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A computer graphic produced by children at the Janakala Kendraya (Folk Arts Center) in Battaramulla with computers donated by LAcNet.
(1) Overview

The last year has been very productive for LAcNet. We should be proud of our accomplishments. First, as highlighted by Varuni Jayamaha’s recent report on the Wired Group projects, LAcNet’s contribution to IT-related education in Sri Lanka has grown exponentially in the last year. Second, LAcNet collected over $130,000 in donations for tsunami relief efforts of which it has distributed almost $95,000 to worthy organizations and projects. Third, LAcNet’s online newspaper, The Lanka Academic (TLA) has built on its past successes, experiencing record traffic and providing a key source of revenue for the organization. Finally, thanks to the hard work of a core group of volunteers, LAcNet’s new server is online and we are on the verge of launching a brand new website. The remainder of this report provides a detailed overview of these successes. Thanks to all of you for your help and support. Let’s build on this momentum for continued success in the coming year!
(2) Call for Volunteers & Donations

We are in the process of creating a new LAcNET website and adding to our growing list of LAcNet projects. Please review following projects. If would like to participate, we would love to have you on board. Please volunteer!

We also need your financial support. Please send your tax deductible donations to:

The Lanka Academic Network  
9603 Avenel Road  
Silver Spring, MD  20903-2311  
USA

Projects for which we are seeking volunteers are as follows:

1. Help develop the LAcNet website!

Very soon, LAcNet will launch its brand new website! We need your help to maintain and improve it. One of our new goals is to design an ‘academic forum’ page on the site that would help network scholars with an interest in Sri Lanka. If you would to be part of this exciting project, write to Manny at teitelbaum.lacnet@gmail.com.

2. Help to develop projects!

We are always looking for new projects to develop and fund. Give us your ideas for new IT centers, tsunami relief projects, online publications, or anything else you have in mind. If it falls within our charter, we may be able to help!

3. Help to develop fundraising!

LAcNet is always looking for new ways to generate new funding. You can help us by volunteering to host fundraising events such as dinners, concerts, dance recitals, bake sales, etc.

4. Help to maintain our IT centers in Sri Lanka!

LAcNet is developing a network of over two dozen IT centers in Sri Lanka. If you are in Sri Lanka or are taking a trip to Sri Lanka in the near future, please help us by visiting one of the IT centers. Your visits help us to maintain close contact with the centers. Plus, we can always use help in maintaining and upgrading the equipment!
(3) Annual Review of Volunteer Activities

This section outlines the annual contributions of LAcNet volunteers. LAcNet members spent thousands of hours contributing to the efficient operation of the organization. These efforts were divided among the following projects/tasks: a) maintaining SLNet services; b) LAcNet membership services; c) LAcNet server maintenance; d) preparing the new LAcNet server and website to go online; e) editing The Lanka Academic (TLA) and moderating the TLA forum; f) contributions to Wired Group projects; and g) contributions to tsunami relief projects.

A. SLNet services

At one time, SLNet was the primary venue for disseminating news related to Sri Lanka. While most news is now accessed via the Lanka Academic web services, SLNet offers daily news capsules from the Lanka Academic reports. This email-based service is still used by approximately 1600 subscribers. SLNet also distributes messages of interest to the subscriber list; the message content is moderated.

Estimated volunteer hours: 50 hrs/yr

Posts: slnet@slnet.org (open to all, but moderated)
Subscribe/unsubscribe: http://www.lacnet.org/slnet/

Project leader: Tilak Hewagama
Moderator: Mevan Gunawardana

B. LAcNet membership services

LAcNet currently has 77 members distributed worldwide. The primary mode of member communication is the lacnet@lacnet.org mailing list. The mail stream is unmoderated for members (for their address on record); posts from non-members are moderated for content. 15 members joined last year, and one joined in Jan 2006. Three members requested to be dropped from the LAcNet list in 2006.

