

Case Study in ICT for Governance, Sri Lanka

# The Government Information Center (GIC) - at 8 months

“If you don’t know, ask 1919”

CPRsouth, Manila, Philippines  
January 2007

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- ▶ Background: e-Sri Lanka, ICTA and Re-Engineering Government
- ▶ Concept of the GIC and objectives
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## e-Sri Lanka : a national ICT-enable development initiative

- ▶ **Development project to bring about growth and enhance equity**
  - **More effective, citizen-centered, and transparent government**
  - empowerment of the rural poor, women and youth through increased and affordable access to information and communication tools
  - developed leadership and skills in ICT
  - employment creation through the ICT industry, ICT-enabled services, and enhanced competitiveness of user industries and services
- ▶ **Initial funding roughly USD 83million**; USD53mm of this from the world bank, counterpart funding from GoSL, other (smaller) donor agencies contributing
  - 5 year IDA credit (extendable)
- ▶ Implemented by the ICT Agency, the apex ICT policy making body in the country
  - Created by act of parliament, in existence for 5 years (2003 – 2008);
  - A government agency that was meant to function like a private sector entity by working with private sector, working fast, hiring highly skilled staff at salaries higher than government and closer to market rates

# **GIC: because a “quick-win” was needed to gain political and public visibility and disprove critics**

- ▶ Concept of e-Sri Lanka (e-Development) “new” and untested
- ▶ The set up of the ICT Agency a “new” concept
  - In-between the government and public sector, not belonging to either
- ▶ Adopted strategies of the Re-Engineering Government Program needing to be proved
  - where private sector has proven skills (in IT, systems, processes) outsource
- ▶ The majority of projects with long implementation cycle
  - –a period where the perception of inaction is heightened
- ▶ Started under a previous government; now functioning under a new one. Needed to prove its muscle
- ▶ Agency needed a “quick win”

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## GIC – the concept

- ▶ A central help desk, accessible by dialing an easy-to-remember number (1919) from any telephone
- ▶ Caller selects which language he/she wants to speak in (Sinhala, Tamil English)
- ▶ Each call answered within the first 3 rings by a courteous and well-trained agent
- ▶ Receive an answer (from a Knowledge-Base/database accessed by the call center agent) during the call
- ▶ If no answer available, agent issues a “ticket number” and tells the caller to call back within 24 - 36 hours (depending on the type of query)
  - During these 36 hours, the Call Center makes contact with relevant government institution, obtains an answer and updates the knowledge base
  - If/when the caller calls back, the answer is given
- ▶ Open 8am – 8pm, 7 days of the week, every day of the year
- ▶ General public made aware of 1919 through media advertising

## GIC – appropriateness of the solution

- ▶ Sri Lanka entering the call center market in a big way
  - several large multi-nationals opening captive call-center operations in the island
  - Many more (smaller) operators have opened up shop over the past 2-3 years
  - All staffed with state-of-the art technology (AVR systems, CRM solutions) and proven agent training programs (imported from India)
- ▶ Most cater to US and UK clientele
  - Working hours often start in the afternoon, or around 8pm Sri Lanka time
- ▶ Leaving the call centers unoccupied (with excess capacity) during most of the day-time hours
  - Enabling the ICTA to obtain lower-than-normal per-seat pricing from operators eager to bring in additional marginal revenue

