

# GROUNDVIEW

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# MAHAVILACHCHIYA

## VILLAGE WITH GLOBAL ACCESS



### Model e-Village in Mahavilachchiya brings ICT closer to rural areas

**H**aving served the children of the village of Mahavilachchiya with ICT and English education since 1998, Horizon Lanka was looking for innovative ways to expand its services and bring the benefits of ICT not just to the children but the adults in the village too.

In the past Horizon Lanka involved parents in ad-hoc computer lessons, field trips, IT exhibitions in Colombo, etc. What was clearly lacking was the need for a formal and organized programme to get the villagers of all walks of life actively involved in the benefits of ICT. After endless discussions with the staff, diaspora and local ICT experts the concept of the e-Village was born in 2004. The sole idea behind the e-Village project was to bring about a positive change in the community of Mahavilachchiya, by introducing people to the advantages of using ICT in seeking developmental solutions.

Whilst on the look out for an attractive name for the planned project, Horizon Lanka was visited by Dr Bandu Ranasinghe Chairman IDM (a premier ICT

company). Having studied the planned work, he suggested the name "Model e-Village" which aptly described the whole concept.

The model e-Village was officially launched in January 2005 with the hope that through the provision of an education in ICT and Internet accessibility at home and at ICT centres the community could enjoy an improved quality of life through informed decision making.

Horizon Lanka Foundation embarked on a step by step approach when unveiling the Model eVillage to ensure long term sustainability.

The first step was gaining community support in the e-village of Mahavilachchiya. Recognizing early on that the support of the local community would be intrinsic to the success of such a concept, one of the first steps Horizon Lanka embarked upon was the strengthening of relationships already established within the community. This also included strengthening ties with the local schools, temples, police authorities, government officials etc.

Following this was the installation of equipment, made possible through a

grant of approximately US\$ 10,000 provided by ICTA. The grant included the provision of 5 PCs for the computer lab along with the licensed Windows OS and Microsoft Office suit. Additionally, ICTA agreed to pay the monthly internet bill which they continue to this day. The ICTA also funded a study tour to Chennai, India for two staff members of Horizon Lanka.

With the help of IDM, 4 members of the Horizon Lanka team were enrolled in a 'Training the Trainer' course. This training proved to be invaluable in helping trainers disseminate the correct ICT message to the community.

Subsequently, Horizon Lanka Foundation began a series of training sessions and workshops aimed at introducing the community to the concept of an e-Village and familiarizing them with ICT usage and its benefits. When the community began taking a more active interest, Horizon Lanka offered advanced tutoring and even organized standard training courses for them through institutes they had firm relations with.

As predicted, since its introduction

the Model eVillage has seen endless benefits to the community of Mahavilachchiya. For instance now, at the click of a button, farmers are now able to access agricultural information, weather forecasts, crop prices and market information. They use this to make informed decisions about what time to harvest crops and at what price to sell their produce.

The unemployed are able to access information from the multimedia library and the internet which significantly speeds up and broadens their employment prospects. The ICT skills garnered at the training sessions and through regular use at home have been invaluable in securing gainful employment. The communication link between villagers and others across the country and the world have been enhanced. Presently, with Internet enabled computers at home and the knowledge to use it, families can talk to relatives abroad using web mail and IP Telephony services like Skype, all without any cost to themselves.

Perhaps the greatest success of the Model eVillage concept launched by Horizon Lanka has been in making village students IT professionals. Public schools in rural areas have poor resources, meaning that subjects like ICT are often overlooked. By providing children access to computers and the internet, they can learn to use these tools to improve their standard of work and hold them in good stead when competing with students from urban schools. Opening communication links between children



from other schools has brought about a better understanding and perhaps a sharing of resources. Ensuring that more children in the village benefit from the novel experience Horizon Lanka is providing more public schools, temples, etc. with computers and Internet access.

