



Grameen Gyan Abhiyan

A Newsletter for the Rural Knowledge Movement

February 2008 Vol. 2 No. 2

This newsletter is a voice of all those wonderful people involved in taking the ICT4D movement to India's villages. The GGA partners, working relentlessly to touch the lives of the rural Indian through technology to the grass root workers, who are closer to the field and the vicissitudes of the landless labourer are focused.

Newsletter content will be pro-women, pro-poor, pro-nature and pro-livelihood and will cover everything from news on trends in the ICT4D world to the activities of the GGA and our partners involved in the critical areas of technology and content creation that can impact the daily life of the villager.

We welcome your questions, suggestions and active participation in raising issues and offering solutions. The GGA Secretariat has set up a help desk to facilitate this exchange, which shall be showcased in the forthcoming issues.

We await an enthusiastic participation from all of you. Get involved!

This edition focuses on technology that takes the knowledge revolution forward.

Sri Lankan ICTA Team Tours A Grameen Gyan Abhiyan (Mission 2007) Partner For Indian ICT Experience

In February, the Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA) of Sri Lanka, the country's apex body on ICT policy, arranged a visit of 25 of its Nanasala or Knowledge Centre operators to M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF), Chennai on a study tour followed by a field visit to Pondicherry to enable knowledge sharing and experience of telecentre operations in India.

The Nanasala project is ICTA's e-Sri Lanka initiative to establish Knowledge Centres and spread ICT services to the rural population. Each of these 25 Nanasala operators was selected from different districts to represent all the communities. During the study tour, they learnt about the operation of the Village Resource Centres and the Village Knowledge Centres, Content Generation and Dissemination through different technologies, Capacity Building, training of Knowledge Workers, Monitoring and Evaluation tools. They also learnt of the NVA Fellows concept and video conferencing with different Village Resource Centres.



The field visit to Pondicherry, including the Veeramapattinam and Kuruvinatham VKCs, and their discussion with MSSRF Knowledge Workers enabled them to put these concepts into perspective and assess the role of ICT in changing the daily life of the Indian villagers. They shared success stories and key challenges in the grassroots.

Following their visit, these enthusiastic Nanasala operators submitted three reports detailing their observations and learning from the Indian telecentres visit, the comparative differences between the Indian VRC and VKCs and the ICTA Nanasalas and the possible ways in which they could implement the innovation and learning from their Indian study tour.

All the 25 operators were positive that this exposure would actually enable them to adapt some of the VKC concepts into their own local community!

Ms. Deepika Gurusinghe Arachchige

Ms. Deepika Gurusinghe Arachchige, is an operator of the Sooriya Wewa Nanasala, Sri Lanka. She is one of the best twenty operators of Sri Lanka chosen for this knowledge and experience sharing study tour. She was the only woman in the team, chosen for her sensitivity towards local community problems and her ability to provide solutions.



INSIDE

Sri Lankan team tours a GGA Partner

Kashmiri NVA Fellow fights guns with computers

Technology News

ICT Results: An EC News Service

Meet Your MP: Ms. V. Radhika Selvi,

Views of an ICT Iconoclast

Deepika comes from a lower-middle class family. She is married to a business man and is a mother of two young girls. She used to work for a Korean company called Hanjung until she saved enough money to start her Nanasala in May 2005, with an initial investment of LKR 2,50,000. Her Nanasala caters to 15,000 people living in 22 different villages. People visit her Nanasala to avail ICT services like internet browsing, computer training, type setting, telephone calls, photocopying, printing and faxing. She earns approximately LKR 50,000.



Following the study tour, she was eager to collect and compile local data and maintain a register in her Nanasala. She promised to engage more women in her Nanasala and explore how ICTs could be used for agriculture, fisheries and industry in her local condition. She wanted to have a mobile health facility for her villages. After this trip, she planned to innovatively use her two-wheeler and laptop, to create awareness among the local community.

Rev. M. Devasagayam

Rev. M. Devasagayam, serves at the St. Mary's Church, Bogawantala, in the central province of Sri Lanka. He also operates a Nanasala in his locality that caters to a population of 4,000 to 5,000 people mostly working in 10 large tea estates. Offering services like computer training, Internet browsing and basic information, the Nanasala generates a revenue of about LKR 4000 to 5000, which is not much considering the fact that one kilogram of rice costs LKR 90 while milk powder costs 725 per kilogram.

