; instead re-define the roles of each participant with social innovation.

Shilpa Sayura content and structure follows National curriculum to help students to pass National examinations; yet it can be used for informal and lifelong learning by others; hence creates an expandable evolving social education model to fulfill the learning needs of the society.

## **7.0 Future research**

Among the new questions arising from this research are that;

Can "Knowledge outside class rooms" be used to foster wider scale of inclusion? And if so, what issues and challenges are effecting its realization?

What other areas of rural development this social education model can be applied? And

how women, farmers and disabled people are included in the process?

Are technology powered social education environments facilitate transformative learning in rural communities? What changes have been resulted of their implementations?

## **8.0 Conclusions**

We are unable to think that traditional education will be equally available for everyone, even in a fairest society. Therefore a paradigm shift for delivering knowledge to every student's learning space is required.

"Knowledge outside class rooms" developed by Shilpa Sayura and Nenasala combination is a "new social education model" which can effectively address critical education problems faced by rural societies and help inclusion of excluded communities challenged with poverty, transportation, communication and energy problems.

The Shilpa Sayura self learning model increases freedom of learning giving students wider choices and decision making power of what they learn and how they learn to removes classroom restrictions by providing "knowledge outside class rooms".

"Knowledge outside class rooms" is an emerging domain in ICT4D, which can significantly catalyze rural education development, hence emphasize increased research, development efforts and social investment to help inclusion of rural people in the future knowledge society.

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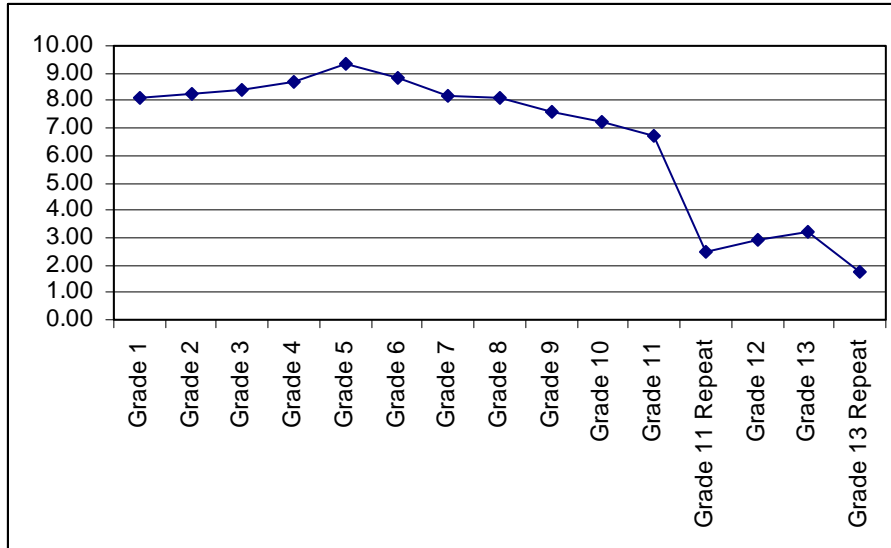
## Figures and tables :

**Table 1.0**  
**Statistics of GCE O/L 2006 in Uva Povince**

	Sat	Qualified for A/L	Percentage qualified	Failed in All %
Badulla	3558	1662	46.71	8.97
Bandarawela	2938	1542	52.48	5.57
Mahiyanganaya	1903	702	36.89	15.16
Welimada	2416	989	40.94	9.39
Passara	1007	350	34.76	9.42
Monaragala	2207	813	36.84	17.19
Wellawaya	3149	1170	37.15	17.15
Bibile	1611	549	34.08	16.07
	18789	7777	39.98	12.36

**Table 2.0**  
**Distribution of students in grades Sri Lanka**

2002 Students in Grades		
Grade	Students	Percentage
Grade 1	326915	8.12
Grade 2	333077	8.27
Grade 3	337816	8.39
Grade 4	350433	8.70
Grade 5	376052	9.34
Grade 6	355310	8.82
Grade 7	328778	8.16
Grade 8	327599	8.13
Grade 9	306548	7.61
Grade 10	291643	7.24
Grade 11	270083	6.71
Grade 11 Repeat	99562	2.47
Grade 12	118400	2.94
Grade 13	128957	3.20
Grade 13 Repeat	71181	1.77
Special Education	4721	0.12
	4027075	