## GIC – expected benefits

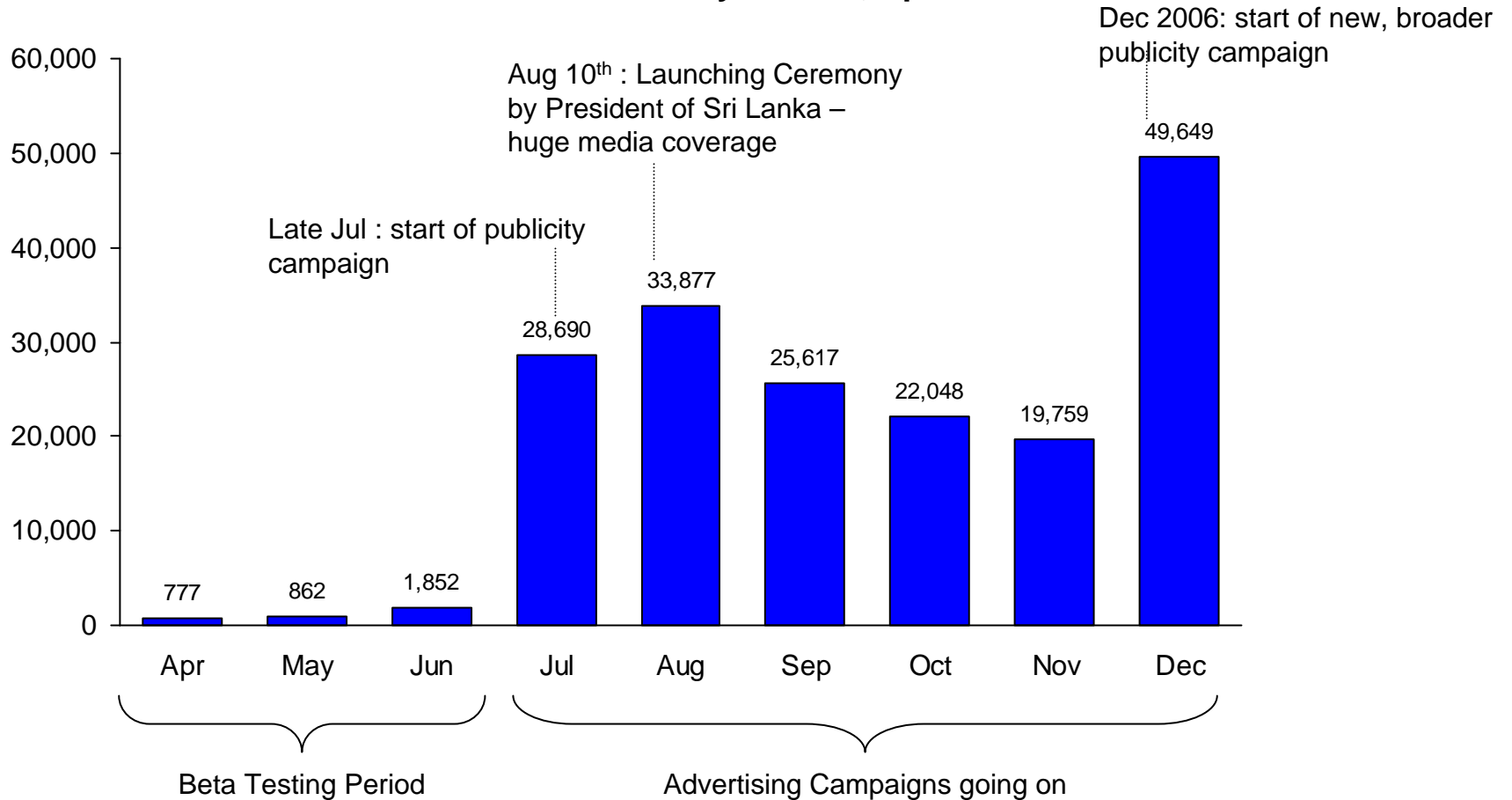
- ▶ Easier access to government information
  - Call a central number, instead of having to dial many government institutions
  - Citizen doesn't have to know the name of the institution, only needs to know what service he/she wants help with (“e.g. new birth certificate” instead of having to know the Birth Certificates are issued by the Registrar of Persons instead of the Registrar General's Department)
- ▶ Less wasted resources on the part of citizen
  - Time and money saved by avoiding repeated visits and repeated calls to government agencies
- ▶ Increased confidence in (and perception of) government (through accurate information, given politely and professionally)
- ▶ More transparency across government → less opportunity for corrupt officials?
  - due to the citizen being empowered through the information available via the GIC

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# Increasingly being utilized by the public; usage appears sensitive to advertising

