

For release on 19-12-2005  
**NEWS RELEASE**

## **TELEPHONE USE ON A SHOESTRING IN SRI LANKA AND INDIA – MEN'S USE OF TELEPHONES NO DIFFERENT FROM WOMEN'S**

**Colombo, Sri Lanka, 19 December 2005:** Men and women in Sri Lanka and India engage in similar levels of telephone use in low-income settings, according to a recent study carried out by LIRNEasia.

A study conducted by LIRNEasia, an Asian research organization based in Colombo, explores the use of telecom services amongst people whose incomes are less than approximately USD 100 per month in Sri Lanka and India. The study provides evidence that there are few significant differences between men and women in the use of fixed, mobile or public phones at these income levels. These results challenge the findings of several prior and well-established studies.

There was also little difference between men and women in terms of calling patterns, based on the average number of calls made and received as well as the duration of calls. Men and women make relatively the same amount of calls in a month and spend roughly the same amount of time on calls. Sri Lankans and Indians on a shoestring mostly make local calls (between 6 and 20 calls per month) and fewer national or international calls (less than 5 calls per month), and spend less than 5 minutes on average on most phone calls (incoming or outgoing).

It was found that telephones are used mostly for relationship maintenance purposes. Respondents gave 90 per cent of weight to relationship maintenance when asked for reasons for using the phone and only around ten percent of weight for instrumental purposes. These weights did not differ significantly between women and men. Relationship maintenance purposes include keeping in touch with family and friends and passing on news and messages; instrumental purposes, on the other hand, include financial, business and other transactions such as arranging meals and accommodation.

This study has shed new light on men's and women's use of the telephone in low-income settings. Much of the existing research, based on small-sample studies in affluent developed countries, concludes that women use telephones primarily for relationship maintenance purposes and for longer-duration calls while men use the telephone less, make calls of shorter duration and call primarily for instrumental purposes. The study conducted by

LIRNE*asia* studies a large sample of users in Sri Lanka and India at the bottom of the income scale and is the first of its kind.

The study did not examine the behavior of affluent users. It is possible that, as non-discretionary calls get added to the mix as would be expected of less financially constrained users, the male-female divergence reported in previous studies will become evident. Another possible explanation for the divergent results is that the tendency of men to make short, instrumental calls is culturally determined. LIRNE*asia* intends to conduct another round of multi-country research exploring these issues in 2006 and will then be in a position to better answer the question of divergent research results.

The survey was implemented for LIRNE*asia* by TNS Lanka and its Indian counterpart, TNS India in April and May 2005. A total of 3,199 people were surveyed, across four localities in Sri Lanka and seven in India. Both genders were represented to their true proportions in the population.

LIRNE*asia* is regional, non-profit ICT policy and regulation capacity-building organization incorporated under the Companies Act of Sri Lanka, No. 17 of 1982, in 2004. It is currently funded primarily by the International Development Research Centre of Canada. Additional information is available at <http://www.lirneasia.net>.

TNS Lanka is wholly owned by TNS India, and has been operating in Sri Lanka since 1995. TNS Lanka has a fully fledged field structure in all parts of the island, including the North and East, in addition to its research, operation and data processing units in Colombo. TNS is the world's second largest market information groups, with 230 offices across 70 countries.

**For more information:**

LIRNE*asia*

Rohan Samarajiva

Executive Director

SLIDA Campus, 28/10 Malalasekera Mawatha

Colombo 7, Sri Lanka

Tel: +94 11 452 7647 Fax: +94 11 452 7648

Mobile: +94 (0)77 735 2361

E-mail: [samarajiva@lirne.net](mailto:samarajiva@lirne.net)