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South Asian Workshop on Information Technology Releases Free Paper MIS Standards & Toolkit for Self-Help Groups

"If microcredit has to truly help achieve the Gandhian vision for a self reliant village we should not only increase the self management capacity for village level financial institutions but also develop affordable technologies to enable those crucial mainstream financial linkages", appealed Dr. Karunakaran, Vice Chancellor, Gandhigram University, Madurai while inaugurating the two-day South Asia workshop on "ICTs for Communities: Learning Workshop Series - I, 2005, MIS for Community Based Financial Institutions, Innovations & Experiences". Website:<http://www.microfinance.in>

More than 80 participants attended the workshop from microfinance institutions, SHGs, banks, other financial institutions, international development agencies, NGOs, ICT vendors and software development companies from across South Asia, including GTZ, NABARD, Vyakul Technologies and Safal Solutions among others. The workshop was organized by ekgaon technologies, a technology and management company; CEFI, New Delhi-based community-centered development agency working across South Asia; and CCD, a NGO focused on community-based development located in Madurai, Tamil Nadu.

The year 2005 has been declared as the international year of Microfinance. Microfinance in the past two decades has proved itself as an effective development and empowerment tool particularly for the hitherto unaddressed sections of society such as the landless and women. The United Nations and The World Bank have recognized micro-credit as an effective tool of development and have given due recognition to the strength of the system. The Indian government has also recognized the importance of microfinance and is providing institutional and financial support through agencies like NABARD (National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development) and SIDBI (Small Industries Development Bank of India) to Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to be able to access credit from mainstream financial institutions.

This workshop is the first in the proposed Learning Workshop Series (LWS) as a step to bring in a community-centered approach for technology development. The workshop focused on specific MIS requirements, enabling tools (ATMs, software, devices, etc.), new application areas (micro-insurance, credit cards, housing, enterprise, agri-credit) as well as the role of Free & Open Source Software (FOSS)



for enabling microfinance information management and exchange.

The workshop series is an effort by ekgaoon technologies and CEFI for promoting open standards and tools enabling community-owned and affordable information management systems. ekgaoon announced that it is making available for free use its new paper MIS standards and information management toolkit for use or modification by SHGs and promoting microfinance institutions, subject to acknowledgement under a Creative Commons license. ekgaoon also announced the release of a parallel web-based software system in the near future. Information about how to obtain these materials can be found at <http://www.microfinance.in/node/61>

The next workshop in the Learning Workshop Series will be organized in Pune, Maharashtra, in December 2005. The topic is "ICTs for Communities - Enabling Rural Commodity Supply Chain".