Total Number of Call Received by the GIC, Apr – Dec 2006



## Utilization rate by the public good, but not enough?

- ▶ NYC's "**311**" service for non-emergency calls, started in April 2003
  - After 3 months of operation, 1MM calls (13% of residents using service)
  - After 6 months, 2.5MM calls (**31% of residents used the service**)
  - But takes complaints and service requests. And 24 hrs. So would be higher anyway?
- ▶ Hong Kong's "**1823 Citizen's Easy Link**" launched in Oct 2002
  - First 8 months of 2006 1.175 million inquiries (the rest were complaints or other types of calls).
  - **17 % of residents using the service**
- ▶ **GIC**: under utilized by comparison?
  - 1% of total population utilizing it after 6 months of operation
  - specially when 92% of people report they have ACCESS to a phone (even if they may not own a phone)

*Note: For simplicity, above calculations assume each citizen called the service just once during the time period in question and ignores migrant populations into these cities/countries*

*Source: NYC data from NYC State website [www.nyc.gov/html/doitt/html/about/](http://www.nyc.gov/html/doitt/html/about/), last visited on 10<sup>th</sup> Jan 2007;*

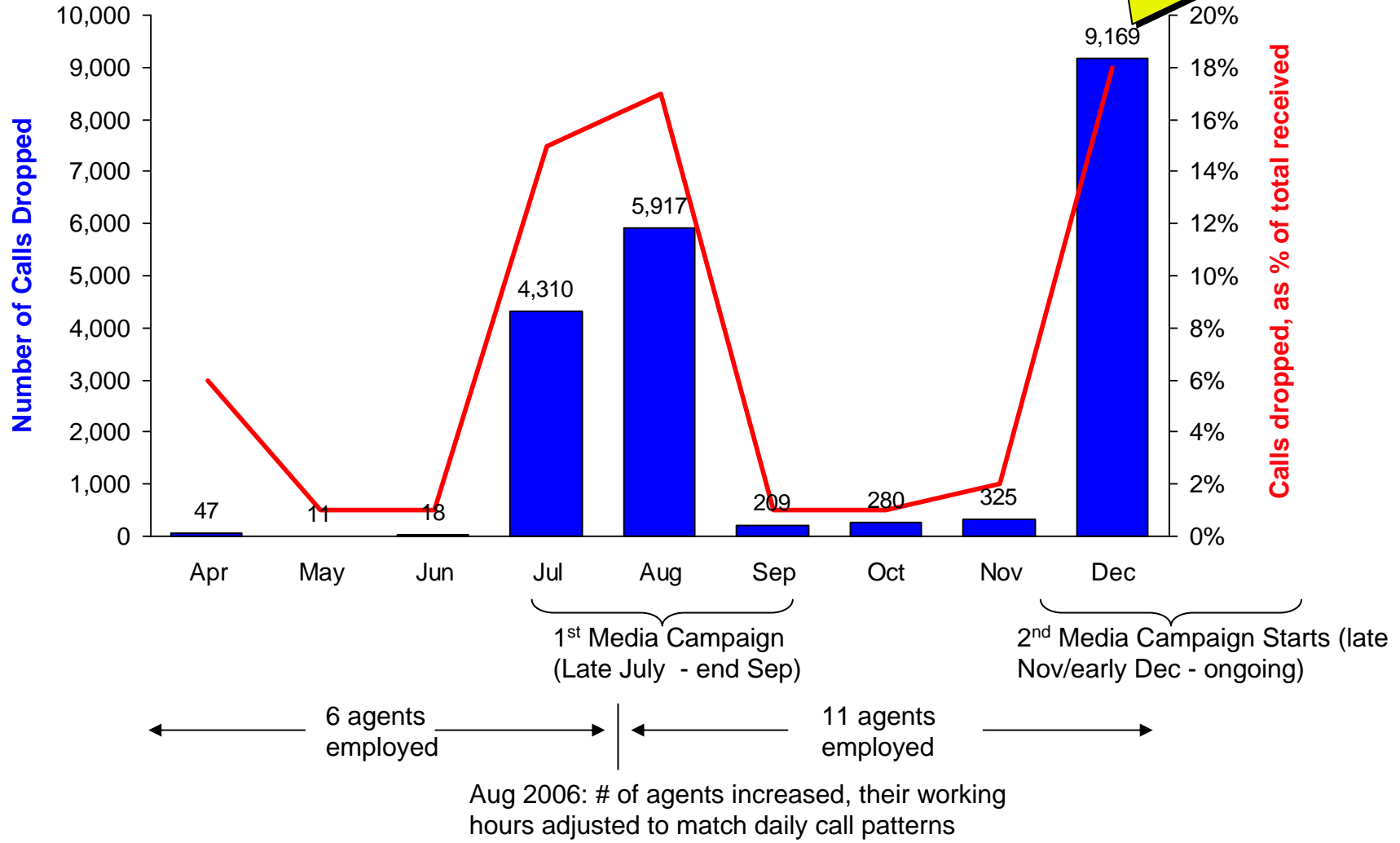
*Hong Kong call data from [www.eu.gov.uk/english/icc/icc\\_over/icc\\_over.html](http://www.eu.gov.uk/english/icc/icc_over/icc_over.html), last visited on 13<sup>th</sup> Dec 2007 and the CIA Fact Book (for population\_*