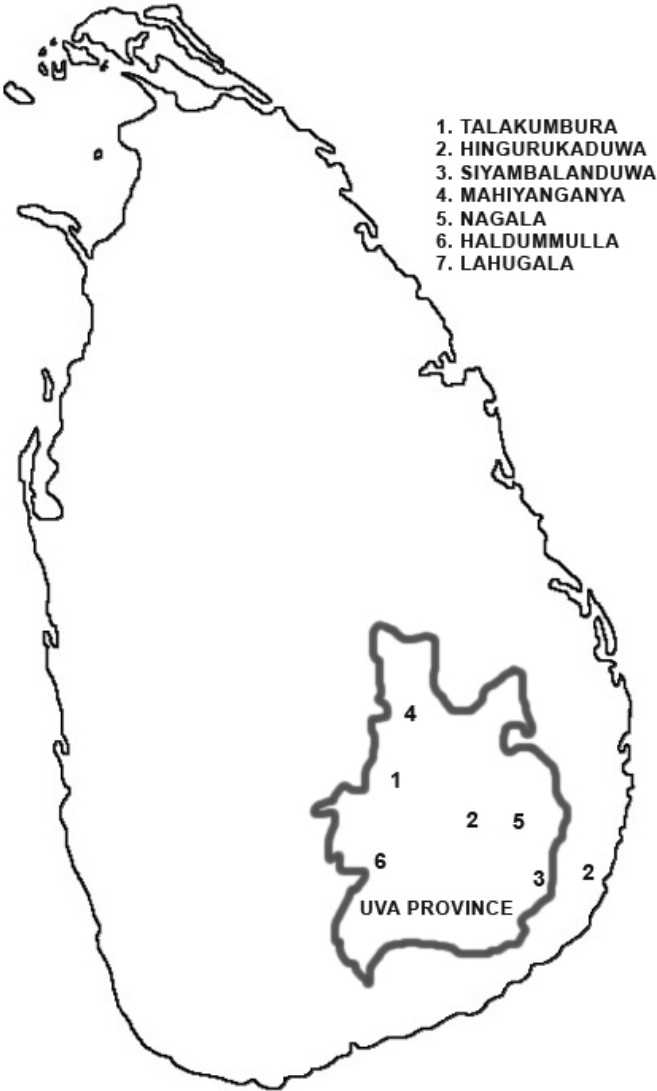
**Figure 1.0 - 2002 Students and Grades**

**Table 3.0. The cases and data collection methods used in this study.**

Case	Data collection methods	Field studies by	Year
Thalakumbura Nenasala Five Priests	Interviews, Observations, Questionnaires	Niranjan Meegammana, Keeragolle Dhammasara	2009
Siyambalanduwa Nenasala E-School	Interviews, Observations, Questionnaires	Chaminda Nishantha Niranjan Meegammana	2009
Mahiyangana Nenasala school dropped Youth	Interviews, Observations, Questionnaires	Niranjan Meegammana Gayan Kirindage	2009
Hingurukaduwa e Village	Interviews, Observations, Questionnaires	Niranjan Meegammana Janaka Srimal	2009
Nagala Nenasala bridging ICT gap	Interviews, Observations, Questionnaires	Niranjan Meegammana Saman Sisira	2009

		Kumara	
Haldummulla Nenasala Training ICT Teachers	Interviews, Observations, Questionnaires	Niranjan Meegamma Murali Krishna	2009

**Case Study Locations**



## **Authors:**

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Keeragolle Dhammasara thero qualified with 2 degrees, is a teacher and Nenasala Manager from Tahalakumbura Nenasala, involved in grass root Telecenter operation with commitment for community development through Telecenter e learning and cultural integration. He is a member of Shilpa Sayura National Impact Team and Treasurer of Uva Telecenter Community Association.

Rasika Sampath, is deputy team leader for Regional Impact Team (RIT) for Uva Nenasala, specialized in M & E of Telecenters, qualified in business and ICT, member of Shilpa Sayura National Impact Team and the registrar of Telecenter Community Association, Sri Lanka.

Murali Khrisna is Manager of Haldumulla Nenasala Telecenter, Winner of e-India 2009 Award and involved in grass root Telecenter operation with strong experiences in community development through e learning and cultural integration at Telecenters. He is an ICT ambassador appointed by ICTA and National organizer for Shilpa Sayura, ICTA e-SDI district consultant and The President of Telecenter Community Association, Sri Lanka.

Janaka Srimal, is a banker by profession, an ICT4D leader, Founder of Lak Aruna and Hingurukaduwa e village which is an example for grass root e learning innovation. He is an ICTA e-SDI district consultant.

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