

Sanchar Shakti

1. What is the scheme and its components?

This scheme has been initiated by the Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF) of Department of Telecommunications (DoT), Ministry of Communications & IT to contribute in the empowerment of rural women. "Sanchar Shakti" is a programme of pilot projects aimed at facilitating SHGs' access to ICT enabled services and their contribution towards ICT enabling services. There are 4 categories of projects under this scheme:

- i. The provision of subsidized mobile VAS (mVAS) subscriptions to SHGs which are valid for at least a year.
- ii. The setting up of SHG run mobile repair centers in rural areas.
- iii. The setting up of SHG run modem repair centers in rural areas.
- iv. The setting up of SHG run solar-based mobile phone/ Fixed Wireless Terminals (phones) charging centres in rural areas.

2. What is the rationale behind the scheme?

As above. It is widely accepted that access to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) can play a crucial role in the development of rural and remote areas and the people residing in such places. This programme envisages using ICT to facilitate the process of empowerment of rural women through delivery of information and skill enhancement.

(I) *Why launch a pilot project & why not the launch of main project scheme?*

The vastness, diversity, low income levels and literacy levels etc that characterize rural India pose challenges to the success of any project. The launch of Pilot Projects is justified as they will expose challenges, test premises and provide learning that can then be incorporated in large scale roll outs by various agencies and ensure that objectives are achieved.

3. Explain the following:-

(I) *What is the value additions on the current mobile services? Give details and how they would empower women.*

Mobile services are currently used primarily for voice based inter personal communications. Value added services in the context of this programme mean delivery of information on various subjects: weather, market prices, financial products, training facilities, buyers, fairs and

exhibitions, government programmes, health and social issues etc relevant to the targeted women beneficiaries.

(II) *What do you mean by livelihood skills. How would these skills be provided/ imparted?*

UNICEF has defined livelihood skills as ‘capabilities, resources and opportunities to pursue individual and household economic goals. Livelihood skills relate to income generation and may include technical/vocational skills (carpentry, sewing, computer programming), job seeking skills such as interviewing, business management skills, entrepreneurial skills, and skills to manage money’. Information imparted through Short Messaging Services(SMS) and Interactive Voice Response Systems(IVRS) will enhance the traditional skills of the women and teach them new skills Also participation in projects like SHG run handset/modem repair centres and solar charging centres will impart new skills to the targeted beneficiaries.

(III) *What are ICT related livelihood skills.*

ICT related livelihood skills in the context of this programme refer to skills involved in maintenance/repair of mobile handsets and modems, selling of mobile airtime and running of solar mobile handset charging centres in rural areas.

(IV) *How many women self help groups are targeted?*

In total 15050 women members of different SHGs are expected to be covered under the mobile VAS projects.

4. What locations have been identified by the Department for running the pilot project. What is the rationale behind selection of these locations?

DoT was open to projects being located in any rural area. The locations of implementation of the Pilot Projects are spread across the country. The villages are situated in States of Andhra Pradesh (districts of Rangareddy & Krishna), Kerala (Thrissur), Maharashtra (Pune), Tamil Nadu (Kanyakumari, Coimbatore, Vellore, Thiruvannamalai, Cuddalore, Thanjavur, Pudukotai, and Dindigul) Uttar Pradesh (Gautam Buddha Nagar), and Uttarakhand (Almora, Bageshwar, Tehri, Uttarkashi and Chamoli), and in Puduchchery. These locations have been chosen by the Service Providers based upon their and NGO partners’ area of operation.

5. What is the execution plan of the pilot and outcomes expected with specific time lines and responsibility centres?

USOF has signed MoUs with various Service Providers for Proof of Concept to be demonstrated to USOF by May 2011. The Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Committee (comprising members from USOF, DOT and UN Women) shall evaluate the PoCs. Based on the recommendations of the M&E Committee, USOF will enter into subsidy support Agreements with Service Providers for the commencement of Pilot Projects in June 2011. A Mid-Term Review Report will be prepared in December 2011. At the termination of the Agreements in June 2012, a comprehensive programme report will be prepared. Seminars will be held to share experiences/learning with stakeholders. The M&E committee would in its recommendations/findings suggest further course of action including inter alia scale up to a national level.

Expected outcomes include enrichment of lives of women provided with information and skills. Successful demonstration to users and suppliers alike of utility of mVAS tailored to the requirements of rural populations in general and women in particular and evaluation/proof of viability of the same. Also, demonstration of the viability of SHG run repair/charging centres. These pilots would encourage telecom sector/ other departments/agencies to undertake similar projects. The scale up of such projects could be on commercially self-sustainable basis and need not involve subsidy support.

6. How will the workshops be held for training the modem repairing etc & who will fund and monitor these workshops?

The agency which comes forward to participate in category 2,3 and 4 projects will tie up with NABARD, manufacturers, service providers and NGOs to arrange for running of repair/charging centres including the aspect of training. At present Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) is coordinating with NABARD for funding of these projects.

