

**Society for Empowerment & Wholistic Advancement (SEWA, Guyana)**  
**SEWA DevNet Linux Information Technology Centre**

***Project Implementation Report*** – Six (6) Months after Full Implementation, Operation and Monitoring of the Centre,

Project Start Date: September 2005  
Project Completion Date: February 2006  
Project Launch Date: March 21, 2006  
Number of Workstations, Excluding Server, at Time of Report: 8

(1) SEWA's reasons for investing in a project of this nature:

One of SEWA's objectives is "to provide charitable services in the areas of education, literacy... etc" As part of the strategy for the fulfillment of this objective, SEWA undertook to provide low-cost, innovative information technology solutions to communities where there are under-resourced families that cannot afford sustained and useful access to reliable Information Technology and the benefits that are derived from this access. The community of Cummings Lodge, in which SEWA has a strong presence, was recognised as one of such community as a result of the recent evolution of the largest section of this community - of some 600 house holds -from a squatters' settlement. Thus when the possibility of this project was first discovered, SEWA recognised the potential benefits for the community and immediately started the process of developing it in partnership with DevNet.

(2) SEWA's partnership arrangements/ mechanisms used to stay within the proposed budget:

In addition to the partnership SEWA has with DevNet/ GLUG, SEWA has a long standing relationship with several Faith Based Organisations (FBOs), one of which is the Cummings Lodge Industry Hindu Society (CIHS), where SEWA's Head Office is currently located. When SEWA decided that it will undertake this project, the Temple complex of the Cummings Lodge Industry Hindu Society was instantly recognised as a potential location of such a centre because of several factors:

- a. There was already a large and readily available group of people from the target community gathering at this venue during various days of the week for organised activity.
- b. There was available space, which was suitable for the centre with little modifications.
- c. All the necessary utility requirements (power, phone lines) were in place or easily accessible.

- d. SEWA/ DevNet realised that a sense of ownership of such a project by members of the community in which it was based was a critical factor in the sustenance of the project. There are many well established cases of such projects becoming “white elephants” due to the perception of paternalism that the community developed, resulting from a lack of involvement in the development of the project. Since the CIHS is a well established FBO with a diverse pool of devotees, from the inception of the project, SEWA has integrally involved both the management of the CIHS and members (especially youths) in the implementation and day-to-day management and operation of the centre. Additionally, the CIHS also benefits indirectly as a result of the project and have recognised this: the educational level of its members is being raised; furthermore, individuals who might not have necessarily been attracted to the Society for its routine activities now visit for the purpose of IT access and are often attracted to the other activities. Hence, the many spin-offs of having such a project at the temple are recognised by CIHS and thus the need to sustain the project is seen as important.

Once SEWA recognised these factors and calculated that these would contribute to realising the establishment of the centre at a very low cost, capitalising on the excellent relationship that SEWA has with the management of the Cummings Lodge Industry Hindu Society (CIHS), discussions started immediately and the approval was given at first request to use the space and facilities. Currently, in addition to providing the space free of cost, CIHS also offsets the power costs of the centre. Additionally, CIHS also contributed to many aspects of the project implementation, both financially and by other means.

SEWA also approached the Guyana Telephone and Telegraph (GT&T) Company and requested a partnership with the company in the support of this project by way of providing free internet access to the centre. This request was not granted, as GT&T stated that such an arrangement was not supported by company policy. However, after friendly negotiation, the company agreed to provide broadband internet access (256 k) to the centre for a domestic rate instead of the stipulated business rate for usage of 256 k broadband connections as SEWA centre does i.e. for multi-station public access. This was granted in exchange for advertisement in the centre by GT&T. However, to date, the company has not installed any advertisements in the centre and has not demonstrated any keen interest in doing so. The centre is being provided with reliable broadband internet access for a domestic rate.

The University of Guyana was also approached from inception as a partner in the project. The University provided housing and technical support during the testing period, and also provided technical support during the installation period. Some hardware was also provided by the centre. The university was also interested in this project because of the proximity of the centre to the University and its availability for study of Linux and open source software.

