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fast facts

Project: Building low-cost telecommunications infrastructure in Myanmar:
Localization and training of a practical guide
Organization: First Myanmar Korea Group Company Limited
Country: Myanmar
Budget: 30,000.00 AUD

situation

Emerging from years of closed-door economic and social policies, Myanmar is on the path towards change. However, barriers to internet access and connectivity due to high cost and insufficient infrastructure hinder the rate of information and communication technology (ICT) use – and the socioeconomic benefits of ICT. The government of Myanmar is currently increasing investment in the telecommunications sector and has adopted its second ICT Master Plan covering 2011-2015 and focusing on infrastructure and legal frameworks. While these steps are promising, access to affordable and reliable internet still remains a challenge for most people. It is critical to strengthen both the institutional and human capacity for ICT access and use, and to develop in-country skills and policies conducive to supporting ICTs.

solution

Myanmar ranks 119th out of the 158 countries in the International Telecommunication Union's (ITU) ICT Development Index; and 159th out of 161 countries when considering the fixed broadband sub-basket as a percentage of gross national income per capita. Prohibitive broadband costs make it difficult to participate in the socioeconomic opportunities that individuals and societies enjoy with increased internet access and use. Given a landmark shift in the political climate of Myanmar, the internet also promotes more efficient and transparent government services. Despite these tangible benefits, online connectivity in Myanmar is restricted to the urban centers of Yangon and Mandalay, and is too expensive for use by the majority of the population. While access to global internet services may be prohibitively expensive, there are many options to increase local and regional communications networks through email, voice technologies and local area networks, which can benefit individual, commercial and governance activities. These systems require skills not generally available in the population, creating a vast opportunity for technical university students to supply this expertise. Universities in Myanmar also have a need to update their technical curriculum, providing the opportunity for teaching such technologies as wireless networking.

The objective of this project is to support ICT capacity building in Myanmar by translating one of the leading books in wireless networking into the Myanmar language for use in university classrooms. The title, "Wireless Networking in the Developing World" (WNDW), is a well-known resource and guidebook for those working in ICT in emerging countries. WNDW was initially created as an outcome of the 2005 World Summits on Free Information Infrastructures (WSFII), and has been regularly updated and made available online under the Creative Commons license. The third and most recent edition of WNDW was published as both a book and online resource in 2013, and has been adopted by leading universities around the world as a primary textbook.

First Myanmar Korea Group Co. Ltd. (FMK) aims to translate WNDW into Myanmar in order to build awareness about the capabilities of wireless networking as a socioeconomic development strategy. FMK is working closely with the University of Computer Studies, Yangon (UCSY) to provide both linguistic and

technical translation. UCSY will also provide local case studies to make the guidebook more relevant and accessible to users in Myanmar. The Myanmar version on WNDW will be made available in print, compact disk and online to academic institutions, NGOs, telecenters, community groups and entrepreneurs in Yangon. It will also be made available on the Wireless Networking in the Developing World website at http://wndw.net. UCSY is considering adopting the text as part of its standard curriculum. UCSY is a flagship university in Myanmar, and any textbook adoption will affect the network of 26 regional universities. The Myanmar version of WNDW is also being considered for use at the Yangon Center of Excellence, which is a technical and vocational institution that teaches basic IT courses and is expanding into networking and other more advanced topics. As a relatively new institution, COE is interested in developing on-site laboratories and curriculum, and well as growing its online presence and teaching resources.

In addition to translating the book, FMK is collaborating with UCSY to host workshops and training on the WNDW content. The first workshop was held at UCSY on 16-21 December, 2013. Twenty-seven teachers from 22 Myanmar campuses attended. On the final day the group installed a campus-wide Wi-Fi network at UCSY. The network is open and freely available to students and faculty. The workshop was led by Mr. Tenzin Yonten, a trainer from AirJaldi Research and Innovation, a non-profit organization established in Dharamsala, India that promotes Wi-Fi networking (http://main.airjaldi.org/).

broader impact

Through outreach conducted by FMK, there is an increased awareness of the value of ICT, wireless networking, and the book translation project, mostly through university channels. FMK is working with academic stakeholders to improve technical curriculum at leading and regional schools. Adoption of the Myanmar version of WNDW will help to strengthen the capacity of students and faculty to actually develop wireless networks. This in turn will enable graduates of these programs to build networks to facilitate a much broader, more accessible ICT-based information society that all Myanmar citizens can benefit from, either as consumers or producers of information and information services. In order for Myanmar to continue to evolve as a more democratic, open, and advanced society, it is imperative that the tools of development – software, hardware and technology policy – are in place and available for all to benefit.

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Students with copies of the Myanmar Version of Wireless Networking in the Developing World