**Digital Inclusion in Sri Lanka**

**POLICY BRIEF**

**Abstract**

The general objective of this study is to reveal the level of digital literacy and the exposure to the Internet among the Sri Lankans, especially targeting those below 25 years of age, rural areas and those marginalised such as women. In order to achieve this objective, quantitative data was collected from already published information by reputed organisations including the Ministry of Educations, Department of Education, Ministry of Finance, Central Bank of Sri Lanka, ICTA, and The World Bank.

**Introduction**

It is evident that technological advancement and innovation are the long term boosters of economic development. For a developing country like Sri Lanka it is important to lay a strong foundation for building its capacity to acquire and create knowledge in order to take opportunities offered by globalization. Within the present environment of knowledge-economy, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) knowledge among school children and youth is fundamentally crucial for the future wellbeing of the people of Sri Lanka (United Nations Development Program [UNDP], 2004).

During the past, all governments attempted to improve computer literacy among Sri Lankans through various policies and programmers. Yet, expected results have not been very encouraging. Modern day youth are the potential labor force of future Sri Lanka, provided, they are capable of participating productively in the knowledge-economy (De Silva, 2008). Such participation is expected to be greatly governed by the required ICT knowledge of youth in all segments of Sri Lankan society. The general objective of this study is to elucidate the level of digital literacy and exposure to the internet among Sri Lankans based on their main economic activity - student, employed, unemployed inactive household members. For the purpose of this study, a person is deemed IT literate if a person can operate any function on a computer/mobile on their own.

The Department of Censes and Statistic of Sri Lanka [DCSSL] conducted two household surveys on computer literacy in 2004, and 2006/2007. In 2009, a third Computer Literacy Survey (CLS) was conducted for further findings. A nationally distributed sample of 10,150 households with 31,302 persons aged 5 – 69 years were enumerated for this issue of the CLS and all the districts were covered other than those in the Northern Province.

The results of the 2009 CLS, revealed that on average, at least one computer is available in one out of ten household in Sri Lanka. The availability of computers in the urban household sector is 23.6% where a computer is available in one out of four households. This is much higher than in the rural sector, which is 9.2% and in the estate sector which is 3.1%. Considering the households that have acquired the first computer during the last five years, the rural sector shows a recent higher acquisition of 75% than the urban sector of 66%.

Computer literacy reported in 2014 in Sri Lanka was 25.1% increased from 16.1% reported in 2006/07. Also, there were highly significant differences in computer literacy across the residential sectors. The highest computer literacy 31.1% was reported from the urban sector households and the lowest 8.4% was reported among the estate sector household population. However, the estate sector showed the highest growth of above 50% in both computer literacy and awareness during the period from 2006 to 2009. Among the provinces the highest level of computer literacy was also reported from the Western Province 28% and the least level was in the Eastern Province 13%.

Computer literacy among males 27% was only a little higher than that of females 23% in 2014. The younger generation aged 15–19 years showed the highest computer literacy rate among all the age groups from 5 to 69 years, and, the older age groups beyond 50 years showed a comparatively lower computer literacy rate.

Computer literacy among the employed population in Sri Lanka was above 40% in 2009. It was evident that a higher computer literacy rate was achieved as the employed population reached a higher position such as Senior Officials and Managers 86%, Professionals 72%, Technical and Associate Professionals 70% and Clerks 77%. However, a nearly 20% computer literacy rate was reported by individuals engaged in the category of elementary occupations as well.

Further, 13% of the population aged 5 to 69 years used the Internet facility at least once during the last twelve months. The pattern of using the Internet among provinces was similar to the pattern of using e-mail. It is important to note that the higher use of the Internet correlates to the higher use of e-mail. In the urban sector, where facilities are commonly available, a higher use of both email and Internet is evident than in the non-urban sectors.

**Findings & Recommendations towards improving the demand side stimulation in Sri Lanka**

First, through implementing awareness raising campaigns at the community level by Executing of public educational schemes along with private initiatives aimed at increasing digital literacy among youths, rural women and elderly population**.**

**Youth**

* Promotion computer related subjects from primary school
* Making ICT as a compulsory Subject (already O/L and A/L has this, but implement for below grades too)
* Maintenance of School computer laboratories at optimum level
* Preparation of learning aids closer to children using internet
* Increasing the efficiency of the ICT related teachers
* Direction of school leavers to equip themselves vocational training based on ICT

**Rural Areas**

* ICT training through carnivals and promotional campaigns
* Awareness programs for parents introducing the benefits learning IT and career opportunities

**Women**

* TV Programs instructing women/ people in area in the form of a tutorial enabling to educate
* Programs at community centers

Second by developing competency among those building awareness and skills regarding the full utility of the digital world and how they can be used not only for social purposes but also to address business and developmental needs.

* Strong efforts towards providing ICT related training for marginalized groups such as rural women, low income earners, from war affected areas etc.
* Provide social entrepreneurship opportunities for the local communities
* Train Service Delivery Agents to run viable businesses delivering IT services
* Telecom service providers to train rural workforce to cater to their own needs
* Train people in smaller towns & villages for IT sector jobs

**Sources**

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