Some of Rev. Devasagayam key lessons from the India study tour, were the importance of providing different employment generating opportunities to the local community; basic and reliable information on weather forecast to help fishermen, a milk cooperative society initiative and agriculture related information and knowledge exchange among knowledge workers.

According to him, some of the characteristics of a Village Knowledge Centre, like latest technology, availability of information on animal husbandry; a bottom up and people centric approach, women empowerment and mobile health services constitute the main differences with a Sri Lankan Nanasala and he planned to replicate the initiative in his telecentre.

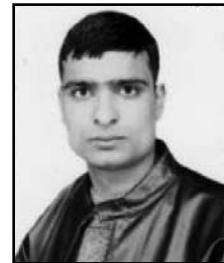
Mr. M. N. M. Rinoos

He is an engineering student in his mid 20 started his centre in 2005 at Jaya nagar. He was chosen for this study tour, based on his successful computer awareness campaign and implementation of e-Learning system in eight different schools. His centre caters to 40 villages and attracts 20–25 visits per day for internet browsing, computer training, job search, photo copying and scanning. He earns a profit of LKR 7000 – 8000. Two of his students namely Akram and Manasi got a job in a Malaysian company following the computer training at his centre.

Following the study tour, he wanted to connect the grassroots people with the government; market local products and use adopt Azim Premji's educational CDs to educate the local people.

Mr. Adil Rashid Vaid An NVA Fellow Chooses Mouse To Triumph Over Guns

At 21, Mr. Adil Rashid Vaid from Bijbehara village in Sadiqabad near Anantnag, in south Kashmir is a well known figure. In an area where people live under the constant threat of militancy and the distressing impact of conflict, Mr. Adil is already a Fellow of the Jamsetji Tata National Virtual Academy. He has completed a computer certificate course from NIIT and runs a computer centre. He will soon finish his graduation in Economics, Sociology and Political Science. He is a puppeteer and a voluntary community worker who helps the local NGO Athwaas.



Armed with a NVA Fellowship and inspired with its possibilities, in August 2006, Adil applied for a loan to set up a computer centre. At the time, the nearest computer centre was several kilometres away from his village and charged Rs. 2000 per month, a steep price out of the financial reach of the local families.

To meet this need, Mr. Adil and his friends set up the computer centre. They only charged Rs. 100 per month to serve the local families and surprisingly the money was always sufficient to sustain the computer centre. Later they bought computer parts and assembled 10 computers by themselves with the little savings they made from the computer fees. They also started to teach computer literacy. Mr. Adil's computer institute has now tied up with an institute in Pune that will provide certification for the computer course offered by the centre. More than 170 students have benefited from Adil's computer centre. Their lives have been changed.



Situated at a distance of 55 kms, south east of Srinagar, Anantnag is the gateway to the Kashmir Valley and is called the granary as it is agriculturally fertile. Although nature is bountiful; agriculture, animal husbandry and tourism, are an adequate means of livelihood, since 1989 the valley has been resounding with the noise of gunfire and many young, educated but unemployed men have taken to militancy, a major threat in this beautiful valley. Mr. Adil's initiatives have provided an option against militancy.

Mr. Adil is pleased at the social impact of his centre. He says he was just concerned about making the guns exit his land. "Jis state mein bandhook gusa hai wuse kaise bahar nikhala jaye?," he states.

Since an early age, Mr. Adil has been concerned about the well being of his people. In his village, the women are skilled weavers but their literacy levels are very low. A small number of villagers are Gujjars, who are backward and mostly illiterate, living in poor conditions. At just 15, when Mr. Adil was still



in Class X, Athwaas, an NGO organisation reached his village, he volunteered his services to teach the kids and women in the neighbouring villages. He received no remuneration for his time and efforts. Only his travel expenses were reimbursed.



For the past three years Mr. Adil has been working as a voluntary community worker at a "Samanbal" (a Kashmiri word for meeting place) opened by Athwaas in District Anantnag. Samanbal is an initiative that involves the formation of women's self help groups for emotional, and economic empowerment. Mr. Adil motivated young girls from nearby villages to visit the Samanbal and form a group. It was a challenge to sustain the group but Mr. Adil was instrumental in developing and sustaining the group. He still devotes time for engaging with the group.



