MODULE 4   PLANNING A TELECENTRE

UNIT 2 PLANNING THE LOGISTICS OF A TELECENTRE

Structure of the Unit

2.0 LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this Unit, you should be able to:

- List the logistical arrangements you need to plan for the telecentre
- Plan for setting up and furnishing the space

2.1 INTRODUCTION

You are ready to start your telecentre. You probably have some ideas of what it would look like, where it is located, the kind of services you offer and the clients who come to the telecentre. But, before you begin, ask yourself:

- What kind of a telecentre do I want?
- What services will I offer?
- What will the telecentre look like?
- What kind of people will come to it?
- How will people describe my telecentre?

Usually, the first thing we do is look for a place to house the centre. As you begin to start looking around for a room or a building ask yourself:

- Is the entrance to the building attractive?
- Does the building have sufficient light?
- Is there cross ventilation?
- Is the building in good condition or will you have to make repairs, paint and improve the premises?
- Is there space for a pantry – to make tea, coffee?
- Is there a proper toilet?

- Does it have a courtyard or verandah where people can wait, talk or children play?
- What kind of activities are around the space – market, commercial, school, college, temple, mosque, gurdwara, church, post office, liquor shop, and library?
- What kind of services do I want to offer?
- How much and what kind of space would this require?
- What kind of a budget will I need or have for the place?

After you have thought this, you may want to make a list and write down what your thoughts are. If you are asking friends or family about space, may be you could read out this list, face to face or over the phone.

The more clear you are about the what kind of space you want, what it is for and how you will use it, the more success you will have in getting a space that suits your requirement and leads to a successful telecentre.

Tip: You may want to keep a small notebook in your pocket to makes notes, place reminders to yourself, etc as you start your search for space, . Or if you have a cell phone, you can take picture of the various spaces you see.

People who have experience in telecentres, say that the more successful telecentres are always in a good location. And, like all services aimed at the public, the **right location** is at the top of the list of logistical arrangements for the success of a telecentre.   So, let us look at location.

2.2 LOCATION

The first thing about your telecentre space, whether it is free, part of a building or an independent rental, is the location.

If your telecentre is not located centrally, people may not come. If they have to travel great distances, they may not come. However, in rural areas, people do travel some distances always for one reason or another. If your telecentre offers them something very special, they may make the effort to come. If it is next to places that they need to visit, then they may also come.

There are other factors to keep in mind as you begin to think of location:

Class/Caste: If your Telecentre is in a place where people of lower caste or class are not welcome, chances are that people in the community or neighbourhood will not use it.

Religion: Keeping the religion factor in mind, if your telecentre gets located in a temple, mosque, church or gurdwara, people from other religious groups may not be too comfortable coming. Or eventually, they may be. You can check this out for yourself, by asking the people concerned.

Government: Sometimes people are not comfortable near or in government buildings. But, you can also ask this question as you go about talking to potential users of the Telecentre.

Shared and/or donated space: You may be able to share a space with an existing business, and pay part of the rent, unless you can afford something bigger and better. Or you may receive a space in donation – that an individual or group may not be using. But remember, it is donated and should the person or the organisation at some point want it back, it is theirs and you will have to vacate it.

Post office or similar space: There are many examples showing that placing a telecentre inside or close to an existing business or service, where people tend to come - such as a post office - results in increased traffic for both operations. You may want to check out these and other places in your community.

Essential services: It is important that a road, electricity, water and phone lines be available in the prospective locations.

Competition: Are there other facilities or businesses that provide similar services? You may face competition and consider another location where you can generate need.

2.3 KIND OF SPACE

Now that you have some idea of the factors to keep in mind about location, you need to think about the space. What does this mean?

Building
The building you choose for your telecentre should be inviting and attractive. People need to feel good looking at it and be tempted to enter and use it. First impressions are very important. Very often if buildings are in a public place like a market or something, there is usually garbage and litter around. Make sure the place is neat and clean, inside and outside.

Size of the space
Although you may think about starting small, there is no harm in thinking big. Since you are taking space, consider taking a slightly bigger space than you need, as you could offer it as a meeting or workshop space. You could generate income from the rental of this space.

For example, someone may like to offer an English language class. Or, you may like to offer it. You could contract a teacher to come in for classes. Therefore, you will need the space. Better to think of it before you rent the space and then try and squeeze people into a space that is not sufficient.
If you have extra space then you can create a pantry and offer tea, snacks to the users of such classes.

Rooms
No matter how small or large your telecentre, separate rooms rather than one large room are preferable. Ideally, there should be enough rooming space for telephone booths (about 1 m x 1 m each), computer stations (at least 1.5 m x 1 m each), small reception and office area, store area and a general traffic area. If it is one large room, you may want to think about how to partition it into smaller rooming spaces.

