

PRESS RELEASE

Ministry of Education to train unemployed youth, continuing a successful USAID pilot program

COLOMBO, March 20, 2009 – The Ministry of Education announced today it will provide workforce readiness training to thousands of Sri Lankan youth, thanks to funding from the Asian Development Bank. Accelerated Skills Acquisition Program will provide the training using a specialized curriculum that targets unemployed youth, ages 15 – 25.

High unemployment rates for youth who do not enter university continue to be a national concern. To better prepare young people to find jobs and be successful in their careers, the Ministry of Education considered a wide range of job skills programs, eventually selecting the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Accelerated Skills Acquisition Program (ASAP). The Ministry of Education chose ASAP because of its success working with young people, especially school leavers, and its strong relationships with the private sector that ensured training curricula taught students the skills they need to be successful in the workplace.

Under the Asian Development Bank funded Education for Knowledge Society Project (EKSP), Ministry activities are aimed at empowering selected students who have completed their Advance Level (A/L) exams and who come from economically disadvantage families. As part of the EKSP Career Guidance and Sisudiriya Stipend components of the project, ASAP will support the acquisition of post-secondary, career-oriented soft skills that are essential for finding gainful employment, especially in the emerging ICT and service sectors of the Sri Lankan economy.

EKSP intends to introduce innovative programmes that have been tested and have shown positive results in local environments in line with government national programmes that are conducted as part of the Ministry's plans for their "Year of Information Technology and English." USAID, the development agency of the U.S. Government, provided \$2.4 million to launch the ASAP Program in 2006. Since then, ASAP has trained more than 8,000 unemployed youth in career success skills, with about 2,000 currently employed or participating in apprenticeships. With today's announcement, that high-quality curriculum will continue to help more youth in Sri Lanka, ASAP will provide the training for the Ministry of Education.

"USAID is proud of what the ASAP Program has accomplished in training young people in the skills they need to find jobs and be successful in their careers," stated Gerald R. Andersen, USAID Director, Office of Economic Growth. "We are especially glad that the Ministry of Education shares our

excitement about this program. With this new partnership, thousands of young people will find good jobs, gaining financial independence that will benefit their families and communities,” he continued.

The ASAP Program focuses on building “soft” skills such as English language and computer literacy training, interviewing skills, good work ethics, and productive attitudes. Curriculum designers worked closely with the private sector to develop training programs so that youth were ready to step into the private sector successfully. ASAP also linked trainees with employers and vocational training centers, especially in rural areas.