He has a large number of women students, of his mother's age, who come for livelihood classes. They say of Mr. Adil that "We are grateful to him. He has the goodwill of the people. He does not want to go to greener pastures to earn riches or a better livelihood for himself, like other boys of his age."

Mr. Adil is also actively engaged with the Pulse polio programme in the villages. After the Kashmir earthquake in October 2005, Mr. Adil visited villages of the affected region. He participated in the initial relief work and is now engaged with rehabilitation work with a group called Yakjah Reconciliation and Development Network. The group is engaged in integrated learning for children in a village in Uri, District Baramulla, North Kashmir.

Mr. Adil sees education and the ability to earn a better livelihood as a solution to the ails of his land. He is also constantly striving to better his abilities. Mr. Adil has participated in workshops for learning personality development skills, social mapping of villages, and the art of making and using puppets for social mobilisation. Mr. Adil uses puppetry to market all the courses that his centre conducts for children and women. He also does marketing for education, health and livelihood.

Mr. Adil has competency in environmental protection and networking at the grassroots level and is looking at the possibility of linking eco-friendly sustainable livelihoods for women with their empowerment at the village level.

Like he says, "Nobody in Kashmir is bothered whether the land is with Pakistan or India. All they want is a state of "amman", or "shanthi", meaning "peace" depending on the language they speak, urdu, kashmiri or hinglish."

And he is doing his utmost to provide an alternative to militancy. Using mouse over guns.



Technology News

Govt. to Link Up 250,000 Panchayats Through ICT

The government plans to initiate e-governance services like birth and death certificates, tax payments and emails through the use of information and communication technology in 250,000 gram panchayats all over the country. This is the key recommendation of the expert committee on Information Technology for Panchayati Raj that recently submitted its report to the Minister of Panchayati Raj, Mr. Mani Shankar Aiyar.

The computerisation of nearly a quarter million panchayati raj institutions is expected to cost Rs. 5,400 crore over the next three years. This amount provisions computers and connectivity for two thirds of the panchayats as the balance one third are expected to have the infrastructure out of ongoing state initiatives by the time the project is fully rolled out. This could be the biggest connected government project in the world that will enable a gram panchayat president or sarpanch to monitor centrally sponsored panchayat centric schemes, do financial accounting and reporting and generally make for transparency and accountability through better management of records and revenue.

This project is under mission mode under the ambitious National e-Governance Plan of government of India.

Planning Commission Plans Broadband Revolution

The government aims to ensure broadband accessibility to almost every Indian citizen in rural India, making for a digital coverage of 97 per cent of its geographical area by 2012."

According to Planning Commission member secretary Ms. Raajeva Ratna Shah, during the 11th Five Year Plan for 2008-2012, the government along with NASSCOM and private industry associates will set up 20 IIIT's (Indian Institute of Information Technology) in various parts of the country for which the Planning Commission has already made a provision of Rs 100 crores.

The industry associations would be entitled to receive a part of allocations out of Rs 100 crores in which education would be imparted for skill contents relating to information technology, computing content, information security, telemedicine, telebanking and finance."

World's Cheapest Laptop From HCL

HCL Infosystems launched their fully functional, ultra portable range of laptops that breaks the price barrier and offers mobile internet at only Rs 13,990. Aimed at the masses, this laptop, nicknamed 'MiLeap' or 'My Internet Leap' weighs less than a kilogram, comes with a seven-inch screen and is equipped with an Intel processor.

According to Mr Ajai Chowdhary, Chairman, HCL Infosystems, "We shrunk the product to reduce the cost of the product. This laptop represents the future of computing. It will herald a new category of computing devices, opening up a wide range of new usage scenarios and application areas."

The MiLeap, is available in two series, the X and the Y. The laptops in the X series are priced at Rs 13,990 and Rs. 16,990 while the high-end Y series is priced at Rs 29,990 and Rs 39,990. The Y series has multiple



IT, ITeS sector to get Rs 16.8 billion in 2008-09

The Indian IT and ITeS sector has been allocated Rs 16.8 billion in 2008-09 from Rs 15 billion in the current fiscal, Finance Minister P Chidambaram said on Friday.

