

# ENLIGHTEN RURAL WITH INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY: NENASALA PROJECT

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## ABSTRACT

*The study intended to identify the impact of Nenasala usage towards ICT literacy of rural community by examining the secondary data which was published from 2006 to 2017. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as tables and charts. As per the findings, there is an impact of Nenasala usage towards ICT literacy of the population. Furthermore, the results show that government training institute such as Nenasala, vidatha only contribute a very little amount for the improvement of computer literacy rather than other sources. Moreover, the findings indicated that the estate population gets the highest training from the government institute rather than rural and urban sectors. Thus, policy implementations should be directed at setting realistic, practical and highly organized to make the rural community aware of the benefits of ICTs and Nenasala centers. Moreover, comprehensive marketing strategies should be employed to make Nenasala successful in attracting target users. Furthermore, increase the Nenasala facilities which are given to the estate sector.*

**Key Words:** *E-Sri Lanka project, Computer Literacy, Nenasala project*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Even though the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) plays a leading role within the global population in developing countries and Least Developed countries have 67% and 30% access to Information and Communications Technologies respectively (1). Accordingly, in today there is a digital divide which is indicated the gap between people who are able to use and benefit from technologies and those who are not. Among the world population, 56.1% of the people use the internet and this access is skewed (2).

Governments in the worlds are increasingly identified ICT is the key enabler for accelerating and attaining economic and social development of the country. Furthermore, it is highlighted that ICT is seen as an essential tool for “improving the delivery of public services, making government more transparent and accountable, broadening public participation, facilitating the sharing of information and knowledge among the people, and integrating marginalized groups and deprived regions” (3). Accordingly, it is obvious that technological advancement and innovations in the long term supporter of economic development (4).

(4), emphasized that as a developing country Sri Lanka is needed strong foundation for building its capacity to obtain and create knowledge to take opportunities offered by globalization. In 2002, the internet usage and ICT usage in Sri Lanka are at a very low level. Accordingly, the government has commenced the e-Sri Lanka project with the objective of “harnessing ICTs towards achieving socio-economic development in the country” and with the vision of the “to take the dividends of ICT to every citizen and to every business and transform the way government thinks and works” (3)

Primarily, the e- Sri Lanka initiative consist with five prickly strategies such as Re-engineering government, Development of information Infrastructure, ICT Human Resource Development, ICT investment, and Private sector Development and e-society and characterize a road map of national ICT (5).

The Information Infrastructure program that is initiated under e-Sri Lanka project is directed to user-friendly and state-of-the-art technology or ICT infrastructure established throughout Sri Lanka that contribute all citizens to have equal and inexpensive access to dynamic information, modern communications, electronic services, and content creating the enabling environment for e-government, e-commerce and e-business (3)

The Nenasala (Global Knowledge center) Project is initiated as a major project under the strategy of “information Infrastructure” of the e-Sri Lanka Initiative (5).Nenasala project which is employed by the Information and communication Technology Agency (ICTA) of Sri Lanka is intended to raising the IT literacy of the people in Sri Lanka. The prime objective of this project is “to empower the rural community through information and communication Technology”. It is vital to note that all the services and support to be provided by the Nenasalas’ are done in such a way as to aim/ guarantee long term sustainability (3)

There are three different types of Nenasala or Knowledge centers depending on the complexity and the type of services that will be offered. Namely, Nenasala, E-library Nenasala, Distance and e-Learning centers (DeLs) and Tsunami Camp Nenasala (5).

Nenasala or Rural Knowledge centers running under the banner of “Vishwa danuma gamata” or “Global knowledge to the village”, the key objective of this programmer is to establish multi-service community information centers which is provided access to internet , email, telephones, fax, photocopy, computer training classes and other ICT services as well as act as a hub of local, national and global information resources to provide an catalytic effect for the rural communities in poverty reduction, social and economic development and building peace while aiming at providing these services in long-term, sustainable manner (5).

E-library is a smaller version of the rural knowledge centers but will follow a community model where some services are provided free with a few paid services to maintain the sustainability of the center.