*Sri Lanka data from GIC, Dept. of Census and Statistics and Central Bank of Sri Lanka Consumer Finance Survey 2005, LIRNEasia ShoeStrings2 survey results of 2006*

# Not ready to handle the increased call volume at the start of each burst of publicity

9,000 dropped calls is too many, for a call center that is attempting to "change the face of government"

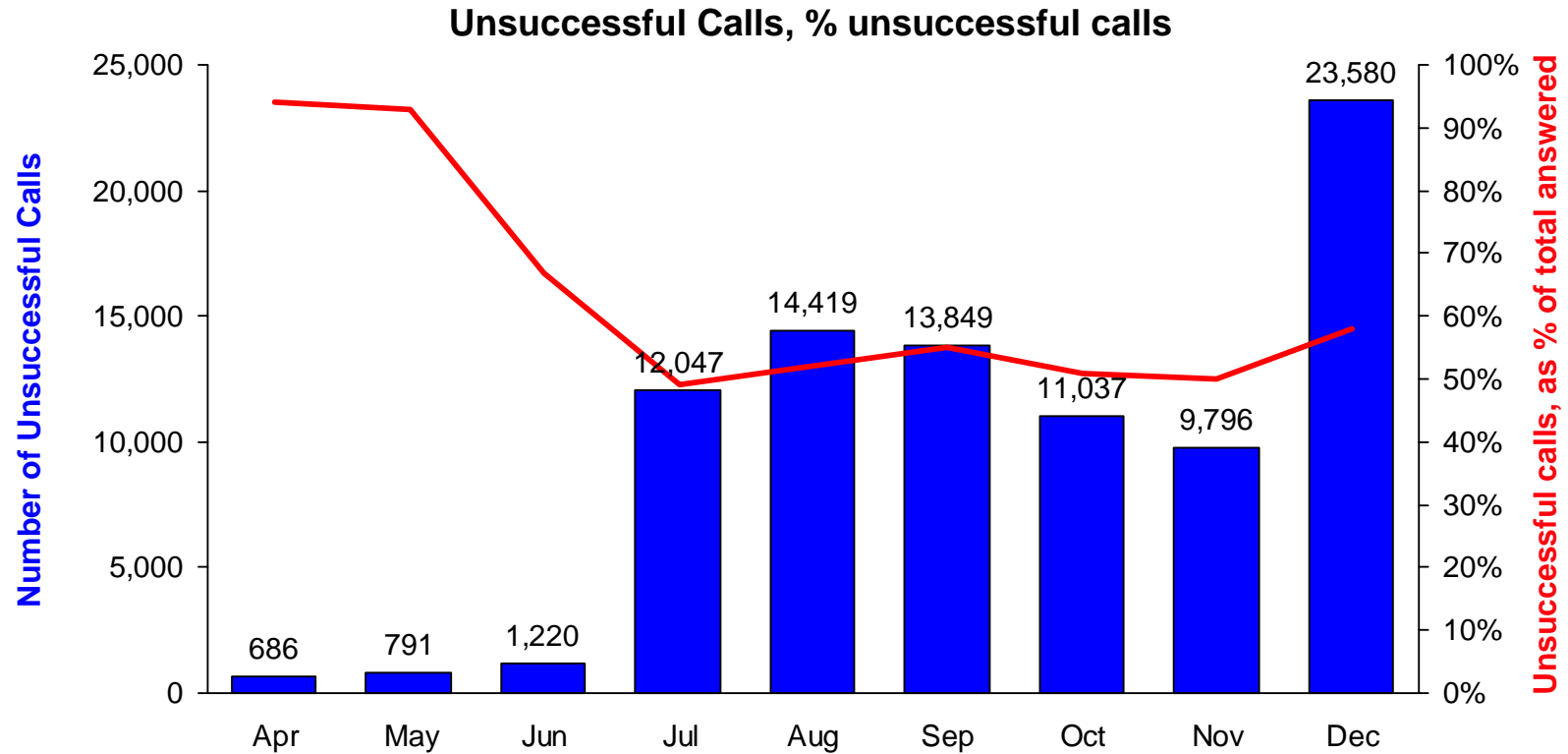
# of Dropped Calls, % dropped calls



## # of dropped calls due to band planning (?) and can lead to negative word-of-mouth

- ▶ A call is considered “dropped” when a Caller Hangs up before reaching a live agent
- ▶ Calls are Dropped because
  - The wait (hold-time) is too long
  - The caller changed his/her mind before call is transferred to an agent
  - Technical difficulties at the callers end (e.g. cell-phone disconnects)
- ▶ Currently, **AVERAGE WAIT TIME is a little over 40 seconds**
- ▶ Not ideal for a government initiative that is attempting to “change the face of government” by ensuring every phone call is answered within 1<sup>st</sup> three rings
  - To **compare, NYC 311 service had 6-second avg. wait time** by June 2006<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ Word-of-mouth effect or negative media coverage for 9,000 dropped calls per month could easily snow ball, leading to GIC being branded as “just like any other govt. office”

# Quality of information available at the GIC getting better, but still a very High number of “unsuccessful” (unresolved) calls