“Government’s forward looking policy is driving the growth of information technology and information technology-enabled services. I propose to enhance the allocation to the Department of Information Technology from Rs 1,500 crore (Rs15 billion) in 2007-08 to Rs1,680 crore (Rs16.80 billion) in 2008-09,” Chidambaram said while presenting the Union Budget in the Lok Sabha.

He also highlighted that the scheme for establishing 1,00,000 broadband Internet-enabled Common Service Centres in rural areas and the scheme for establishing state wide area networks (SWAN) with the help of the government were under implementation.

“A new scheme for state data centres has also been approved. I propose to provide Rs 75 crore (Rs 750 million) for the Common Service Centres, Rs 450 crore (Rs 4.5 billion) for SWAN and Rs275 crore (Rs 2.75 billion) for the state data centres,” he said.

From the text of the Budget Speech 2008 of Finance Minister Shri P. Chidambaram

navigational features such as touch screen, thumbboard, stylus and touch buttons with Windows Vista (Home) as the operating system.

MS India sets up lab at IIT Madras

Microsoft India has set up its Windows Technologies Lab at the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras. The lab will be a hub that will harness innovations through research. It aims to be a platform that students and faculty can use for research and training.

Experts from Microsoft are expected to visit the institution regularly to conduct seminars and workshops. The initial focus of the lab will be on Windows terminal services, device drivers, Windows embedded networking protocols, Windows kernel and Windows mobile. The lab is part of Microsoft’s unlimited potential initiative that focuses on transforming education, fostering local innovation and enabling jobs and opportunities through relevant, accessible and affordable technology solutions.

TRAI For Lower Mobile Charges In Rural Areas

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) may soon make it mandatory for operators to offer a mobile connection in rural areas at lower entry costs. The move is aimed at making affordable phone connections available to rural subscribers as TRAI is planning to abolish the subsidy support in the form of Access Deficit Charge from April this year.

According to TRAI, the objective is to ensure that the benefits of abolition of ADC are effectively transferred to make the services affordable and enable an increase in rural tele-density that would help to bridge the urban rural divide.

Hughes To Set Up 1000 Rural ICT Kiosks in India

Hughes Network Systems, the US-based software development company is planning to set up 1000 rural ICT kiosks in India within the next three years to promote education, teaching aids and rural banking.

The company has tied up with Reliance to set up its centres in rural India. It has also tied up with IT company Microsoft to offer various IT services in the villages. Hughes plans to first set up a village based satellite terminal at a cost of Rs. 100,000 to enable broadband based distance education. India has 350 million illiterates and the dropout rate is 87 percent.

ICT Results of the European Commission

The European Union has many collective projects that run cutting across all the member nations. It is exactly like the way we handle our Indian states. ICT Results is an editorial service created for the European Commission to showcase EU-funded ICT research and activities. The *ICT Results* service was developed in 2003 for the European Commission’s Directorate-General Information Society and Media. *ICT Results* features online news and analysis on the emerging results from information and communications technology research. It reports on prototype products and services ready for commercialisation, as well as work in progress and interim results with significant potential for exploitation.

The views expressed in the articles have not been adopted or in any way approved by the European Commission and should not be relied upon as a statement of the Commission or the Directorate General for Information Society and Media. Reproduction of this article is authorised, provided its source “ICT RESULTS” is acknowledged.

The ICT Information Desk Office, BU25 02/160, B-1049 Brussels, Belgium, Fax: +32 2 296 83 88

Team-based e-learning

European researchers have developed the first online platform that integrates elements of e-learning, social networking and project management to help virtual teams get the most from their practical experience.

How do you like to learn? Do you listen to a lecture and take notes, or would you prefer visual diagrams, pictures and handouts?



Whatever your favoured learning style, the listening and watching eventually comes to an end and it is time to “do”. Project work is one of the best ways to help people put theory into practice, to reinforce and apply new concepts or skills.

People also benefit from working in a team, discovering the dynamics of collaboration and teamwork.

Numerous web-based packages are available that allow people to collaborate on and manage projects among remote teams. But these tend to be geared towards commercial project management and are not focused on project work as a learning process, per se.

The COOPER project has built a platform that meets the growing need for project-based e-learning. The platform combines functionality from project management, social networking methods and traditional e-learning systems. It provides a virtual environment in which geographically dispersed teams can talk together, contact tutors, set up project workflows and submit documents. It is especially for the university sector and companies with an international workforce or that have to train foreign customers.