A Distance and e-learning center will have distance and e-learning services inclusive of all infrastructure facilities such as video conferencing room, multi-media computer laboratory and a playback room. The overall objective of the DeL center project is to provide new information sharing and learning opportunities to a large spectrum of users in the country, through the establishment of an interactive, multi-channel network linking to existing domestic e-learning networks, and global networks for distance and e-learning , such as Global Development Learning Network (6).

Tsunami camp Nanasala is a special project, ICTA has undertaken to provide ICT facilities for tsunami victims by establishing small computer kiosks or Nenasalas in welfare camps where people who have been displaced due to the tsunami.

According to the United Nations Information and communication technologies task force in 2004, Sri Lanka has a high demand for ICT in the household (7).

ICTA had realized that the success of Nenasals depends on the level of ICT awareness among the general public. Hence it had carried out several supportive programs to improve the people’s awareness towards ICT. There is an impact of Nenasala on participants’ ICT awareness level. However, the impact is not significant. It is meant ICT awareness level of community is at considerable low level (5).

K. Keniston indicated that factors that make for effectiveness or ineffectiveness of grassroots ICT projects in developing nations are mostly unknown and rarely studied. Therefore, most those projects have not achieved their primary objectives within the expected time frames.

Other studies indicated that the critical success of ICT projects depends on the nature of the beneficiary involvement in the design and delivery of the proposed systems (8).

Sustainability is a multi-dimensional concept. According to Meddie Mayanja, ICT community development specialist, World Bank institute, the sustainability of Telecenters has several dimensions including; sustainability of infrastructure and equipment, services and relevancy, human resources and finance (9).

Furthermore, ICT literacy panel stated ICT literacy should not be simply defined as a familiarity or ability to use computers, internet, and technologies, panel defines it as ICT literacy is using digital technology, communication tools and/or networks to access, manage, integrate, evaluate and create information in order to function in a knowledge society (10). Furthermore, (5) explained that the Nenasala project impact on the improvement Computer Literacy rate of the rural community.

Although, the Nenasala project introduced more than 10 years and 1000<sup>th</sup> Nenasala Project was launched on 2005, Survey conducted by Department of Census and Statistics highlighted that overall computer literacy in Sri Lanka is 28.6% in 2017. Though the rate is 46.8% in Colombo district, it drops to 8.0% in Kilinochchiya. As well as urban area takes 40.5% computer literacy and rural and estate reported 27.1% and 9.1% respectively (11)

Accordingly, the study is mainly aimed to answer the question “Does Nenasala project impact on ICT Literacy of Rural Community?”

## 2 METHODOLOGY

In order to identify computer literacy improvement in Sri Lanka, the observation method was applied to collect secondary data. It was observed newspaper articles, research article, online web publications, in well-known sources and reports which are published in the department of census and statistics from 2004 to 2018 which was related to Computer Literacy Rate in Sri Lanka. Data Analysis was performed by using Descriptive statistics.

## 3 RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The Nenasala project initiated under the Information Infrastructure program (5) which is done as the prickly strategy in e-government project, launched 1000 telecenters island-wide, located within places of religious worship and public places (12).

The rapid developments in ICT have greatly contributed to improving human living standards worldwide. As well as ICT developments in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have become a compulsory requirement for a country to survive (11). As a result of that a lot of developing nations move with ICT project initiatives to improve the ICT awareness, ICT literacy, socio-economic conditions etc. (5). The following statistics (Table 2) shows that how the computer literacy rate is improved from 2006 to 2017 after the Nenasala telecenters are opened.

**Table 1: Computer Literacy Rate**

	2006/07	2009	2014	2015	2016	2017
Western	23.2	27.7	35.6	38.4	38.1	38.8
Central	14.8	18	23.4	25.9	26.3	28.8
Southern	15.6	19.8	24.8	27.3	27.4	29.3
Northern	N.A	N.A	16.8	19.4	21.1	16.9
Eastern	11.4	12.9	14.4	13.2	14.8	14.7

North Western	12.6	16.5	23.3	25.3	27.1	28.0
North Central	8.9	14.1	16.6	21.7	21.7	23.6
Uva	9.9	14.7	15.6	17.8	18.3	17.9
Sabaragamuwa	12.3	19.1	21.7	22.1	27.0	26.8

Source: Department of Census and Statistics

It is illustrated that in 2006/07 year North Central province (13) has lowest computer literacy rate (8.9%) and in 2017 it is indicated as 23.6 % rate (11). Furthermore, the Northern Province didn't participate to survey conducted by department of census and statistics in 2006/07 and 2009 because of the LTTE captured the Northern areas.