Estimated volunteer time effort: 50 hrs/yr

Posts: lacnet@lacnet.org (unmoderated for members, other posts moderated)
Subscribe/unsubscribe: team@lacnet.org
List administrator: Tilak Hewagama
C. LAcNet server maintenance including web pages

The primary LAcNet member mailing list is maintained on the LAcNet server. Server maintenance membership services, including subscriptions, and web page maintenance requires substantial effort. Soon after the Tsunami of December 2003, we estimate that the web services required approximately 40 hours of volunteer effort.

D. New LAcNet server

LAcNet purchased a server to augment the old server maintained by the admin team (Jagath, Tilak and Vasantha) at the previous academic institution. The Dell replacement computer has been installed with the Linux operating system and it has been configured for day-to-day operations including web page updates (there was some delay due to a failing disk, but it has since been replaced). The new server is currently hosted at another academic institution due to the graciousness of a former LAcNet member Prasad. The server is administered by the admin team and they have done a commendable job in maintaining the server without any mishaps or break-ins, etc. during the time of operation. Jagath has also provided a "how to" manual for potential volunteers who would like to maintain WebPages on the server or attend to day-to-day activities. As of now Manny, Varuni and Jagath are attending to updating the pages of the LAcNet website using this interface.

E. The Lanka Academic (TLA)

The Lanka Academic (TLA) has grown in leaps and bounds during the last few years into a premiere news source for Sri Lankans all over the world. We are particularly proud of the volunteers from all over the world who contribute their time and effort to make it a truly 24/7 news operation. Some of the special activities TLA has undertaken are as follows:

a) Special coverage of the Tsunami Disaster. TLA and its correspondent Munza Mustaq were the first to break the news of the Tsunami to the outside world.

b) TLA volunteers who are LAcNet members took a leadership role in collecting, coordinating and distribution of funds, medicines and other supplies during the Tsunami.

c) TLA was the first to break the news story of the shooting of Minister Kadirgamer and the subsequent events in Sri Lanka ably covered by Bandula Jayasekare another correspondent for TLA.
d) Creation of a discussion forum for news/events/culture/academic prospects for TLA visitors. The popularity and utility of this forum has been immense and helped double our web traffic in one year!

e) LIVE coverage of the Sri Lanka Presidential Elections. In keeping with our tradition of providing live coverage for elections since 1994 live coverage of the Sri Lanka elections was carried out up to the conclusion in the late hours of 18th November 2005. Our operation was a 100% volunteer effort with TLA volunteers updating the returns from Sri Lanka (Thanks Varuni and Thushara!). Vasantha's algorithm of tracking the winner was particularly popular among the visitors to the web.

Overall, the past year was an extremely successful and gratifying year for TLA with the readership skyrocketing based on word of mouth. We are gratified to continue as the natural successor from SLNet the one time only source of Sri Lankan news on the Internet.

During the year some Board Members suggested that TLA be partitioned from LAcNet for various reasons. We have not been able to attend to the time consuming efforts of creating a separate organizational structure with separate tax IDs, etc. due to the commitment of TLA volunteers to other LAcNet projects and services. We hope this task will be completed soon so that TLA can have an independent financial structure, but expect the mutually beneficial relationship between LAcNet and TLA to continue.

F. Wired Group projects

Varuni Jayamaha assumed responsibilities as the Wired Group coordinator in mid-June. Her efforts along with the help of the dedicated group of Wired volunteers have been reported to the membership in a separate report. We express our since admiration for the wired group for their efforts and dedication to the projects under their purview.

1. Hiring of project manager

In August, LAcNet hired its first project manager, Thushara Dharmawickrama, for Wired Group projects in Sri Lanka. Thushara’s contribution has been enormous, helping LAcNet to greatly expand its on-the-ground presence in Sri Lanka. Thanks to his help, we are now well on our way to our goal of establishing a network of two dozen IT centers in Sri Lanka.
2. World Bank project