“Most e-learning systems are based on modules, students work through a curriculum,”

“Usually a student has something to learn, and the tutor sets questions or an assignment to test what they have learned. Collaborative learning through teamwork projects need an entire project management system, but with e-learning functionality built in.”

The COOPER platform uses a technique called Dynamic Process. By integrating Dynamic Process and WebML, a modelling language for web application, it allows the project team to effectively build its own, customised project management system and workflows.

Another important innovation is the integration of several communications systems, including voice over IP (VoIP) and video conferencing. Team members can speak with one another, hold virtual meetings, or leave messages for other team members or tutors.

One of the problems with project-based learning is that its impact is hard to assess. Another arm of the COOPER project has looked at various assessment strategies. The research partners realised that standard question/answer assessments were less suitable. Instead, they are developing tools that follow a system from the Open University of the Netherlands and the Central Institute for Test Development (CITO), which includes long-term assessment schemes.

The project is due to end in March 2008 and the majority of the COOPER platform will be freely downloadable over the web, except some commercial components, such as the visual design tool WebRatio and VoIP, which can be requested under academic license agreement. Project partners will provide consultative services. **ICT Results**

Fast-Learning Computer Translates From Four Languages

Modern approaches to machine translation between languages require the use of a large ‘corpus’ of literature in each language. Now an EU-funded project has demonstrated a cheaper solution which compares favourably with the market leaders in translating from Dutch, German, Greek or Spanish into English.

The European Union now has 23 official languages. That means documents written in one language may need to be translated into any of 22 others, a total of 253 possible language pairs. Small wonder that the institutions

of the European Union, and organisations dealing with international commerce, among others, have a keen interest in automating the process where they can.



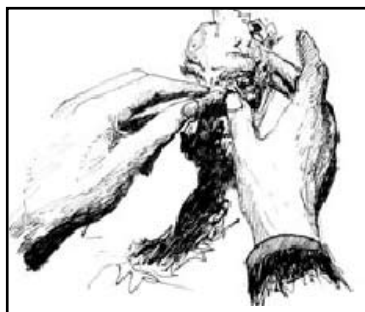
The EU has been active in promoting research in this field since the 1980s.

The partners have now built a system that translates from Greek, Spanish, German or Dutch into English.

Trials so far show that it performs well in comparison with SYSTRAN, the rules-based market leader in machine translation. Considering that SYSTRAN is based on half a century of development while METIS II has only run for three years, which is quite an achievement. A prototype is already available on the internet. **ICT Results**

Education in the Third Dimension

Up to now, most learning focused on abstract symbolic knowledge like writing, or passive receptive iconic knowledge through images. But



there is a third kind, ‘enactive’ knowledge, or learning by doing. It is the information we acquire using our whole bodies, and it is a new paradigm in IT-assisted education.

Learning by doing, or by ‘enaction’, started at the dawn of humanity itself, from the time

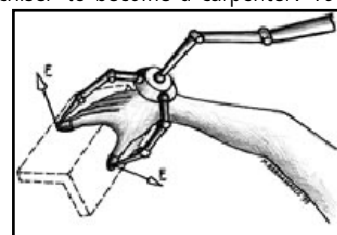
the first proto-human discovered that a bone could become a tool. But it is a practice that has become marginalised in developed societies, as convenience and, increasingly, technology lure people away from craftwork and physical labour.

Today, knowledge mediated by computers is transmitted symbolically, through writing, or iconically with pictures. But not, perhaps, for much longer.

Thanks to an EU-funded research network, called Enactive, there is now a large and thriving research community working on computer-assisted ‘enactive’ knowledge. Experts in robotics, virtual reality, experimental psychology and neuroscience share resources and information. **ICT Results**

Virtual Carpentry

It is easy to imagine various potential applications. How about using a screen, a glove and a handheld ‘chisel’ to become a carpenter? You could change the settings to reflect different types of wood, and you could mess up as many pieces as you like because they would be replaced virtually. But, at the end of it, you would be a fully skilled craftsman.



Does it sound a bit far-fetched? Well, in a separate EU-funded project, called Haptex, researchers have successfully created the 'feel' of a virtual fabric. Its texture, strength and elasticity are all transmitted via a glove. First time users are really surprised at how real this virtual fabric feels.