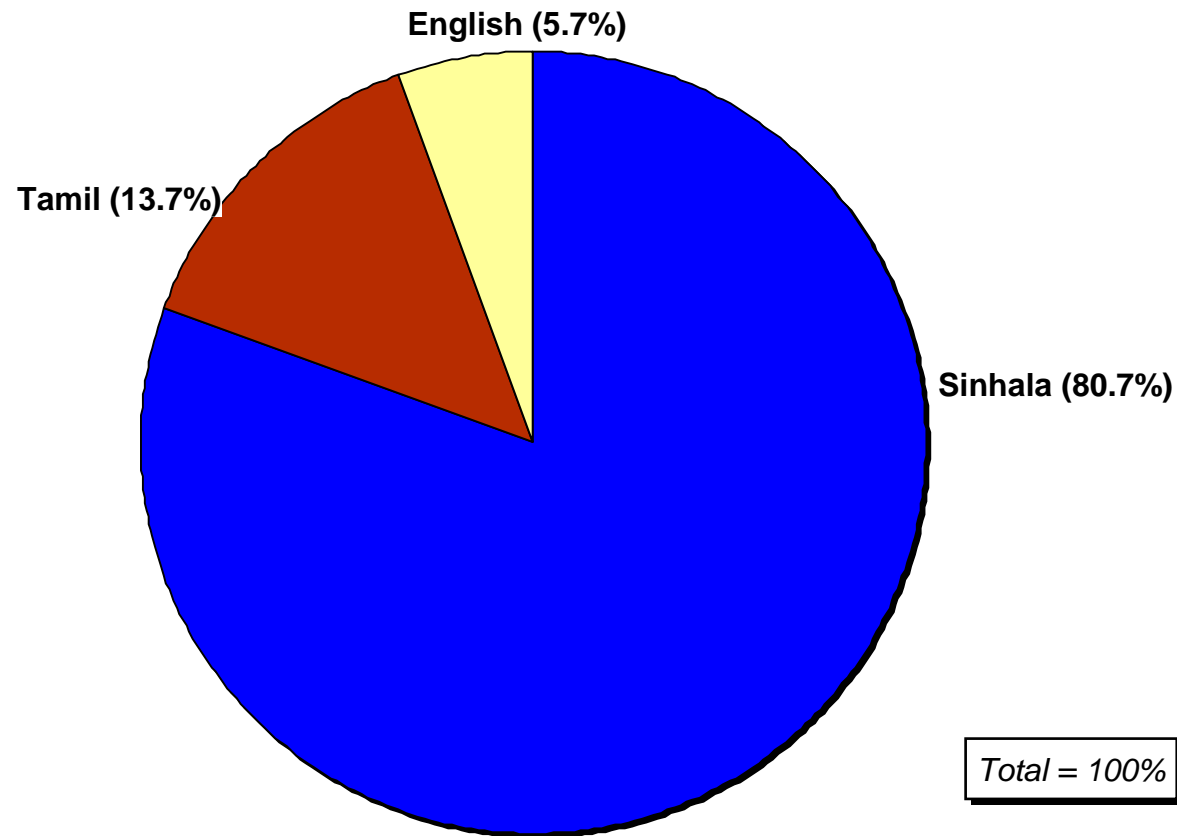


# Information in Knowledge Base not keeping up with demand and expectations

- ▶ A call is considered “unsuccessful” when the Agent fails to find a solution to the callers questions by searching the Knowledge Base (or by contacting the relevant Govt. department)
- ▶ Call can be unsuccessful if:
  - Caller is asking about (services of a) govt. institution that has not yet supplied its data to the GIC
  - Caller is asking about service that is not
- ▶ Ad campaign is raising undue expectations? (“I can ask any question”, “I can lodge a complaint against the government by calling the GIC” etc)
- ▶ Government Institutions and ICTA not being pro-active in adding previously unavailable information to the Knowledge Base