7. How many Ministries/organizations are involved in this scheme and how?

At present the Department of Telecommunications is involved through the Universal Service Obligation Fund (USOF). The USOF is the agency which will provide subsidy to service providers for the mVAS projects. The DoT Gender Budget Cell and USOF will facilitate the other category projects by coordinating the contribution of manufacturers, service providers, NGOs and NABARD. NABARD has been kept informed about the project and a representative from NABARD participated in deliberations with service providers. Also U.N Women has provided us with a gender expert.

8. When is the main scheme proposed to be launched? What are the timelines ?

As explained at para 5 above. Different milestones/future time lines can be summed as:

1. In May - June 2010, the project was conceptualized and Concept Paper was prepared and circulated.
2. Meeting of all stakeholders was organized at DOT HQ under the Chairpersonship of Dr Vijayalakshmy K Gupta Member (Finance) Telecom Commission on 16th June 2010 wherein the scheme was explained and queries and doubts of interested project applicants were clarified. Altogether 54 participants attended the meeting including representatives of Ministry of Rural Development, NABARD, major Service Providers, Value Added Service (VAS) Providers, and specialized agencies such as National Institute of Design (NID), National Skills Development Corporation (NSDC), National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) etc.
3. During the period July-September 2010, twelve project applications received with time extensions being granted DoT-USOF Evaluation Committee.
4. In September 2010, UNIFEM joined programme as a partner
5. From August to November 2010, several rounds of Evaluation Committee meetings held with project applicants. Refinement of proposals was carried out with a focus on utility of content for target beneficiaries
6. On the 10th of December 2010, the Evaluation Committee met to finalize and recommend mVAS projects for the Proof of Concept (PoC) stage. A proposal for signing of MoU for PoC for seven projects was submitted for approval by Competent Authority on the 14th of December 2010. The approval was received on the 24th of January 2011
7. With the signing of MoUs for PoC phase of the mobile VAS Projects in February-March, the programme will be formally launched. By April-May 2011, the PoC phase will be completed.
8. The USOF evaluation committee with representation from U.N women will evaluate the progress in detail and recommend validated projects for acceptance by the Administrator, USOF.
9. This will be followed by the signing of subsidy agreements and the consequent commencement of the subsidized pilot projects by June 2011. We expect that other project categories will also fall into place by this time. The DoT- USOF team with representation from UN Women will continue to evaluate and monitor the progress and facilitate the implementation of the programme.
10. Mid- term review and reporting will be done in December 2011. By June-July 2012, a comprehensive report of the programme will be drawn up. Seminars will be held to share the experiences of both the members and the programme facilitators and to discuss the project's various

achievements. After gauging the success of the projects, the scaling up of more effective pilots will be deliberated upon.

9. How does the pilot and main scheme contribute to women empowerment in particular and national development in general?

The projects identified and implemented under this programme will contribute to women's empowerment by:

- i. Enriching lives of women through connectivity, information and skills
- ii. Generating income and employment opportunities for rural women through better access to information and markets and their participation in running local repair facilities/charging centres.

These initiatives will contribute in national development by:

- i. Proving the utility and viability of meaningful mVAS applications for rural markets and rural women to users and suppliers of the same.
- ii. Encouraging the use of mVAS to provide such services by Government/service providers.
- iii. Proving viability of SHG run rural mobile handset/modem repair centres and solar mobile charging centres and encouraging the large scale setting up of these centres which would in turn provide local employment to rural women and enable greater and more effective use of ICT in rural areas.

10. Whether it is a self sustaining scheme? What is the recovery rate? Detailed calculation may be provided?

The pilot project agreements would involve USOF providing subsidy by reimbursing the service provider on a per user per month basis against proof of mVAS services having been delivered to target beneficiaries. (The latter would receive mVAS against the payment of a correspondingly discounted price.) No loan is involved. It is envisaged that the projects would demonstrate utility and viability to users and suppliers of these services, thereby giving an impetus to the provision of such services on a commercially self-sustainable basis beyond the subsidy phase.

11. What is the coverage area? Who are the beneficiaries and their tentative numbers?

These details are provided below:

Service provider	State(s)	Tentative No. of Beneficiaries (SHG members)
Tata Tele Services Limited	Uttar Pradesh	2250
Sasken Communication Technologies Limited	Tamil Nadu	3000
Vodafone Essar South Limited (Vodafone)	Andhra Pradesh	2250
Reuters Market Light (RML)	Maharashtra	2200
Reuters Market Light (RML)	Uttarakhand,	2200
Videocon Telecommunications Limited (Videocon)	Tamil Nadu	1150
Unitech Wireless (Tamil Nadu) Private Limited (“Uninor”)	Tamil Nadu	2000

12. Which are the targeted women’s self help groups? And how they have been selected? Whether the scheme would be restricted to these women self help Groups or it would be extended to other women too?