Imagine a surgeon practicing a delicate procedure on a virtual patient, until he or she becomes expert. Or, one day perhaps, it will be possible to model an individual patient and practise a particularly tricky operation virtually, before trying the real thing.

It is all built on the idea that we learn better by doing something than by reading about it, or even watching a video.

But the real wonder of this research is that experts do not yet know what marvels enactive knowledge could yet unlock. Creating computer-assisted, enactive devices will provide tremendous tools to disciplines like experimental psychology and neuroscience.

Imagine a language interface that hears what you say and responds appropriately. Will you learn better, faster, or not? What does 'whole body' education tell us about human psychology, evolution and learning mechanisms? And what new potential enactive applications will those experimental discoveries enable?

It means that the whole field of technology assisted, enactive knowledge is just at its very beginnings, but thanks to the work of the Enactive Network of Excellence, the field is set to expand rapidly. **ICT Results**

Next-generation e-learning

Take an e-learning platform, mix in a large dose of social networking, sprinkle liberally with intelligent software agents to stimulate users and, according to a team of European researchers, you have a recipe to keep students' attention even during the most testing training courses.

Recent trials of two new software platforms based on this new approach show substantial promise in overcoming one of the biggest problems that has dogged e-learning: how to keep students motivated and attentive. The platforms, developed in the AtGentive project, are designed to aid students in the classroom and to help them continue learning and collaborating long after classroom sessions have ended.

Keeping a (virtual) eye on the class...

"Artificial agents are autonomous entities that observe users' activities and assess their state of attention in order to intervene so as to make the user experience more effective," "The interventions can take many forms, from providing new information to the student, guiding them in their work or alerting them when other users connect to the platform."

In an e-learning context, the agents provide a smart form of proactive coaching for students, assessing, guiding and stimulating them. For example, an artificial agent can alert a student when an article they have posted elicits the attention of other users, or when they receive feedback on their input into a collaborative learning task. In a classroom environment, an artificial agent embodied as an animated character spots students who are not interacting with the system and probably not paying attention. The avatar helps by trying to "wake them up."

"For collaborative learning to be effective, it is important for people to know how their input is being received by others and whether what they are working on is of interest to other people,"

It is also important to minimise distractions. For that reason, the agents designed in the EU-funded AtGentive monitor what students are doing and only intervene when doing so will not unnecessarily take their attention away from the task at hand.



"AtGentSchool has a more short-term (real-time) and individual focus on managing attention, while AtGentNet is more long-term (asynchronous), and focused on the group and on social attention,"

Dutch firm Ontdeknet, whose artificial characters are the visible face of AtGentSchool, is continuing to develop the platform and is incorporating it into its product line as an e-learning system for children. **ICT Results**

Meet Your Member of Parliament



Ms. V. Radhika Selvi, member of parliament, who won the 2004 elections from Tiruchendur constituency, was soon elevated as Minister of State for Home Affairs. Following the brutal murder of her husband in September 2003, and plenty of political confabulations, she had contested the elections with her new born baby under the DMK symbol and a hot, blazing sun.

Since then, she is working for her people but is yet to initiate any ICT programs in her constituency. She has come a long way and still retains her down to earth approach to life. An interview.

What is your most memorable moment as MP?

One of my happiest moments was when we freely distributed patta land upto two acres maximum area to landless labourers. People in my constituency are so poor that any free distribution of rice or cycles to young students, simply lights up their face. That happiness is my joy. We have also distributed colour television sets under the various welfare schemes brought out in our manifesto.

Another memorable moment was when new train services were introduced for my people, after a long time of pursuing the matter with the Railway Minister.

What are your concerns for your constituency?

The main problems my people face are the extreme poverty and lack of drinking water. The fishermen are so poor they can barely manage two meals in a day. Their health gets affected. There are not enough health care centres. The other problems are road connectivity; people are still to recover totally from the impact of the tsunami. There is alcoholism among the men. The women have to manage everything.

What are you doing to meet these challenges?

Health, education and high drop out rate, alcoholism among men, degradation of coastal areas, water scarcity.

My priority for my constituency is to create awareness among the masses about health issues, interaction with district administration for better

implementation of the Total Sanitation Campaign and also work to improve the living conditions of beedi

labourers. We are also trying to bring about women empowerment through promotion of women self-help groups.