- ▶ **23,000 unsuccessful (unresolved) calls per month unacceptable for a government initiative that is attempting to “change the face of government”**
- ▶ **The “new face/voice of government” beginning to sound a lot like the old?**

# Calls in all 3 languages, majority in Sinhala as expected

Preferred Language of communication, as % of total calls



*Note: Language selected by Caller by pressing 1, 2 or 2 (for Sinhala, Tamil and English respective) on their telephones. Above data would not include language preferences for callers who do not have a touch tone phone*

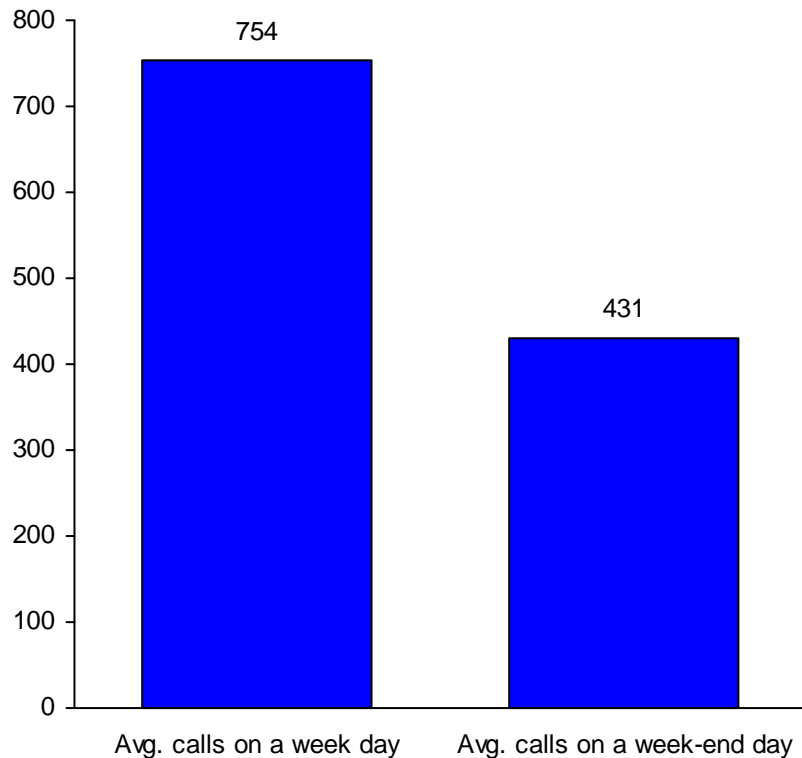
*Source: Auto-generated reports of the AVR System*