Daya Weerakoody was instrumental in negotiating the donation of 200 computers from the World Bank to be used for computer laboratories for underprivileged children in Sri Lanka. This generous donation of computer systems by the World Bank (including shipping) was accepted in Colombo by our project manager. As Wired Coordinator Varuni’s report indicated, these computers have been utilized in various projects under the Wired program. We owe a big thank you to Daya, Varuni, Tilak and Thushara for taking a leadership role in this project. We consider this project to be a watershed event in the history of LAcNet. It is in the caliber of the beginning of SLNet mailing list (prior to the inception of LAcNet in 1991), the founding of LAcNet and The Lanka Academic, and the first IT project proposed by Chuli de Silva and launched in 2001. This project has the potential to cumulatively impact 40,000 students at an average of $0.12 per student LAcNet investment (about $1 per student including the combined donation value). In terms of the volunteer time investment, we find the potential impact of 400 students per volunteer hours (compared to a nominal value of 20 for other smaller scale projects).

3. eSociety proposal

The Partnership Assistance Program was soliciting proposals that would further the Sri Lanka eSociety initiative goals. The award values are high, and we believe that our mission is commensurate with specific eSociety goals. With this in mind we have submitted a proposal that would exploit our network of computer centers and extend their capabilities. The response from the granting authority has been quite positive and we have addressed some of the comments and questions the reviewers posed and the proposal has been resubmitted for consideration.

Potential award value: $50,000
Estimated volunteer time effort: 200 hrs/yr
Potential impact: 40,000 students
G. Tsunami relief projects

This is the second time since it’s inception that LAcNet participated in a project which doesn’t strictly fall in to its goals and missions.

A few years back we took the initiative to collect money during a flood situation in Sri Lanka where 500 lives were lost. A collection page was set up at TLA and the money collected $3500 was handed over to The Red Cross for flood relief efforts.

During the Tsunami a group of volunteers got together in no time to set up the web pages to raise funds, organize medical deliveries, air transportation, urgent supply of materials etc. We were successful in collecting a significant amount of funds and we have disbursed the moneys to the projects listed below.

1. Projects through the University of Moratuwa.

These projects were spearheaded by Thrishantha and Sanath as mentioned before and the details can be viewed at http://www.theacademic.org/tsunami/UM/update.shtml

2. Project for the supply of material to the North and East

LAcNet allocated funding for the collection and transportation of food and medical supplies to the Tsunami affected North and East of Sri Lanka through the Tamil Literacy society. More detailed activities of the project are shown in http://www.theacademic.org/tsunami/NE/ne.shtml

3. Well/Outhouse Cleaning

As an immediate step in improving the living conditions of Tsunami affected victims a project was formulated and completed to clean wells for restoring potable water and establish out house for use of the victims.

More details on the well-cleaning project can be found here:

http://www.theacademic.org/tsunami/Well/
http://www.theacademic.org/tsunami/Well/update.shtml
4. St. Mary’s Church, Matara

LAcNet provided matching funds for a collection of funds from Dimitri Wijesingha. The project is described here: http://www.theacademic.org/tsunami/Dimitri/dimitri.html

5. Sudheera Daruwo - Central Bank Trust Fund

LAcNet partnered with the Sudeera Daruwo Trust fund established by The Central Bank of Ceylon geared to help orphaned children from the Tsunami disaster. We have received regular updates from the project conveners in Colombo and we hope to post them on the web once we remove personal details of the affected children.

6. Galle Housing project

LAcNet donated funds for a housing project carried out by a group of physicians. LAcNet volunteers have visited the sites and report that the project has been completed successfully. Here are some pictures of our rupees at work:

LAcNet facilitated this house building project initiated by a group of well-wishers in Ithaca, New York. One of our board members have visited the sites and discussed the projects with the head priest of the temple. The project is in progress.

8. Ohio Project

We are awaiting an update on this project from Vicum Perera.

Additional funding: In addition to the above we have some funding left from the original collections (please refer to the Tsunami accounts that were sent out in recent days). Currently, Ransirimal Fernando is in Sri Lanka visiting projects and we hope to allocate these funds to other projects that are to be proposed.
(4) Annual Review of Activities Undertaken by the LAcNet Board of Directors (BOD)

Gihan Dias participated in meetings of the board of directors.