I have been insisting on all occasions to provide education for all and to minimize the drop out rate. The mid-day nutritious meal scheme is being effectively implemented in my constituency thereby reducing the drop out rate in schools to a great extent. Funds have also been allocated from my MPLADS for development of educational institutions. Through various public meetings and private meetings, I am continuously educating the masses about the evils of consuming alcohol and de-addiction camps/centres have been strengthened through district administration for this purpose.

Degradation of coastal areas and water scarcity are areas of major concern in my constituency. Recently, as directed by me, a central team was constituted to survey the coastal areas to study anti-sea erosion measures thereby to develop a comprehensive coastal area development project for my constituency. Their report is awaited and will be implemented. Already, various schemes of the state government like fish landing centers, afforestation, etc. have also been taking place. Both the Central and State Governments are taking steps for excavation and desiltation of ponds and lakes through various water shed development projects. Funds have also been allocated from my MPLADS for augmenting drinking water supply.

How have you spent your MPLAD Funds?

Yes, time and again, funds are regularly provided from my MPLAD funds for construction of schools, hospitals, laying of new roads, construction of health centres and augmenting drinking water facility by providing overhead tanks, excavation of ponds, lakes, provision of underground water pumps, provision of water shed development programmes. Anna Marumalarchi Scheme and mid-day nutritious meal schemes are being successfully implemented in my constituency.

The Anna Marumalarchi is a rural development scheme that seeks to provide basic minimum needs like drinking water, link roads, street lights, an effective public distribution system, education, health facilities and child care centres, even storm water drains and sewerage facilities through the village panchayats. For instance, we have done health camps, child immunisation camps, eye camp, literacy campaigns, small savings campaign etc. that create awareness and makes the village more progressive. Even NREGA has been successfully implemented in my constituency.

Is there anything the people can do to help themselves?

Yes, establishment of self-help groups, especially for women in the fields of dairying, fisheries, agriculture, etc. are a necessity. Panchayats also need to get more involved in assets generation activities like water harvesting structures, library buildings, road construction, etc.

If you could get your people in one room at the same time, what would be your message to them?

I would like to convey the message to my people to always be non-violent, maintain unassailable unity at all times, be aware and more proactive about their health, be eco-friendly and to always

Focus on News, views of ICT Iconoclasts



This is a new column lending the international angle to the GGA newsletter. Here, we plan to focus on news, views of ICT iconoclasts, and strategies being used for empowerment through ICT in other parts of the world.

In the first column, we bring you excerpts from an interview with Mr Craig Barrett, Chairman Intel, the largest chipmaker in the world, given to CNET News.com. As chairman, Mr Barrett helps define the vision and strategy of Intel. He also works with world leaders as chairman of the United Nations' Global Alliance for ICT and Development. In this role he helps to map out strategies for using technology in developing regions to improve education and health care, and spur economic growth.

Like GGA, Mr Barrett believes that content is the key driving force that can make or break ICT efforts for rural empowerment. The interview.

How do you think the Internet and, more specifically, wireless broadband technologies such as Wi Max can help reduce poverty around the world?

Craig Barrett: The Internet and computers are tools. And the impact they make depends on how intelligently those tools are used. We believe that intelligent use of technology can make education better. You'd be hard-pressed not to say that using broadband wireless or some wireless technology and remote diagnostic equipment will not improve health care. You'd be hard-pressed not to say that bringing farmers in rural environments more information to help them figure out how to sell their products at a market themselves, and eliminate the middleman so they could keep more of the transaction value for themselves, doesn't promote economic development. You'd be hard pressed to say that a kiosk in a small village or community in a remote part of the country that helps people remotely register or sign up for certain government programs rather than (them) travelling to the big city to do that, doesn't offer a value.

So in areas of education, health care, economic development and e-governance, these benefits are no-brainers. But it has to be the intelligent use of technology and not just throwing any technology at the problem that makes a difference. I can guarantee you that a farmer in central China is not interested in reading about what's happening on Wall Street. They aren't interested in Silicon Valley content. They are interested in content which relates to them and solves the problems they have. So local content, meaningful content is the key to all of this.

