

## **Asian Telecentre Forum 2008: A Collaborative Platform for Asian Telecentre Stakeholders**

Between 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> November 2008, Ministry of Energy, Water and Communications, Malaysia played host to guests from all over the world. More than 600 participants followed the invitation to attend the international conference eASiA2008. The conference organised by Centre for Science, Development and Media Studies and elect Technomedia Pvt. Ltd.

The event has seen deliberations on five thematic domains, namely governance, education, health, mobiles and telecentres. One of the most dynamic sessions of the conference was the Asian Telecentre Forum. The Asian Telecentre Forum 2008, third in the series of telecentre forums organised by CSDMS in collaboration with telecentre.org, focused on the knowledge sharing between the flagships and emerging telecentre networks in the region and beyond.

For an unprecedented few days, a team of telecentre practitioners – a small, but growing cadre – enjoyed the rare opportunity of meeting and learning from each other; discussing, clarifying, and codifying their common goals and disparate experiences; acknowledging the challenges to success – even as they began to shape realistic strategies for overcoming them.

The participants and their organisational titles ranged widely. They ranged from Heads, Vice-Presidents from corporate sector; Representatives from telecentre networks, to grassroots level telecentre managers; academicians. Indeed, the discussions were varied with in-depth deliberations.

The forum was constructed around seven topical sessions scheduled over two days. Some of the discussion topics were: Mapping the Asian Telecentre Movement, Telecentre Networks 2.0, Role of Telecentre Networks in National Scale-up Programme, Sustainability of Telecentres: A Systemic Approach, telecentre.org Academy, Content, Services and Innovations at the Last Mile and Mapping Different Telecentre Business Models. Each session began with a brief presentation, followed by vigorous discussion and debate.

From the beginning of the forum, it was clear that all the of the participants – those from the largest, most sophisticated national organisations to those from smaller local and regional groups shared few challenges: national level scale-up, sustainability of telecentres, capacity building of telecentre practitioners, lack of locally relevant content and business plan for sustaining them.

Key Outcomes of the Forum:

- Asia is big and late-comer to the global telecentre movement
- Evolution of telecentres in Asia: Concept acknowledgement (1990s), Pilots (late 1990s), Scale-up (mid-2000s)

- Emergence of Asia-Pacific Knowledge Network of Telecentres
- Microsoft remains committed to empower and foster local innovation
- Huge opportunity for different stakeholders and the future is bright
- OneROOF, Inc. and D.Net demonstrated systemic approaches to ensure the sustainability of telecentres
- Emerging telecentre networks from East and South East Asian region joined telecentre.org community
- The forum has also paved the way for mutual knowledge exchange among the participants

In short, the forum was a gathering of peers. There were no experts dominating the proceedings, more interactive and participative. Rather, the participants took full advantage of an unusual opportunity for exhilarating collegial exchange and knowledge-sharing.