



Saral Services

Annual Report April 2007-08

Society for action research for Accelerated livelihood Services

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Executive Director's Letter

We are happy to present our Annual Report for 2007-08. This year has seen good growth in multiple dimensions, and has also helped us build clarity and focus on the nature of interventions. We are extremely grateful for the steadfast support given to us by our collaborators and associates. Especially the Cooperatives and other organizations of the rural people, the Oxford University, Sheffield Hallam University, and organizations such as SRIJAN, AROHAN, CCF, and PRADAN. We take this opportunity to thank all our associates, friends and well wishers.

To address the growing demand for support on capacity building, we experienced difficulties, mainly due to lack of personnel in key functions. As an organization we learnt that we need to build our own capacity to handle these assignments more effectively. To build our own capacity we have inducted senior persons and have initiated means of providing appropriate training to our staff.

SARAL Services was able to launch SaralTA 101, a unique ICT training programme for rural youth which through a loan and guaranteed employment builds ICT skills in rural youth and helps to get them engaged in the community of ICT for development. New areas in which we initiated action for application include the harnessing of mobiles and IVRs technologies to rural development, capacity building, strengthening the participatory IT design process and agile technologies for software development and research works.

We look forward to the coming year enriched by our experience, emboldened by the support extended to us, strengthened by our learnings and aware of our weaknesses and limitations and with a conviction that we are involved in a purpose that has implications for the greater good of the many.

Overview

As we look back on the year passed and look towards the coming year we see the need to balance our interventions across two dissimilar approaches that need to resonate with each other – that of showing initiative and being pro-active and that of encouraging participation and carrying others along. In view of this our slogan is “Encourage Participation. Be Pro-active.”

Activities

Capacity Building

Initiated SaralTA

One of the key findings of the ICT study conducted by Saral Services in 2007 on the application of ICT in rural India is that IT adoption by rural based micro finance institutions (MFIs) and District Cooperative Banks (DCBs) is handicapped due to inadequate supply of IT trained persons.

It is ironic that a parallel problem exists of rural unemployment. The fact is that unemployed rural youth for ICT are not employable because they lack adequate technical training, primarily due to the lack of access to such technical education.

In the light of these findings Saral Services designed and launched SaralTA, a training academy for rural youth to acquire ICT skills. In December 2007 SaralTA launched SaralTA 101, a 4 month residential training program, with a batch consisting of 10 trainees. SaralTA 101 aims to make youths employable by giving them the required exposure to ICT and training them in the basic management of specific applications that are being used in the organizations and institutions in the rural areas. We made arrangements of complete absorption of the successful trainees in Safal Solutions and other organization working in the field of ICT for development.

Keeping in mind profile of the prospective trainees the training fees are covered through a loan which will be recovered from the salaries of the successful trainees. For the first batch the loan has been advanced by Safal Solutions and other avenues of loans are being explored such as the Vidya Loan of Basix and loans by HDFC bank.

The attempt is to match deployment with catchment to ensure that the immediate need of ICT technical personnel is met and rural youth get an intense exposure to the technologies and engage in systematic practice (combining work with learning) to be able to embark on life long learning in this exciting and fast developing field.

The long term aim is to create a batch of trainees from amongst the alumni of SaralTA 101 who show good prospects of taking up programming who could undergo a SaralTA 201 training course in software programming so they could emerge as developers.

On 8 March batch 02 of SaralTA 101 was started.

Stabilization of ICT Use

Saral Services continues to be involved in capacity building activities to ensure stable use of ICT in organizations involved livelihood and micro finance. Here two models are being followed.

The first is placing our staff in the office of the user organization to ensure that bugs and requirements are communicated face-to-face and rectified immediately. This process is an

attempt to emulate the principles of agile technologies. This process has been implemented in Pradan at Delhi and Arohan at Kolkatta. The second model is focusing on training and demonstration of software and is being applied with the various partner organizations of the CCF.

Research

KHETI Project

Saral is actively participating in the KHETI project which is a joint action research project with the Sheffield Hallum University (UK), Safal Solutions Pvt Ltd. and Pradan and is currently being actioned with the Sironj Crop Producers Company Ltd., at Sironj, Madhya Pradesh. The project aims to create a service by which agricultural advice can be accessed by farmers through service providers who will be able to capture images and voice in the field and convey the same to a scientist who after hearing the voice and viewing the picture will be able to give advice through the service provider to the farmer. The scientist could also be available to answer queries on the phone. All such queries and responses would be captured by the application and an editor could then create information capsules which farmers directly and/or through the service providers could access and gain useful and relevant information regarding scientific agricultural practices that needs to be followed in their area.

This application involves the use of mobile technology and Interactive Voice Reactive System (IVRS) along with the web. For Saral Services the involvement in this project is giving valuable insight and experience in the process of Participatory Design and the detailing of the how the Standard Operating Process can be applied to the application of new technologies and into new domains.

VIKASDWAR Project

As part of the action research agenda in the concept of the Community e-Center we have designed a pilot project to acquire knowledge regarding the crucial sustainability issue of the CeC. We have called this project the Vikasdwar (Village Internet Kiosk for All Services Developing Worldwide Access to Resources) project. We have envisioned a partnership model where the actual Vikasdwar kiosk would be run by a village entrepreneur, who has been given training in handling the equipment and more importantly owns the business processes which will help him/her deliver chargeable service to customers. At present the focus is on delivering services under the heads of education, entertainment and e-commerce. We plan to start operations for 1 Vikasdwar Kiosk as a pilot project and then roll out others based on the learnings.