# More calls during week days and “normal” (i.e. government?) working hours

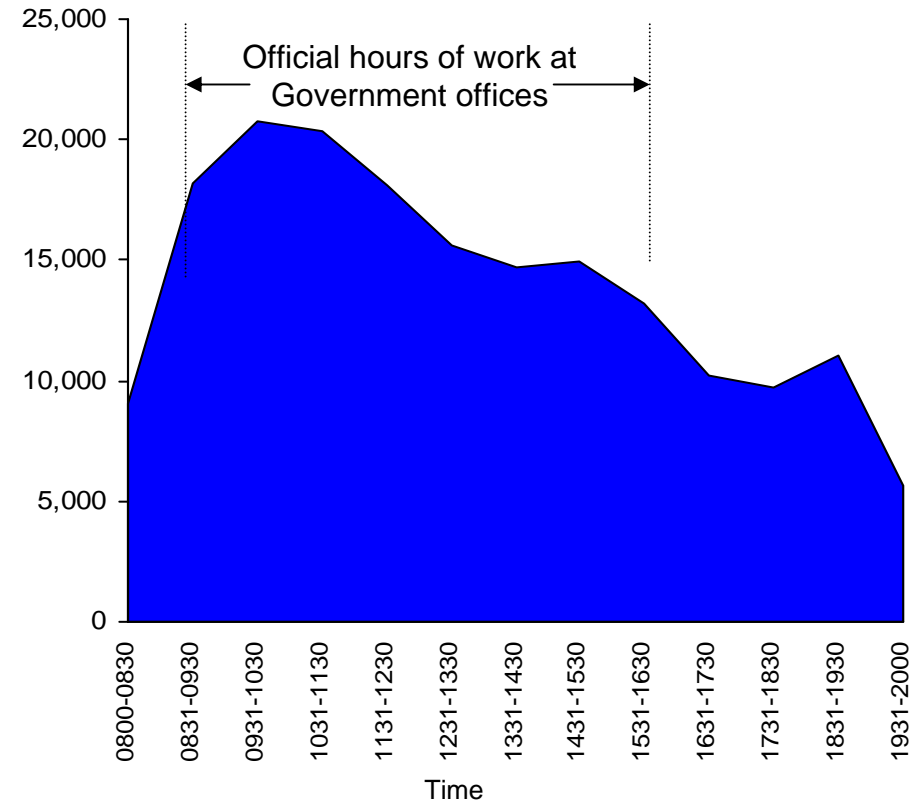
**Why? Hypothesis:**

1. People assume GIC works normal “Government hours”
2. People call when they have access to a telephone (from their office)

**Average # of Calls per Week-day vs. Week-end<sup>1</sup>**



**Calls during each time period of the day<sup>2</sup> (GIC operates 8am-8pm)**



Source: Auto-generated reports of the AVR System

Notes: (1). Week days are Mon, Tue, Wed, Thu, Fri. Calculated by adding all calls received during week days (for the period Apr – Dec 2006) divided by # of week days during that period. Similarly for week-end (Sat, Sun) days; (2). Graph shows total number of calls received (for the period Apr – Dec 2006) during each time period shown

# Majority of calls related to govt. institutions that have high level of citizen interaction

Distribution of Calls by topic/government institution

| Government Institution (key services provided to citizens)  | Calls as % of total answered |
|---|------------------------------|
| <b>Registration of Persons</b> (issuance of National Identity Cards)  | 15.1%                        |
| <b>Immigration &amp; Emigration</b> (issuance of passports, visas)  | 13.5%                        |
| <b>Department of Motor Traffic</b> (issue drivers license, register new vehicles)   | 13.4%                        |
| <b>Divisional Secretariats</b> (325 regional institutions that are a first point of interaction for many citizen service s- e.g. issuance of NIC, passports, birth certificates, various permits) | 11.9%                        |
| <b>Department of Examinations</b> (conduct grade 5, 10, 12 exams, publish results)  | 7.5%                         |
| <b>About the GIC</b> (people calling to simply inquire about this new service, who is running it, where the call center is located etc.)  | 6.4%                         |
| <b>Department of Labor</b>  | 6.2%                         |
| <b>Calls related to services from ALL OTHER</b> government institutions   | 25.9%                        |

