

Regional Workshop 4-10 May 2005, Agra, India

Managing Sustainable E-Community Centers

Opening Remarks by Mr. Jeoung-Keun Lee, Senior Capacity Building Specialist, Asian Development Bank Institute, 4 May 2005

Ladies and gentlemen, I am delighted to join the Director General of CPSC, Dr. Man-Gon Park, in welcoming you to the Regional Workshop on Managing Sustainable E-Community Centers. I extend my deep appreciation to Mr. Sanjay Prasad, District Magistrate of Indian Government for honoring us with his presence this morning. We would like to express our gratitude to the Government of India for their warm hospitality, which has made possible the holding of this workshop.

This workshop has been jointly organized by ADB Institute and the Colombo Plan Staff College in hopes to address a goal that all of us here hold in common: to establish effective, efficient, and sustainable e-community centers. Information and communications technology (ICT) has never been more essential than now, in today's knowledge-based society and economy. For this reason, many countries have taken the initiative to build e-community centers—especially in rural areas, where the availability and accessibility of ICT tend to be low.

Currently, there are several models of e-community centers that provide basic Internet services, including the telecenter franchise, civic telecenter, phone shop and multipurpose community telecenter. These models are not exclusive, since some e-community centers are in fact hybrid versions of two or three different types. Whereas phone shops used to offer only basic telephone services, several shops are now moving into Internet service and even videoconference services, as the market develops.

On the other hand, it has come to our attention that in many cases, e-community centers have been established by development agencies on a pilot basis and often their sustainability is not guaranteed after the initial project period. Therefore, it is necessary to review various business models of e-community centers and look for the best model for their sustainability.

The questions that confront us, then, are these:

- (i) What will make e-community centers better suited to the needs of the people who use them?
- (ii) What will improve their efficiency and sustainability?

- (iii) How do we monitor performance of e-community center?
- (iv) What steps can we take now to promote e-community centers, and
- (v) What new options and challenges can we expect in the future?

Over the next several days, we will be examining these issues in greater detail and, with the help of our resource speakers and your input, generating realistic strategies that will bring us closer to our common goal. To achieve our goal, we must move swiftly from vision to action. We have to develop a road map and mobilize our resources. Let us work together to bridge the digital divide gap by providing information services to the poor through sustainable e-community centers.

We have a very busy and exciting week ahead. I wish you all successful and fruitful deliberations. Thank you.