

e-infrastructure Pilot Project for Nepali Schools: Bridging the Digital Divide

POA Educational Foundation and Ministry of Education, Government of Nepal, recently entered into a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to launch a pilot project for developing e-infrastructure in Nepali schools. The pilot project is based on 10 high schools in Katmandu.

Contingent upon the results and experience from this pilot study, POA hopes to launch the project in all schools of Nepal at different stages.

The pilot project was conceptualized by two prominent NRNs: Dr. Shiva Gautam and fully funded by Mr. Aditya Jha of POA Educational Foundation through Nepal Library Foundation of Canada. Dr. Gautam is a faculty at Harvard Medical School USA, and Mr. Jha is a Canada based philanthropist and entrepreneur (www.karmacandy.ca & www.osellus.com).

During this pilot project each of the following 10 schools were provided with five Pentium III computers and one printer to establish 10 e-Libraries in the selected schools. The following schools were chosen by the Ministry of Education.

1. Gyuheshowari
2. Nandi Ratri
3. Kanya Mandir
4. Jana Kalyan
5. Ratna Rajya
6. Baal Bikash
7. Jana Bikash
8. Geeta Mata
9. Nil Barahi
10. Gandhi Aadarsha

The students and teacher will receive training on basic computer skills. The computers were collected and refurbished by World Computer Exchange (WCE) (www.wce.com) a non-profit organization in the US, and then shipped to Nepal by COPPADES (www.coppades.com) also a non-profit organization in Nepal.

Bridging the digital
divide

Digital divide has now emerged as a strong indicator of overall socioeconomic divide. Bridging this gap should be one of the priorities of new Nepal. Information technology is playing the central role in creating a new global economic

order. Bridging the digital divide is a precondition for Nepal to be able to take a quantum leap towards becoming integrated into the global virtual economy.

There are no other better front than schools and communities where the first step towards narrowing the digital divide should be taken.

One of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDG), agreed by UN member states, requires making available "the benefits of new technologies-especially information and communication technologies". One of the debates in the context of introducing e-learning in Nepal could be: should information technology like e-library get priority over addressing citizens' basic needs? The answer lies in the fact that computer/e-library is part of the ongoing development efforts that address the most basic needs, such as building more classrooms and providing clean water. According to experts, ICTs can be part of the solution and e-learning should be considered a critical facet of basic development, an alternative medium of capacity-building and a means to people's empowerment.

The usefulness, benefits and impact of e-learning on the students are well known.. For example, studies have shown that students usually learn more in classes in which they receive computer-based instruction, learn their lessons in less time with computer- based instruction and like their classes more when they receive computer help. Besides being connected to the world with the information on the finger tip could be helpful to access to various teaching material and learn about the world and prepare them for the challenges of tomorrow.