53.9% of all calls are for 4 institutions

Almost **everyone** needs at least one of these (ID Card, passport, drivers license, birth certificate)

# Calls from across the country, but benefits may not (yet) be reaching those who have the most to gain

Geographical (by province) Distribution of Calls

| Province                         | % of received (answered) calls | % of households with telephone <sup>2</sup> |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| Western Province                 | 53.3%                          | 45.3%                                       |
| Southern Province                | 10.3%                          | 18.3%                                       |
| Central Province                 | 9.1%                           | 17.1%                                       |
| North Western (Wayamba) Province | 8.5%                           | 23.10%                                      |
| Sabaragamuwa Province            | 6.9%                           | 13.40%                                      |
| Eastern Province                 | 4.0%                           | 13.90%                                      |
| North Central Province           | 3.8%                           | 13.90 %                                     |
| Uva Province                     | 3.3%                           | 9.1%  |
| Northern Province                | 0.8 %                          | 19.70%                                      |
| Calls from Overseas              | 0.02%                          | 6.2%  |

>> *Should* aim to receiving more calls from these provinces.

>> Population in extremely rural areas within these provinces may have the most to gain (e.g. most amount of time saved by NOT traveling to Colombo repeatedly to obtain a passport)

**Notes:**

(1). Based on information given by each caller in response to the question “Sir/Madam may we please know where (which district) you are calling from?” at the end of the call. This (caller’s location) was only collected June 2007 onwards

(2). As reported by the Consumer Finance Survey 2005 of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka. Note Household penetration of phones is unusually high for Northern Province because survey was only carried out only 2 districts. If all 5 districts were included the number would be much lower

# What's missing from this analysis of performance

- ▶ Contains only some observable data (e.g. # of calls) and informed hypothesis
- ▶ Qualitatively feedback only available from transcripts of recorded calls and from emailed/written feedback sent by citizens
  - “*this service is very useful*” (in emails and recorded calls)
  - “*Difficult to imagine this is government*” (repeatedly heard in recorded calls)
  - “*...but you need a lot more information – my question was not resolved*” (also repeated!)
  - “*why can't you start accepting complaints as well?*”
- ▶ Some important factual data unavailable for analysis
  - E.g. # of repeat-callers who (indicative of success and usefulness of the service)
  - CRM system and call process needs to be updated to capture this information
- ▶ Less directly observable, but equally important indicators on user perceptions, satisfaction missing
  - E.g. is the GIC making government easier to access? Have you ever heard of the GIC?
  - Can only be gathered by a survey of users (& non-users)
  - To be done within the next 12 months by the ICT Agency's Monitoring & Evaluation team

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## Current performance “acceptable?”; But to become GOOD.....

- ▶ Increase the successful call rate (lower the # of unsuccessful calls)
  - Add information on nearly all government services to the Knowledge Base
  - Keep information already in KB regularly updated
  - Both require close interaction with govt. departments and a pro-active project owner at the ICT Agency
  
- ▶ Increase total incoming calls
  - Much more targeted advertising campaign
  - But one that sets the right expectations
  
- ▶ Avoid high number of dropped calls
  - Regular adjustments of agent staffing pattern and numbers
  
- ▶ See if the objectives are being met
  - User perception surveys, as described in Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) plans
  
- ▶ **In short, simply implement the existing project plan, M&E plan and enforce the existing Service Level Agreement**
  - **The Agency not doing this?**

## Then to become GREAT ....

- ▶ Provide additional (value added services) to callers
  - Start taking (registering) complaints about government services (by creating issue tracking/complaint management system)
  - Introduce Fee-Based Services. E.g. filling out online applications (for users who do not have internet access, but have access to a phone); faxing or mailing government forms /documents when callers request, bill them through their phone bill
- ▶ The Holy Grail: move (as close as possible) to a Public Private Partnership
  - Call center operator responsible for increasing incoming call volume and generating income from fee-based services
- ▶ Holy Grail (2): Bridge the digital divide by moving the GIC out of Colombo to (1 or 3) rural villages
  - High connectivity cost is the barrier; language skills and literacy is already sufficient
- ▶ **In short, be bold, pro-active and visionary**