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Distance Education via Satellite: A Case Study of the Indonesian Distance Education Satellite System

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ABSTRACT

In 1980 the U.S. Agency for International Development initiated the AID Rural Satellite Program (RSP) to explore the potential of telecommunications as a means of extending scarce expert resources and expanding educational opportunities to remote and rural areas. Building on simple, interactive, and inexpensive telephone-based technologies, the Program developed teleconferencing systems for use as a development tool. Three pilot projects—in Indonesia, the West Indies, and Peru—were implemented to test and demonstrate that audioteleconferencing could reliably and affordably support development activities in education, health and agriculture. However, this article focuses on the development of distance education in Indonesia. Linking 13 distant universities in Indonesia and six universities in the West Indies, audioteleconferencing system are used to provide academic courses to university students, to upgrade faculty skills through in-service training programs, and to facilitate administrative and institutional communication. The effect is to make the expert resources of each institution available to all members of network, thus multiplying each professional's outreach and effectiveness. Over 15 courses are taught each semester to thousands of university students in Indonesia. The study concludes that the system has worked well. The Program have afforded valuable lessons in the planning and implementation of distance education programs, the design of appropriate technical systems, the programmatic and technical management by these programs, the process of technology transfer, and the identification of the most suitable uses and audiences.

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