Intel is backing major WiMax initiatives in India, China and Africa as well as in other parts of the world. As one of the major technology providers for WiMax, Intel could benefit a great deal financially if these regions adopted WiMax technology. Do you think it's all right for companies to benefit financially for their so-called "philanthropic" activities?

Craig Barrett: Golly, I think probably there is something of a virtuous cycle. Doing good often creates business and economic growth. And that

growth allows for more good to be done. By the way, we are not a service provider. We don't provide WiMax service. That's for the telecommunications companies to do. Intel is a technology company.

True, but Intel makes the technology and the chips that will be embedded in devices that will use these WiMax networks. So some critics suggest that Intel's participation in these programs is really self-serving, because it could lead to the sale of more WiMax chips.

Craig Barrett: That certainly is a possible interpretation. But WiMax as a broadband technology is the most cost-effective technology available today to reach the most people in rural and under-developed countries, which is why I think you see hundreds of trials of this technology around the world. And it is being received in most of the emerging market places very well.

Some of the detractors of the technology may be people who have spectrum licenses and who have invested in technologies like 3G. They may not want the competition. So they might suggest that it's not a proper thing to do. But it's really an issue that the country and the carrier have to decide. They have to decide what is the best technology for their needs and investment. We are encouraged that there are a couple of hundred trials and 50-some odd commercial deployments of the technology. So a whole bunch of people must think that it's a worthwhile investment, because they are putting their dollars behind it.

Many experts agree that WiMax seems like a good fit for the developing world where there is relatively little fixed communications infrastructure. But what about in developed markets like the U.S.? There has been a lot of criticism lately of Sprint's WiMax strategy. Do you think there is a place for that technology in the developed world?

Craig Barrett: You have to do the business analysis just like you would with any other technology in any region. Is there a demand? Are there customers? Will you get a return on your investment?

But that seems to be the issue. There are a lot of Wall Street analysts who question the business case for deploying this network when there are already other technologies in place that could provide similar services.

Craig Barrett: You'd have to ask Sprint about why they chose WiMax and if their business model holds up. Their CEO just departed, but you'd have to ask them if they went through a detailed technical and financial analysis to find out why they chose WiMax. And then you'd have to ask Clearwire why they decided to do the same thing. At the end of the day, it should be a decision made on the business merits of the technology. Is there a customer base? Will there be a return on investment? No one is forcing these companies to use this technology.

But Intel has certainly been pushing it and touting it as the best solution for mobile broadband.

Craig Barrett: There is no doubt we have been one of the technology founders of WiMax. And we push it as a solution. But there are obviously people who have other interests, like the 3G cellular market. If they paid billions of dollars for their wireless licenses, they might not look favorably on another competitive offering. I think it's appropriate to look at who might be criticizing WiMax and why. And if you look at the people who have chosen WiMax, I'd assume that they have done their homework on the technology.

Do you think large corporations, in particular technology companies, have a responsibility to give back?

Craig Barrett: I don't think the question should be limited to technology companies. I think every company has some level of obligation to give something back to society and to be a good member of society. The tech companies may be good examples of this because we tend to operate all around the world and sell our products around the world. So that global view that we have may make us more likely to contribute on a global scale. But I don't think this should be limited to technology companies. I think that a Boeing or Alcoa has the same sort of obligation.

By Marguerite Reardon

"Used with permission from CNET Networks, Inc., Copyright 200_. All rights reserved."

(Source: http://www.news.com/for-intel-the-business/2008-1014_3-6214384.html)



GGA Secretariat & Editorial Board

Chairman

Dr. M. S. Swaminathan

Advisor

Dr. P. C. Kesavan

Secretaries

Dr. Basheerhamad Shadrach

Mr. S. Senthilkumaran

Coordinator

Ms. N. Ganga Vidya

Editorial Team

Dr. J. Mohan

Ms. Aasha Gulrajani Swarup

A Fortnightly Published by

Grameen Gyan Abhiyan Secretariat

M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation

3rd Cross Street, Taramani Institutional Area

Chennai -600113, India

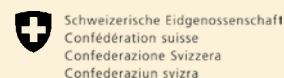
Tel: 044-22542791

email: gga@mssrf.res.in

skype id: grameen

Web: www.mission2007.in; www.gga.org.in

Supported by



Swiss Agency for Development
and Cooperation SDC