In addition to these significant partnerships, several other contributions were also obtained from various institutions and individuals. Computer hardware was donated by Iwokrama International and Saraswati Vidya Niketan Secondary.

Many private entrepreneurs and individuals were also approached to make contributions to the project. Six cubicles for the work stations and about 12 of the chairs, and other furniture were donated by such persons. SEWA gathered these contributions both by formal correspondence to these individual requesting their support, and also through personal one-on-one requests in every day social situations. SEWA, in the course of soliciting these contributions, discovered that there are many individuals who are willing to contribute to projects of this nature once they can be assured that their contributions would result in benefits for the community.

(3) The proposed implementation time was two months. Challenges which delayed the implementation, and the lessons learnt.

The actual implementation time for complete installation of the server with five (5) workstations and commencement of usage by the community – 6 months.

The following are some of the reasons why project implementation took six (6) months.

1. Many of the volunteers and individuals who were identified to be trained from the inception of the development of the project had regular employment at various institutions, in addition to other commitments. Hence, mutually convenient times for the various participants were difficult and this lengthened the project implementation period.
2. Technical glitches during configuration – although this was anticipated, there were instances where the technical problems encountered took longer than the anticipated time to sort out.
3. Gathering free hardware, furniture, and other items: a wide cross section of individuals and institutions were approached for contributions and their contributions came after many months.

4. Internet connection from GT&T: the initial contact and negotiation with GT&T took much longer than planned due to misplaced correspondence, inter departmental communication and similar bureaucratic obstacles.
5. Preparing the location – to keep project cost down and allow for participation in the development of the project by the intended beneficiaries, SEWA depended heavily on volunteer/ low cost labour to prepare the housing of the centre. Many of the individuals juggled responsibilities, and in many cases were available only on weekends. This also lengthened the project implementation time.

Lesson learnt from all of this can be summarised in one line: collaboration with a diverse group of individuals, institutions and corporations can result in achievement of beneficial community projects at low costs, but perseverance, patience and deep commitment are necessary.

(4) Impact of the centre: since the opening: The impact of the centre can be summarised by the following data:

- Average number of individuals who use the centre weekly: **55 (predominantly ages 6 years to 40 years)**
- Individuals who have learned to use computers, including internet, for the first time: **45**
- Average number of individuals who use the centre for access to the web for school-based educational purposes on weekly basis: **20**
- Average number of adults (over 35) who have used computers for the first time at the centre: **8**
- Of the average 55 individuals who use the centre weekly, approximately **40** do not have access to affordable, useful and financially sustainable information technology other than that provided by SEWA DevNet Linux IT Centre.
- At least 150 persons have been introduced to Linux and open source information technology.
- Two persons have been trained in the installation of the Linux Terminal Server Protocol.

(5) Summarise the future plans - management of the centre, sustainability (including the recurrent costs).

The management of the centre is done by volunteers of SEWA. The centre is opened six days per week – 17:30 hrs to 19:30 hrs Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, and from 13:30 hrs to 19:30 hrs on weekends. This will be the permanent basis of operation until SEWA is able to employ full time staff to oversee opening of the centre for longer periods.

Currently the opening of the centre and conduct of its business are done by four (4) SEWA volunteers who operate on the basis of a weekly timetable. This system is working well.

The job of the timetabled administrator is simple: ensuring all equipment are functioning, ensure discipline, manage printing, assist with computer usage and teach new users, minor trouble shooting, cleaning of software and hardware components.

The support for rectification of major technical problems is still provided by DevNet, but SEWA will work to develop internal capacity over the course of time to rectify these.

*Recurrent costs:*

Power Bills – CIHS has been offsetting this expense. They have pledged to provide this support continuously.

Internet and Phone Bill: SEWA will undertake a sponsorship programme with local entrepreneurs to offset this expense, which is the most significant. In the meantime, the expenses are paid by SEWA and donations made by users of the centre.

Hardware: SEWA will contribute to the maintenance of hardware, in addition to continuing the relationship with local entrepreneurs whose support will be sought.