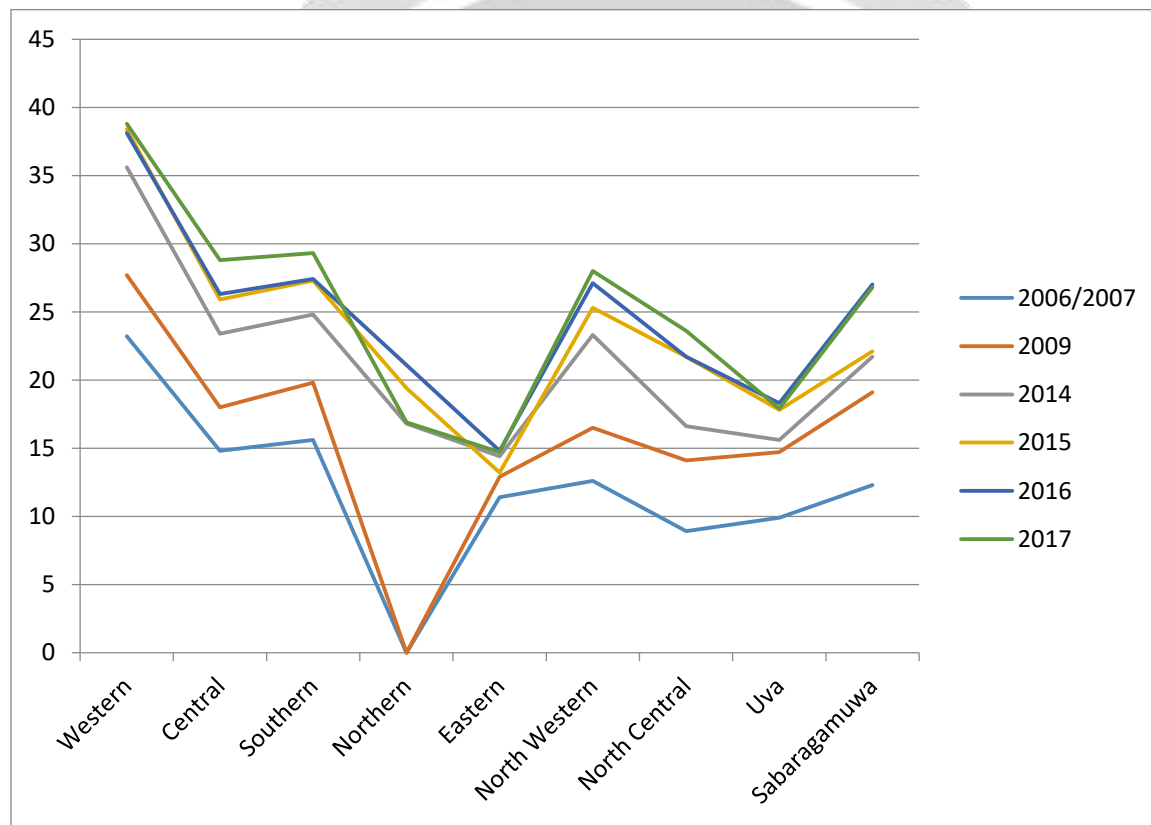
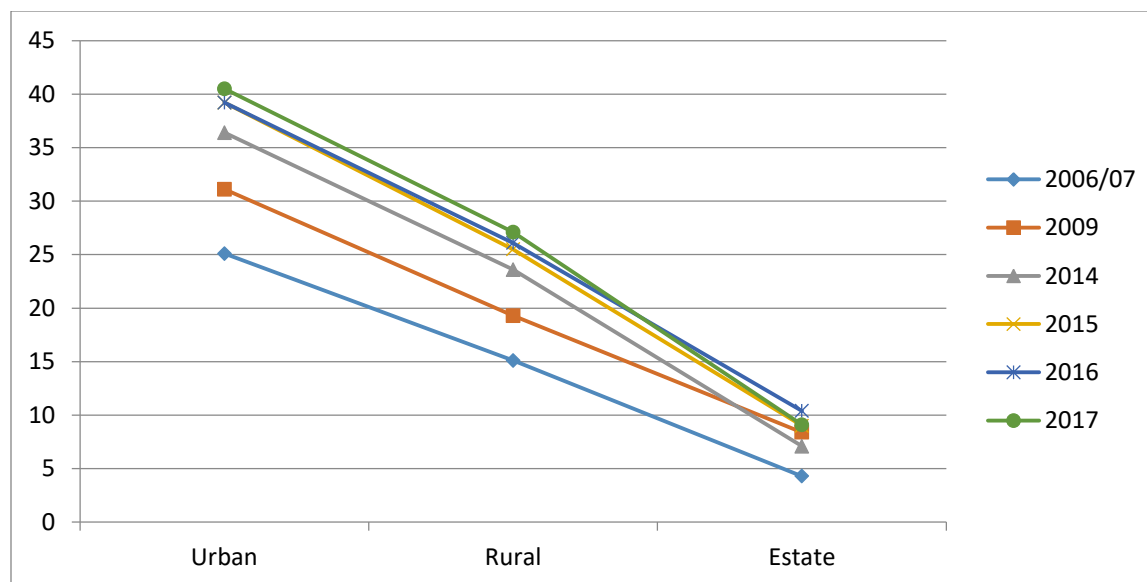