Taking into account the lack of communication between healthcare workers (including Doctors, nurses and pharmacists) at the local hospital, Horizon Lanka donated a used PC to the hospital and hopes to provide Internet access in the future. Through the use of IT health workers have been able to significantly reduce the time taken to perform a particular task, improve record keeping and provide better information sharing. Horizon Lanka also hopes to initiate a telemedicine project by combining Mahavilachchiya hospital with a city hospital and is currently looking for funding and government support to do so.

Access to bank accounts through the internet and commu-

nication via email has significantly reduced the inconvenience and travel costs incurred by the community as well as being a great time saver. Villagers do not need endure the burden of travelling to Anuradhpura town to conduct business transactions anymore as Horizon Lanka has made it possible for them to do so at home.

Something which has been near impossible in the past is the need for disseminating information quickly which is of utmost importance especially in times of crisis like a national disaster, war or drought. It is hoped that the introduction of ICT will facilitate the information flow to rural areas. Public information suppliers from NGOs and the government now have a better mode of access to the rural communities. Thus the community will begin to feel less isolated and become more interested in what is happening in the rest of the country. Additional benefits of the Model eVillage included-

#### **i. Multimedia Library**

The project provided the community with a multimedia library containing books, newspapers, periodicals, VCD, audio CD, DVD, audio cassettes, downloaded data CDs and other relevant reference materials. Using both the internet and international resources Horizon Lanka conducts information searches upon request assisting local members of the community and local businesses. Horizon Lanka also has an open invitation



to scholars, researchers, educationists, professionals and donors who may want contribute to the library by sending any valuable resources that may benefit the research facilities available.

### ii. Communication

Horizon Lanka was involved in getting the first mobile phone network to cover the village of Mahavilachchiya in 2006. Additionally Horizon Lanka provides Internet facility to the village through the main computer lab and through the mesh network.

### iii. Digital Photography

Digital photography, graphic designing and digital arts is another service currently provided by the e-Village group. By sourcing contracts from local and international businesses the team aims to enhance the skills base of the youth and provide further diversification of income within the village.

### iv. Videoing and video editing

Horizon Lanka has acquired the necessary equipment to do videoing educate the community in the art of video editing.

### v. Secretarial services

By providing MS Office training, Horizon Lanka e-Village has been able to educate youth and adults in the creation of MS PowerPoint presentations and the typesetting of letters and documents. This has been very useful in increasing employment opportunities as well as being beneficial to individuals who need to conduct business activities.



### vi. Webpage and Graphic Design

Web design is a positive initiative that has already commenced within the village. By taking up offshore web designing contracts, a promising ground for new career opportunities within the village has been created. By gaining new contracts, Horizon Lanka aims to nurture this talent in the community, bringing economic growth into the district.

Mahavilachchiya became the first rural village to benefit from mesh technology thanks to the Asia Pacific Development Programme and

Enterprise Technologies Pvt. Ltd. Mesh technology has allowed the whole community wireless access to the Internet from their homes, ICTA facilitated this initiative. Since its inception Horizon Lanka's eVillage concept has furnished over 50 families in Mahavilachchiya with used desktop computers. Following up on the unprecedented success achieved in Mahavilachchiya Horizon Lanka Foundation is now able to share its experience, taking ICT to the rural communities of Sri Lanka. The Foundation provides consulting services with respect to launching and setting up rural level ICT centers throughout the country.

For more information please visit- [www.horizonlanka.org](http://www.horizonlanka.org)

**Nandasiri Wanninayaka,**  
Horizon Lanka Foundation,  
Mahavilachchiya.



In rural areas plagued by unemployment, isolation, and ill equipped schools, Nandasiri Wanninayaka makes rural youth competitive in the global marketplace. Wanninayaka who was born in remote Mahavilachchiya found a way to introduce modern technology to isolated communities, link villagers to outside networks through the Internet. He bravely opted to use alternative education (with an emphasis on the English language and ICT) to foster teamwork, creativity, and self-esteem amongst the students. Nandasiri Wanninayaka has been able to pioneer Sri Lanka's first village-level outsourcing venture.