Pantry
 It is a good idea to have a pantry area (a shelf or a table) to prepare some tea, coffee, snacks. You may think of keeping a refrigerator to store some food. Clean and plenty of drinking water is also an essential item. You could also provide mineral water or keep an earthen jar (a `kalsi` or `ghara`). If the telecentre is near a tea-shop, so this purpose is served.

Toilet
"The day every one of us gets a toilet to use, I shall know that our country has reached the pinnacle of progress." Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, first Prime Minister of India.

Pandit Nehru said this a long time ago. Even today, this is a challenge for us. As you are a role model in the community, you set an example. A clean and available toilet is very important. As you learned in previous Modules and Units, clean potable water and proper sanitation are major issues in community development. And, this is linked to the health of the community.

If a toilet is not included in the space, you could consider getting a *Sulabh Sauchalaya* installed. The cost is about Rs. 6000-1000. At the end of this Unit, in the Reference section is the address of the website. You can access it and introduce the technology to your community.

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Cooling

When the weather is hot, the inside temperature of your telecentre is important – for the equipment as well as for your clients.

The most obvious solution is to put a fan, as required, but it blows the dust around, which is not good for the equipment. Coolers keep the place cool, but once the rains come, they only build humidity into the environment. You could consider appropriate local technology such as `*khus'*.

If you have adequate power supply and the budget, you may go for air conditioning. The closed windows keep out dust, which is harmful to the equipment, and keeps operating temperatures of the equipment down. This results in less equipment maintenance and repair and increases the comfort levels of the staff and customers.

You could also put curtains or `*chiks'*, made of local material. This is the most inexpensive of all options. It will keep out the light and cool the place down. But, you will still need fans or a cooler, to lower the temperature further for comfort.

As a matter of fact, a cool telecentre during the height of the summer may prove an attractive feature, encouraging users to visit it and spend more time using the facilities.

For those in colder climates, you have to think about the reverse: keeping the space warm. You can opt for central heating or space heaters.

2.4 IDEAL BUILDINGS OR LOCATIONS

As we discussed above there are existing building and organisations where your telecentre could be located. If not in these facilities, then you may consider a space close to these.

Existing well-used facilities

Post office
Community hall
Community radio station
Library
Shop fronts
Panchayat Building
Marketplaces
Bus stop or bus terminal
Train station
Educational organisation
Rooms in a local NGO's offices
Religious organisations

Checklist for space

As I mentioned earlier, you may have a notebook to write down observations of what you are seeing. You also may have taken some photos of the places you have seen. Here is a checklist that will help you to make decisions and also to make a budget for the Telecentre later.

a. What kind of a Telecentre do I want?
b. What kind of space will I need?
c. How many rooms should I look for?
d. Will the space need repairs?
e. How much interior work is needed (partitions, etc)?
f. Is there a toilet? Is it in good condition? If I have to put one in, where would it go?
g. Is there cross ventilation?
h. Is there light?
i. How can I cool it?
j. What are the surroundings like?
k. How close is it to the nearest bus stand?
l. Besides the rent, how much will it cost me to make the changes I want?

Check Your Progress 1

Note:
a) Please use the space below each question for your answer
b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this Unit

1**.** List 4 four things you need to keep in mind before you start looking for space
   i.   _____
   ii.   _____
   iii. _____
   iv.   _____

2. List 3 factors to keep in mind about location
   i.   _____
   ii.   _____
   iii. _____

3. Name the organisation that provides appropriate technology toilets

     _____

2.5 MANAGING THE SPACE

Managing space means how you will use the space. First, what kind of space do you have? Is it one large room or several rooms? If it is one large room, will you need to make partitions? How will you furnish the space?

Let us go through the steps in decision making about managing the space. The ideal arrangement is to have several rooms. If you have rented a hall or one large room, think about how you can divide the space.

Room Space 1: An office space for yourself – the Manager/Operator (if you plan to be at the telecentre yourself most of the time), or any senior member of the staff (who will be there most of the time).

Room Space 2: A dedicated space for the computers, which will be placed on tables, and chairs for people to sit on. It is a good idea to keep some space between the computers, so that people have some privacy when they are working.

Room Space 3: A common space like a reception area for when people come into the centre. This can have a desk and chair for the receptionist or anyone who is staffing the centre. It should be an open space with some chairs for the visitor, be inviting, bright and attractive so that people would want to come back again after the first visit.

Room Space 4: An area or a part of a room, where you can offer classes – hardware and software training, or which can be used for group discussions or workshops. You could rent this room out for special classes. This would be an income-generating project for the telecentre. You will need a table and some chairs, maybe a black or white board to write on.

