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fast facts

Project: Mobile Portal for Fisheries Community Services
Lead Organization: National Institute of Fisheries and Nautical Engineering (NIFNE)
Country: Sri Lanka
Budget: 40,000 AUD

situation

In Sri Lanka, over 600,000 people are directly employed in fisheries and over three million people are indirectly dependent on this sector for their economic livelihood. The unavailability of firsthand market information, such as demand for and supply of different varieties of fish and price fluctuations in domestic and international markets, is a challenge compounded by the existence of middlemen who play a central role and reap unfair profits. Both customers and the fishermen themselves are adversely affected by current market practices where profits and savings are determined by the powerful brokers.

solution

In this pilot project, the project team developed two mobile and web-based service portals designed to provide a wide variety of various types of information to meet needs of the fisheries community. This system is composed to two parts. The first is a SMS-enabled web-based Trading Portal that offers market information along all points of the value chain so that fishermen receive a fair market price and consumers receive a better, less-expensive product. The second deliverable, the Info-Server Portal, provides fishermen with critical information such as weather forecasts and fishing reports. While information provisioning services often require the purchase of expensive and prohibitively complicated equipment, the operational platform developed by the team makes it possible to provide this information through affordable mobile telephones.

Given the high potential value of the Trading Portal to the fishing community, this first system was given priority status and was completed within the first six months of the project. The portal was developed using open-source software and works across mobile and Internet platforms. The second half of the year was dedicated to the development of the Info-Server Portal system. This system allows data entry operators to upload time-sensitive information (such as weather forecasts) to a central server and then push that information to end-users. As with the Trading Portal system, the Info-Server Portal system was also created with open-source software.

In addition to the development of the information systems, the project team made a conscious effort throughout the development process to seek the input of project stakeholders -- primarily fishermen and fish-buyers. In return, several training sessions and awareness-building programs were held to familiarize both communities about the systems and to train target users to use the portals once they became available.

While stakeholders understood the importance of the project and the potential for the portals to scale to real-world implementations, there were significant financial and infrastructure constraints which had a direct impact on the deployment of the initial project. Only three fishing villages were able to participate in testing the Mobile Trading and Info-Server Portals. A future goal is to engender support from the government and community organizations in order to support a larger roll-out and subsequent effect on prices and goods.

broader impact

Since the original project, the team has been interacting with target stakeholder groups via existing community organizations such as Fisheries-Cooperative Organizations, Nanasala Tele-centers and other Social Organizations. It is believed these organizations may become active project partners in the future, and could, with NIFNE's guidance and support, eventually assume responsibility for the maintenance and further development of both information systems.

In addition to the project itself, the team expects to see a number of secondary impacts as a result of the original implementation. First among these is likely a market expansion within the industry as a "smart" fish trading culture begins to emerge as a result of increase access to relevant information. It is the team's hope that this increase of information exchange will allow fishermen to explore new business models and enter into market agreements that will increase income opportunities and the quality of life of fishermen, but also an increase in dignity as the perception of their work changes.
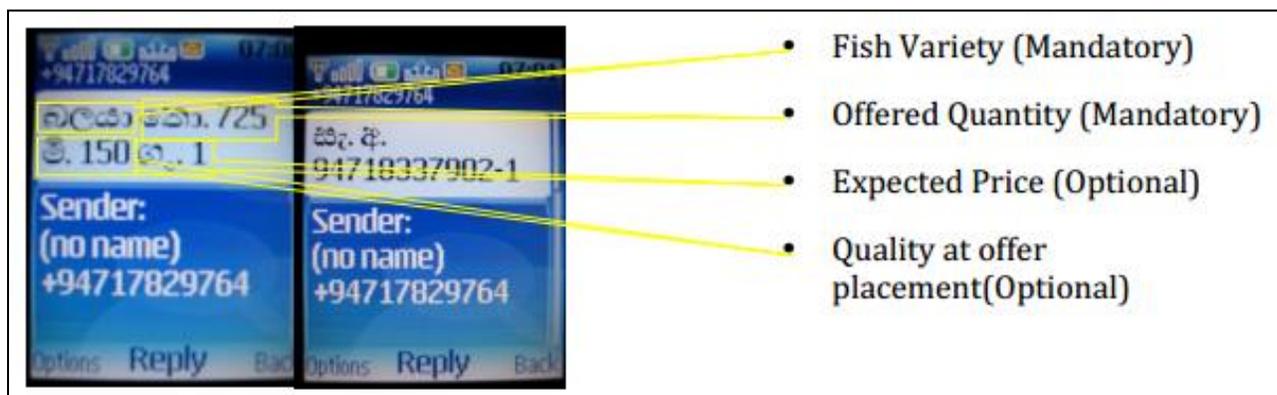
Screen shots of mobile application

project contact

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