Nishantha (Nish) Illangasekare has contributed to LAcNet in two ways. He has been involved in day to day operations of TLA and also contributed his time as a volunteer for the wired project. TLA has grown from 4 visitors a day to hundreds of thousands of visitors and TLA is accessed by policy makers, diplomatic community and people of power and responsibility. Editorial issues are taken seriously and TLA has emerged as a credible news service to the greater Sri Lankan community. TLA is maintained by a group of volunteers who take turns in updating the news on a 24/7 basis.

Nish also participated in the wired projects in formulating proposals and agreements. He has been involved in the writing of the eSociety proposal for obtaining funding for projects in Sri Lanka. As you may know LAcNet has been dependent on a meager source of revenue through advertisements from the TLA page. Given that we have moved on to bigger and better things with the Wired project, the submitted proposal if successful would make a great deal of difference in how we could fund projects in Sri Lanka. Even if this proposal does not get through we are confident that this is an ideal model for LAcNet to pursue in future funding attempts. Nish has also worked with the wired group in formulating letters, memorandum of understanding with our partner programs in Sri Lanka.

Thrishantha Nanayakkara has been our eyes and ears on the ground in Sri Lanka. In addition to taking the responsibilities as the President of LAcNet subsequent to the departure of Vicum, Thrish has lived up to his full potential in helping LAcNet as a director living in Sri Lanka and continues to be an example to others. Thrish along with Sanath another one of our volunteers was instrumental in coordinating the Moratuwa undergraduates in visiting the Tsunami affected areas, providing help for the destitute, helping with the final disposition of Tsunami victims, etc. Despite his busy academic schedule, Thrish continues to help with the wired projects by helping with project proposals, visiting computer sites and helping with clearing computers from customs.

Vicum Perera was instrumental in reviving the quarterly updates to the members of the LAcNet activities. Vicum took upon himself the obligations of the LAcNet secretary in this task and expended a great deal of effort to provide a readable report that included the efforts of LAcNet volunteers. In addition Vicum proposed two projects under the Tsunami funds, for which he serves as project manager. Vicum was President of LAcNet until July 25, 2005, at which point he resigned as president and from the organization.
Kavan Ratnatunge participated in meetings of the board of directors and serves as LAcNet’s Secretary.

Thilaka Sumanaweera has been the software guy for the TLA website and his efforts in software development enabled us to maintain a website that is dynamic and timely in updating Sri Lankan news. Thilaka was also involved in the operational aspects of TLA by recruiting and retaining the various correspondents who contribute to TLA. Thilaka took a leadership role in creating the dedicated websites during the Tsunami efforts and was instrumental in updating the progress of the Tsunami work carried out under the auspicious of LAcNet. In addition, Thilaka volunteered to coordinate the well cleaning project and has been instrumental in its successful conclusion.

Emmanuel (Manny) Teitelbaum is a US citizen who takes a keen interest in Sri Lanka and its people. Manny was instrumental in initiating the Kew Road computer project and serves LAcNet’s Vice President. Manny helped to guide the board through some rough times and also took over the task of updating the membership. Manny was of helped with the preparation of the eSociety project, has taken a role in updating the LAcNet website, and is an active member of the Wired Group.

Daya Weerkoddy again “volunteered” to hold the unenviable treasurer position of LAcNet. Unlike in previous years where the LAcNet accounts were not that extensive or complicated, Daya has been inundated with the tasks of many accounting responsibilities including the Tsunami funds, regular LAcNet income from TLA, and other external Tsunami projects that came under the accounting responsibilities of LAcNet. Daya was instrumental in restoring the tax ID for LAcNet and completing a fully audited account for LAcNet activities for the previous years. As mentioned previously Daya was also instrumental in negotiating the World Bank computer project and has been a dedicated volunteer in the wired group. Daya also created a grade one through twelve syllabus for IT education in Sri Lanka and we have submitted this as part of the eSociety proposal. In addition Daya serves as a dedicated volunteer for the TLA group in updating the news site on a 24/7 basis.