Room Space 5: If you have space, you could consider creating a pantry area. Further, if you can afford to, an open and informal space in your telecentre would be a great idea.   It is important to keep the space open and informal. What does this mean?

An open space is where there is no rigid arrangement of furniture. It is not cramped. This gives the space an air of informality. Remember that the telecentre is not a classroom in a school or college. Nor is it an office. It is a place where people come for services and also to learn and share.

Now, this does not mean that there are no rules for use of this open informal space. Very often, informal is taken to mean that we can do anything we want. Not true. The telecentre will be successful if people respect the space and use it joyfully.

To create an air of informality and comfort, you could consider a floor seating section. This would mean an investment in some light mattresses or *gaddas* (floor mattresses) and bolsters and cushions. You could invite people from the community to come and give talks, concerts, tell stories and any other activity that brings the community into your Telecentre. Several times a month you could show a film and invite the community.

In rural areas, you may find small roomed areas with an open courtyard in the front, or in the back of the roomed area. This could ideally serve for the purpose we have just discussed.

2.6 FURNISHING THE SPACE

Furnishing means what you will put in the space. There will be:

Equipment - computers, printers, scanners, DTP machines, telephones, photocopiers etc. We have already covered this.

Furniture
- tables, chairs, bookshelves, waste paper bins, storing cupboards
- kitchen utensils (cups, glasses, plates, spoons);
- cleaning supplies (for dusting, mopping, washing soap, vim),
- gadgets (water kettle or gas, water cooler, fans, room coolers, TV)
- soft furnishing (curtains, cushions, mats)

It is best to buy light furniture – so that if you need to, you can move it around. Heavy metal furniture may not be a good idea, as it is not attractive to look at and hard to move. Slim, light furniture is the best.

Many people invest in plastic furniture because it is light, easy to store and clean. You could consider this, but also remember that it is not very eco-friendly. Plastic is a human-made material and not very pleasant to look at, especially when it gets a lot of use – it does not age well, unlike natural materials such as wood, cane, cloth, etc.

Invest in comfortable furniture, especially chairs for the computers. Make sure that the height of the table on which the computer sits is a standard height (30 inches) and the chair matches the height. Avoid heavy chairs. Light weight chairs will give the room a lighter feel.

Don't crowd a room too much. The temptation to put tables close together means that people will not feel comfortable working. Keep some distance between the tables and the computers.

Check Your Progress 2

Note:
a) Please use the space below each question for your answer
b) Compare your answer with the one given at the end of this Unit

1. Name 4 kinds of spaces that you need in a telecentre
   i. _____
   ii. _____
   iii. _____
   iv. _____

2. Name 2 kinds of furnishings you will need for the telecentre
   i. _____
   ii. _____

2.7 SUMMING UP

In this Unit you have learned about planning logistics for a telecentre. The main points are:

- Location of a telecentre is crucial
- The space inside the telecentre should be bright, attractive, well laid out and easy to use
- The space should be well divided and furniture well laid out

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2.8 Check Your Progress: Model Answers

CYP 1

1. Four things to be kept in mind before looking for a telecentre space:

- What kind of a Tele-Centre do I want?
- What services will I offer?
- What kind of people will come to the Tele-Centre?
- How should people come to my Tele-Centre?

2. Three factors to keep in mind about location:

- What is the kind of business activity around the location?
- What is status of approach roads?
- How close is the bus or railway station?

3. The organisation that provides appropriate technology toilets is Sulabh International.

CYP 2

1. The four kinds of spaces needed in a telecentre are:

- Space for keeping the computers, printers and other IT equipment
- Space for reception and office activities
- Space for computer and other stationary storage
- Space for training classes/ workshops/ group discussions

2. Two kinds of furnishings needed in the telecentre

- Suitable light weight furniture of sitting and placing computers, printers etc.
- Soft furnishing like curtains, cushions, mats etc.

2.9 DEFINITIONS

1**. Cross-Ventilation:** This refers to a closed space which has window/door or any other opening in the wall in opposite direction. This helps air flow inside the space and makes comfortable stay for the people inside the room.

2. **Pantry:** A small room or space where tea or drinks are prepared, and normally where there is no cooking.

2.10 ASSIGNMENT

Make a presentation on what you think would be your ideal telecentre.

The presentation could be

1. A 5-7 minute cassette or CD audio recording
2. A video tape (5 minutes)
3. A written essay (1000 words)
4. A drawing
5. A poem
6. A photos essay (with about 10 photos and text)

2.11 GLOSSARY AND REFERENCES

1. Roger Harris. *A Framework for Designing Telecentres*. Roger Harris Associates, Hong Kong, March 2007.
2.**www.wikipedia.org**: Definitions and References
3. **www.sulabhinternational.org/**