There are several SHGs which have been targeted in this scheme. The exact numbers however will be finalized after the Proof of Concept is demonstrated. But as per figures furnished by Service Providers, number of SHG members that are expected to benefit from this scheme is around 15050. These have been selected by Service Providers. The extension of benefits to other rural women would follow from the outcomes as described in paras above,

13. What is the concept of USO in telecom? How it could be related women empowerment?

The Universal Service Obligation Fund of India came into being with retrospective effect from 1.4.02 with the passing of the Indian Telegraph (Amendment) Act 2003 in December 2003. The Fund which is headed by the Administrator, USOF has a mandate of providing access to Telegraph (Telecommunications) Services to people in rural and remote areas at reasonable and affordable prices. The Fund has initiated a large number of schemes aimed at promoting public and individual access to telephony and broadband services in rural India.(www.usof.gov.in). In recognition of the requirements of Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB), preferential allocation of broadband connections to women's SHGs has been incorporated in the USOF's Wire Line Broadband Scheme. Also a pilot scheme has been launched to provide broadband enabled Rural Public Service Terminals (RPSTs) to women's SHGs in Rajasthan and H.P. Through these terminals the SHGs can provide banking services, airway/railway/bus tickets, insurance products, mobile top up and other VAS to rural public. The current programme is also being rolled out in pursuance of the DoT's GRB commitments.

14. What are the various services proposed in the scheme?

There are four project categories:

- a) Provision of a mobile VAS subscription to SHGs with a service validity of at least one year
- b) Setting up of SHG run mobile repair centers in rural areas
- c) Setting up of SHG run modem repair centers in rural areas
- d) Setting up of SHG run solar based mobile/CDMA FWT charging centers in rural areas

15. How would marketing, sales, financial, aspects would be taken care of ?

These will be responsibility of Service Provider with whom the MoUs/Agreements are signed

16. Whether any training is involved? How will these be organized & monitored for the outcomes? Who would be the nodal agency?

Training is an integral part of the projects. The Service Providers/lead executing agency will be responsible for ensuring appropriate training. M&E will include evaluation of overall efficacy of project implementation including training provided.

17. How has the pilot stage arrived at? Whether there have been preparatory exercises/feasibility studies/workshops in evolution of the scheme?

Different milestones/future time lines are as follows:

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- vii. With the signing of MoUs for Proof of Concept phase of the mobile VAS Projects in February-March the programme will be formally launched. By April- May 2011, the PoC phase will be completed.
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- ix. This will be followed by the signing of subsidy agreements and the consequent commencement of the subsidized pilot projects by June 2011. We expect that other project categories will also fall into place by this time. The DoT- USOF team with representation from UN Women will continue to evaluate and monitor the progress and facilitate the implementation of the programme.
- x. December 2011 will see the project's first mid- term review and reports. By June-July 2012, a comprehensive report of the programme will be drawn up. Seminars will be held to share the experiences of both the members and the programme facilitators and to discuss the project's

various achievements. After gauging the success of the projects, the scaling up of more effective pilots will be deliberated upon.

18. How is it related to gender budgeting and how does it address the gender concerns.

Gender budgeting is a methodology to assist governments to integrate a gender perspective into the budget as the key national plan for public expenditure. As a GRB initiative, this programme will partially subsidise through USOF, the cost of mobile VAS services provided to rural women and encourage setting up of category 3,4 and 5 projects. The impact on rural women has been discussed in paras above.

19. How will it service as a vital tool for women empowerment?

This scheme will contribute in the empowerment of women in a many ways as discussed in paras above. Some of the most prominent direct benefits are:

1. Generating awareness on health issues and ways to handle them
2. Increasing awareness on social issues and ways to handle them.
3. Increasing access to training, markets and financial information related leading to better decision making on livelihood activities
4. Awareness about pertinent Government schemes
5. Providing new livelihood opportunities.

20. Cost & benefit analysis/or viability analysis of the scheme?

The subsidy support needed was arrived at after assessing costs and user charges involved. As this is itself a pilot project scheme it is intended to facilitate a detailed cost-benefit analysis.

21. What are the risks anticipated and the contingency plan for effectively handling them?

A number of challenges were anticipated for the mVAS projects and detailed discussions held with service providers from August to November to address these issues. Primarily these relate to ensuring relevance and utility of the content for SHG members covered and ease of access in the backdrop their daily activities, literacy levels and cultural context etc. Similarly challenges such as supply chains, training and sustainability issues have been identified for category 3,4, and 5 projects and these will be addressed while finalizing these projects

22. Is there any mechanism in built to provide periodical feed back assessment after launch of the scheme?

Yes, each project proponent will have to submit monthly feedback reports to the USOF. The projects will be subject to continuous and detailed evaluation at the PoC and subsidy support stages.