Appointment of Managers

This year Saral Services have managed to acquire the services of two managers with many years of experience. One has come in on deputation from Safal Solutions and is looking after the

SaraITA program as Training Coordinator. The other was appointed in March to look after capacity building, documentation and project management.

Plan for 2008-09

Capacity Building

SaraITA

The batch 01 is over and all (with the exception of one whose Field Trip has been postponed last week of May due to his personal problems) have absorbed by Safal Solutions in different locations as IT Technicians (Field Support). Batches 02 is undergoing training, but of the original 10 trainees only 4 are left as they could not cope with the level of the training. Our learning is that we need to be more careful in the screening process. The screening for batch 03 is underway and the training program is scheduled to start on 19 May. The plan is to consolidate our learnings of these batches and develop the SaraITA 101 course as a multi location course. Also the plan is to have one batch of SaraITA 201 from amongst the alumni of SaraITA 101 who show good prospects of taking up programming.

Stabilizing of applications

Early in this year we have been informed how the software application developed by Safal Solutions was rejected by Trust Micro-Fin Network, without any information from them. This case was discussed and an important learning was acquired for our activities of stabilizing ICT applications in organizations. These learnings included the recognition that over time a drift away from the agreed objectives occurs especially when we leave all initiative on user organization and abandon a proactive approach. In an attempt to rebuild a proactive approach we have identified the need to identify both formal and informal “points of verification” at important nodes and proactively ensure that the software application is being used and is serving its desired purpose. In a nutshell the learning is: “No news, need not be good news.”

Our stabilizing activities are now focusing on creating and maintaining “points of verification” in terms of the agreed objectives with the user organizations including Pradan, Arohan and CCF.

Training

We have initiated capacity building exercises for prospective tech leads, project leads in software development and in field support so they can do better project management in the light of learnings from agile technologies and approaches and participatory IT design processes.

Research

KHETI Project

Our activities in this joint action research project will continue. We will learn more about the applications of mobile technologies, IVRS and other telecom applications to the domain of rural

development. Apart from refinement of the features in the coming year focus will also be on building business models and exploring the scalability and replication of these models.

VIKASDWAR Project

We have identified prospective partner rural entrepreneurs and have given them an initial training and exposure. The plan is to build a viable and sustainable model for rural IT partnerships with selected rural entrepreneurs.

Accounts and Audit

We have maintained our accounts as per the rules of accounts and a Charter Accountant has audited our accounts and report is being presented before you.

SARAL SERVICES

BALANCE SHEET AS AT MARCH 31,		<i>Rs.</i> 2008	2007
	<i>Sch</i>		
<u>LIABILITIES:</u>			
RESERVES AND SURPLUS	1	491,645	11,739
	TOTAL	491,645	11,739
<u>ASSETS:</u>			
FIXED ASSETS	2	102,580	56,634
CURRENT ASSETS, LOANS AND ADVANCES			
Cash and Bank Balances	3	79,689	79,201
Advances Recoverable and Other current assets	4	1,082,268	109,407
		1,161,957	188,608
Less: CURRENT LIABILITES AND PROVISIONS			
Current Liabilities	5	767,722	229,483
Provisions (Fringe Benefit Tax)		5,170	4,020
		772,892	233,503
NET CURRENT ASSETS		389,065	(44,895)
	TOTAL	491,645	11,739

Accounting Policies and Notes to Accounts

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As per our report of our even date attached
for **V. NAGARAJAN & Co.,**
Chartered Accountants



A.G. Sitaraman
(A.G.SITARAMAN)

Partner

Membership No. 017799

for **SARAL SERVICES**

[Signature]
Executive Director

[Signature]
Director



Date: July 03,2008
Place: Hyderabad

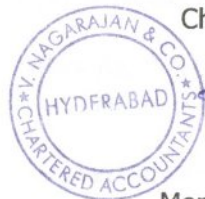
SARAL SERVICES

		Rs.	
INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED ON MARCH 31,		2008	2007
	<i>Sch</i>		
INCOME:			
Information Tehcnology Services		1,965,050	1,205,515
Fee from SaralTA		396,721	-
Grant Received		100,000	-
Other Income		-	30
	TOTAL	2,461,771	1,205,545
EXPENDITURE:			
Salaries, Allowances and Other Benefits to Staff	6	1,228,305	769,609
Professional & Consultancy Fee	7	196,771	196,500
Travelling & Conveyance	8	93,104	54,697
Other Administrative Expenses	9	422,866	226,091
Non Cash Charges:			
Depreciation		40,819	32,732
	TOTAL	1,981,865	1,279,629
Balance		479,906	(74,084)
Provision for Fringe Benefit Tax		-	4,445
Excess of Income Over Expenditure (transferred to General Reserve)		479,906	(78,529)

Accounting Policies and Notes to Accounts

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As per our report of our even date attached
for **V. NAGARAJAN & Co.,**
Chartered Accountants



A.G. Sitaraman
(A.G.SITARAMAN)

Partner

Membership No. 017799

Date: July 03,2008

Place: Hyderabad

for **SARAL SERVICES**

[Signature]
Executive Director

[Signature]
Director

