‘Bridges to the Future Initiative’ completes two-year ICT for basic education effort with dramatic success

Unique Telugu language literacy strategy makes ICT available to out-of-school youth and primary school students in AP

Hyderabad, January 9, 2007: Initially launched by the Government of Andhra Pradesh in 2004, the **Bridges to the Future Initiative** (BFI) is a landmark for education in the State. Under this initiative, the International Literacy Institute (ILI), at the University of Pennsylvania (USA), and in partnership with Byrraju Foundation, IIIT and other agencies, an “extreme user-friendly” Telugu literacy instructional program uses currently installed PCs in school settings to provide high quality literacy instruction to out-of-school youth and primary school students. Results of a two-year long impact study show dramatic results in putting drop-out youth back into school, and raising learning achievement of in-school children aged 8-10 years in poor rural settings.

In her message the Hon-ble Minister of Education, Smt. N. Rajyalaxmi said that Andhra Pradesh has been actively pursuing a policy of promoting basic education, literacy, and technological literacy in an attempt to bridge the digital divide and enable the underprivileged to familiarize themselves with ICT and move into the mainstream. In her address, the Minister expressed her satisfaction that the GOAP and ILI have collaborated to produce an innovative curriculum and teaching process in Telugu that enables children, youth and adults, both in and out of school, to be integrated into today’s society driven by Information Technology.

Through the **Bridges to the Future Initiative** computers and other ICT infrastructure is used for the benefit of the regular secondary school students and teachers. After school hours, youth who have had little or no years of formal education now have access to the same computers and as well as culturally appropriate and educational effective software.

Prof Dan Wagner, Director of ILI (University of Pennsylvania), presented preliminary results of two longitudinal evaluation impact studies, one that focused on out-of-school youth in Hyderabad and Ranga Reddy districts, and the second one in-school students in schools in West Godavari district. Prof Wagner said, “Internet and ICT access is growing exponentially, and we can now bring high-quality, high-interest local language multimedia directly to the learner, regardless of age or school status – a breakthrough in promoting a truly literate society. ILI’s findings suggest that BFI high quality instructional multimedia software can help reading and calculating in youth at about twice the rate (per hour) as ordinary instruction that is without ICT support.”

Prof C.J. Daswani, former head the National Scheme of Non-Formal Education and BFI-India National Director, emphasized that the BFI programme provides a new opportunity for Andhra Pradesh and all of India to help solve the problems of illiteracy. “The initial response from out-of-school and in-school learners clearly demonstrates that ICT can be a powerful motivating tool for enabling these children to enter the mainstream. The specially developed software in Telugu enables these children to learn independently and use ICTs with minimum of guidance. Most

impressive was the fact that so many – nearly 33% of youth in the BFI programme – were able to return to full-time schooling," Prof Daswani stated.

Infrastructural and technical support for BFI-India has come from the State Government of Andhra Pradesh and the University of Pennsylvania. Core and continuing project support has been provided by JPMorganChase, with additional assistance from the World Bank, Spencer Foundation, Unicef, U.S. Department of Education, UNESCO, ICICI Bank, IIIT-Hyderabad, Azim Premji Foundation, and Byrraju Foundation.

BFI future activities will involve a scaling-up across AP state. More broadly, the BFI model is now scalable at low cost for numerous Indian languages. Languages on the near-term horizon include Hindi, Urdu and Kannada – all of which can be produced based on the model already developed for Telugu. Such a scaling up would allow the BFI model to be rolled out across many parts of India where an ICT infrastructure is, or will soon be, in place. The BFI-India provides a powerful model for child and adult literacy and numeracy learning, based on the appropriate use of ICTs for learning, in India and globally.

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