

Jamsetji Tata National Virtual Academy (NVA) Catalyst of Rural Knowledge Revolution

M S Swaminathan Research Foundation



Introduction

Since 1992, M S Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) has been implementing the Village Resource Centres (VRCs) and Village Knowledge Centres (VKCs). In 2003 MSSRF established the Jamshetji Tata National Virtual Academy (NVA) to scale up the VKC program. The NVA mission is "To promote sustainable rural livelihoods through digital empowerment based on a pro-poor and pro-women orientation to technology choice and dissemination, and human resource development." The NVA programme is intended to bring together experts and grassroots level communities in two-way communication with the objective of making knowledge accessible to every home and hut.

The idea of the Village Knowledge Centers began in 1992, earlier than NVA, and led to the establishment of NVA. A Village Resource Centre is typically located at the block level, the commune level or the mandal level or at the central point of a cluster of villages. **Village Knowledge Centres (VKCs)** are normally located among a cluster of villages or at the panchayat level. Space and electricity for the VKCs tend to be provided by a variety of partners (e.g., elected village administration, traditional village

administration, farmers and fishermen associations, milk societies, youth clubs, NGOs, region based institutions such as temples and churches, village development council, etc.).

Jamsetji Tata National Virtual Academy (NVA) and ISRO-VRC Programme

In 2003, the VRC and VKC programmes were further strengthened by the creation of the Jamsetji Tata National Virtual Academy (NVA) and ISRO-VRC programme. This programme involves collaboration with several international and national partners (IDRC, Tata Trusts, CIDA, ISRO, SDC, Microsoft, telecentre.org, Qualcomm, IFFCO & IKSL, etc.) for developing content and capacity to embark on sustainable rural development.

VRCs are connected through the **Indian Space Research Organization's (ISRO)** uplink and downlink satellite facilities. Users located at one node of this network can fully interact with others located at another node through video and audio links. Each node can be expanded further using different technologies such as notice boards, pamphlets, public address system (wired / wireless / GSM), community newspaper (vernacular), press releases, cable TV, audio / video conferencing through wireless, telephone, meetings, mobile phone, SMS server, internet radio server, fixed wireless loop telephone closed user group, pen drives and CDs through bus drivers, K YAN-PC (it contains PC, projector, TV tuner card, DVD player, amplified speakers and modem) and intranet web site for dissemination of useful and necessary information.

Three main aspects of the Programme

NVA is mainly provides need-based **locale-specific, demand driven information content** (both dynamic and static) based on collection of several secondary data and a well-planned need assessment, organizing **training and awareness programmes** and make **linkages** with several leading institutions / organizations for translating the content into field-based applications.

Methodology - Three-tier Knowledge Network

In order to strengthen the management among VRC, VKCs and strategic partners (data providers, generators, capacity building providers, etc.) the NVA developed a three-tier knowledge network. **First-Tier:** MSSRF, Chennai has been connecting several data generators and data providers (universities, experts, financial institutions, corporate sector, technocrats, grassroots academicians, etc.) focussing primarily on content and capacity building. **Second-tier or Village Resource Centre (VRC):** Normally the Village Resource Centre is located at the block level, the commune level or mandal level or at the centre point of a cluster of villages. The, locale-specific, demand driven information is disseminated



from the VRCs through Village Knowledge Centres (VKCs) and vice-versa. **Third-tier or Village Knowledge Centres (VKCs): Village Knowledge Centres (VKCs)** are normally located among a cluster of villages or panchayat level.

Knowledge on Wheels

NVA provides the Tele-Ophthalmology services to the rural communities through Sankara Nethralaya Medical Research Foundation. The mobile eye-care unit and it has all the necessary ophthalmic equipments for diagnosis of eye problems and is equipped with spectacle grinding and frame fitting facilities, to provide spectacles then and there at reasonable and affordable costs to the rural community. NVA also provides soil health advisories through soil and water testing van. This mobile soil testing unit is helping to test the different soil parameters in farmers' fields, identify the deficiencies and provide remedial measures.

Mobile Applications

NVA, QUALCOMM, Tata Teleservices Ltd. and Astute Technology System jointly launched a programme called "Fisher Friend Mobile Application" during December 2007. Through this programme, the fisher folk receive information on sea wave height, weather, and potential fishing zone, rural yellow pages for fisher folk, government announcements, etc. through mobile devices in the vernacular language.



NVA also provides audio-based farmers' advisories through IKSL-AirTel mobile network using "GREEN SIM" card..

ICT-based curricula

NVA conducts three ICT-based curricula including (i)Microsoft Unlimited Potential Programme (MUPP), (ii) Computer Aided Learning Programme and (iii) Intel Learn Programme. They are addressed to the rural children and youth (both women and men) to improve their IT Skills and knowledge about sustainable development through IT literacy.

Virtual Congresses and Interactions

NVA is regularly organizing virtual congresses and virtual interactions between policy makers, experts and rural communities to deal with the different issues and bridge the prevailing gap between scientific "know-how" and field level "do-how".

Mission 2007 - Every Village a Knowledge Centre: Grameen Gyan Abhiyan

In 2004, in partnership several national and international organizations MSSRF initiated steps to extend the Village Knowledge Centres (VKCs) concept to different parts of the country by creating multi-stake holder partnership called "Mission 2007: Every



Village a Knowledge Centre". Since early August 2007 this network / movement is referred to as "Grameen Gyan Abhiyan (Rural Knowledge Movement)". GGA is a multi-stake holder partnership, facilitating national and regional events related to ICT-enabled rural development activities. MSSRF hosts the Secretariat for the GGA – a broad based coalition of government, non-government, academic and business sectors committed to the cause of taking ICT to all the 600,000 villages of India as soon as possible.

NVA Fellowship

Rural women and men are rich in traditional knowledge and wisdom derived from experience of working with nature and natural resources. If rural transformation is to take place, the contributions of these grassroots academicians are essential since they know the problems of rural communities and also the solutions. It will be important to identify and select suitable rural women and men who have shown leadership qualities, so that they would become role models in their respective villages. This Fellowship does not contain any monetary benefits and it is in recognition of the SOCIAL COMMITMENT OF THE INDIVIDUAL TO 'PUBLIC GOOD'.

Based on this concept, **1449 NVA Fellows** (M:888; F:561) have been selected from 21 States and One Union Territory (Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Puducherry, Punjab, Rajasthan,

Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarkand, