

Intergovernmental Council of the International Programme for the Development of Communication

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Final Report



TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Opening of the Session</i>	3
<i>Report by the representative of the Director-General</i>	4
<i>Debate on distance education projects</i>	5
<i>THEMATIC DEBATE: International partnership in media development</i>	7
<i>The Community Radio Project for Kothmale, Sri Lanka</i>	15
<i>Decision to adopt a moratorium on all new projects</i>	16
<i>Presentation of the report</i>	17
<i>Decisions on Budget 2001 and Projects</i>	19
<i>Plan of action</i>	26
<i>Any other business</i>	27
<i>Closure of the session</i>	29
ANNEX	

V. The Community Radio Project for Kothmale, Sri Lanka

63. The Kothmale project, it was explained, was a pilot project which was intended to serve as a model for other initiatives of the same nature. It was innovative, in that it associated new technology (Internet) with classic broadcasting. It had been set up under UNESCO's regular programme, as an experiment allowing the concrete evaluation of the benefits which marginalized populations could draw from access to new technology (Internet), and the effects which it had at a national level on the digital divide. The major interest in the project was that it had taken into account the factors which prevented rural populations in emerging nations from gaining advantage from new technology, namely:
- failure to recognize the possibilities offered by that type of media;
 - difficulties in accessing the network (the cost of computers and the difficulty of getting an Internet connection);
 - language problems for non-English speaking populations (not forgetting the high level of illiteracy);
 - information that was poorly adapted, in terms of both content and form, to the needs and capacities for assimilation of the audience;
 - lack of motivation (due to lack of awareness) to make use of the information offered by the Internet.
 - in the context of the project, the radio "digested" and adapted the data, and offered it to its audience in an appropriate form. Its impact was therefore optimized.
64. UNESCO provided the necessary equipment and took charge of training the local volunteers needed to staff the station. The results on the ground had so far surpassed expectations, most notably in the sphere of technical know-how, and in the final analysis, the well being of the community at Kothmale had been noticeably improved.
65. Mr Jayaweera, Regional Communication Adviser for Asia, then presented a film tracing the history of the project to the Council and gave a commentary on it, the whole project being judged not only a grand success in its own right, but also a model which could be imitated throughout the world. Ms Stella Hughes of the Communication Development Division then outlined the parameters of the implementation of the Kothmale project and described the fruits of a seminar held in the town. She also spoke of what could be expected if such radio stations were to spread throughout the whole of Sri Lanka, and gave details of the prospects for the implantation of community multimedia centres (CMCs) in Asia and Africa and, in the longer term, in Central and Eastern Europe. Indirect access to new technology by populations in those areas would then become a reality.
66. *"How much did the project cost?"* someone asked. Mr Jayaweera said that, since it was a pilot project, its budget was necessarily a little above the average, as there were considerable costs involved in conducting research and evaluation. The cost of that alone was estimated at \$16,000. The project proper – equipment (production, broadcasting and digital), training and accommodation – amounted to \$35,000. Meanwhile, the Government of Sri Lanka had invested \$7,000 for the

initial connection to the network and two year's free connection. *"In all, concluded Mr Jayaweera, this project cost a total of \$60,000."* But he added that similar projects, planned for Nepal and Bhutan, would benefit indirectly from the research done at Kothmale and could be put into operation for around \$25,000 each.

67. Mr Ondobo then announced that a credit of \$400,000 had just been allotted from the regular programme to the extension of the Kothmale project in Asia, and that \$395,000 had been allocated to the community multimedia centres, within the framework of the Programme aimed at reducing poverty in Africa, in the Sahel region. It would be implemented in cooperation with the Social Sciences Sector of UNESCO.

VI. Decision to adopt a moratorium on all new projects

68. When the plenary meeting resumed, Mr Keune announced that the meeting of the Bureau, which had just finished, had been "active and constructive". The first question touched on had been the financial situation of the Programme, which had been judged serious. The worrying state of the Special Account had forced the Bureau to make the following announcement, to be delivered by the Chairperson of the Intergovernmental Council:

- *"On the occasion of its forty-third session, the IPDC Bureau, meeting at UNESCO Headquarters, Paris, on 28 March 2001, has taken a decision, subject to revision and evaluation at a later date, to implement a moratorium on all new projects for a period of one year."*
- *In announcing this measure, the IPDC Bureau emphasizes that this decision has become unavoidable in view of the decline in donor contributions, a fact which has led IPDC to re-evaluate its capacity for action and to attempt to better position itself to face the major challenges of the era of the digital divide."*
- *During the moratorium, all necessary measures will be taken to put into effect the 56 projects already approved and which are awaiting funding. Representatives of the IPDC Secretariat, in liaison with the Regional Communication Advisers acting on the ground, will oversee the management of 'pending projects'. This situation will be the subject of a preliminary examination at the next meeting of the Bureau, scheduled to take place in Paris from 18 to 20 December 2001."*
- *The ad hoc group, which will henceforth be referred to as 'the Working Group', will be called upon to collaborate in the development of this process."*
- *During this period, the IPDC Secretariat will undertake the necessary steps to improve the state of the organization's finances, in consultation with its partners, old and new."*
- *We are very well aware that this is a drastic measure, but we had no choice given the state of the budget. This also means that that we will not be able to accept any further written proposals for projects"*