Fig. 1: Computer Literacy in Sri Lanka

The figure denoted that western province has the highest computer Literacy rate from 2006/2007 to 2017. And the northern and eastern province has the lowest computer literacy rate. The other provinces show considerable growth in computer literacy during the time period.

Hence, the urban, rural and estate areas' consists of computer literate people as follows from 2006/2007 to 2017. And also the figure shows that computer literate rate of the estate sector is very less rather than other sectors.



**Fig 2:** Computer Literacy in Sri Lanka

Furthermore, the department of the census and statistics highlighted that sources such as private training course, School/ university, government training centers, employment activities, workplace, family members, friends/ relatives, self and others which is taking computer training by the citizens in the Sri Lanka (13). The following table shows that the majority of those who are literate have received training from school/ university and private associations. The training received through the government training centers is comparatively low. But the estate sector denoted 13.6% training obtained from the government institute than the other two sectors in 2017.

**Table 2:** IT Training obtained statistics

Source	2014			2015			2017		
	Urban	Rural	Estate	Urban	Rural	Estate	Urban	Rural	Estate
Private training course	30.5	31.6	43.7	28.8	30.0	41.1	26.6	24.8	26.8
School/university	39.4	39.5	43.2	42.0	42.9	55.9	48.4	46.9	59.4
Government training centers	5.1	6.3	12.4	4.2	6.1	6.8	3.5	5.7	13.6
Employment activities	20.2	13.1	7.7	20.4	14.4	5.6	23.2	14.5	10.6
Work place	10.7	6.1	3.5	11.2	6.4	1.8	12.4	8.1	5.8
Family members	30.0	22.7	18.2	28.4	26.0	17.9	30.2	27.2	17.2
Friends/relatives	20.7	18.0	20.8	20.8	20.2	24.1	22.1	24.0	25.9
Self	29.5	19.9	10.0	29.7	21.6	11.3	33.8	31.5	20.0
Other	4.3	3.4	4.0	3.9	3.4	5.0	2.4	3.5	3.2

Source: Department of Census and Statistics



The above results show that government training institute such as Nenasala only contributes a very little amount for the improvement of computer literacy rather than other sources. Accordingly, the finding highlighted that Nenasala only contributes a very low percentage towards computer literacy and only estate population gets the highest training from the government institute.

#### 4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

The study mainly intended to discover the impact of the Nenasala project on ICT literacy of rural community. According to the findings, there is impact towards the ICT literacy from Nenasala project. Although, Nenasala usage affected towards ICT literacy rural and urban areas mostly used private institute and school/ university to improve their ICT literacy comparatively estate sector. Thus, policy implementations should be directed at setting realistic, practical and highly organized, to make the rural community aware of the benefits of ICTs and Nenasala centers. Moreover, comprehensive marketing strategies should be employed to make Nenasala successful in attracting target users. Furthermore, increase the Nenasala facilities which are given to the estate sector.

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