

Last Mile Initiative



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Sri Lanka Bridges Digital Divide

The Asia and Near East Bureau IT Coordinator, Jonathan Metzger, led a team this month to Sri Lanka to seek ways to bridge the divide using Last Mile approaches. The result is a global development alliance that unites major telecommunications firms, a nationwide network of bank branches, and technical assistance from USAID.



*Typical Sampath Bank Branch to furnish community access and telecom hub.
Photo by J. Metzger.*

Sampath Bank has 67 branch offices around the country, of which some 15-20 are considered “rural.” Partnering with firms such as IBM, Sampath will donate its surplus telecommunications capacity, reliable electricity, and facilities so that communities can access the Internet and other services in the evenings and on weekends when the branches would otherwise be empty.

Planning is now underway to construct a suitable business model for linking schools, other area businesses, and even private residences. Jeff Allen of USAID/Sri Lanka is leading an effort to generate content focusing on jobs, work force development skills, “English as a Second Language” training, and up-to-the-minute crop price information for farmers. ■



*Downtown Deniyaya in Sri Lanka, potential Last Mile site.
Photo by J. Metzger.*

Six First-Year Countries to Cover Last Mile

Last Mile Initiative programs are now being implemented in six USAID countries: Peru, Guatemala, Macedonia, Sri Lanka, Ethiopia, and Nigeria. Regional Bureau IT Coordinators nominated country programs and then reviewed concept papers along with staff of the Information Technology Team in EGAT.

Initiative funding averages around \$400,000 per country from a special account established by Administrator Natsios and managed through EGAT. These “core” funds are being used in most cases to support applications of wireless and other technologies to serve rural communities.

Missions and regional bureaus are providing complementary funding to assure Last Mile technologies contribute directly to field objectives. Additional funds have been provided from Washington to undertake preliminary design and selection work for second-year countries. Regional Bureau IT Coordinators can provide further details. ■



Last Mile is an Initiative of USAID Administrator Andrew Natsios

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