



Last Mile Initiative

Beyond the Bridge

Bulletin 6 – March 2005

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Ethiopia Workshop Achieves Site Selection Consensus

In Ethiopia, co-ops are vital to sustaining family incomes in rural areas. For example, in the Mekele area of the Tigray region, a cooperative made up completely of displaced soldiers harvests fish from a local lake. They have adopted sustainable fish management practices and have purchased a refrigerated truck to deliver fish to area markets. However, they must travel more than 20 km in order to access a telephone to market their products and to better match demand with supply. That's where the Last Mile Initiative in Ethiopia comes in.



National Telecommunications Cooperative Association

Participants in Ethiopia "Rural Connectivity through Partnership with Cooperatives Associations" Workshop

In a January 2005 workshop in Addis Ababa, USAID brought together stakeholders from the regulator, incumbent telecommunications operator, Ethiopian Federal Cooperatives Commission, and select rural communities. The workshop resulted in the selection of the first pilot site and the development of procedures and criteria for future site selections for the Last Mile Initiative in Ethiopia.

The National Telecommunications Cooperative Association (NTCA) led the workshop that was sponsored by the initiative and by USAID's Cooperatives Development Program in DCHA/PVC. The community-based co-op model works well in Ethiopia because co-ops are fundamentally for-profit businesses that are owned and operated by the communities they serve. According to Brian Mitchell of NTCA, "they are especially adaptable to the business model of providing utility services because their shareholders benefit from the investments made and services provided."

Innovators Gear Up

One of the most exciting features of USAID's Last Mile Initiative is gearing up for action. The Innovation Team is now being established to encourage new approaches in three key Last Mile areas—technology solutions, business models and applications.

The core innovation coordinators are Michael Best, Georgia Institute of Technology; Al Hammond, World Resources Institute; and Michael Tetelman, Academy for Educational Development. USAID is engaging these individuals and their organizations as sources of ICT knowledge and perspective-- a Last Mile think tank.

"My hope is that the external nature of the Innovation Team lends it credibility," says Jeff Cochrane, Last Mile Initiative Worldwide Coordinator. By offering advice and counsel, they have the flexibility to weave innovative ICT approaches into the fabric of every Last Mile program.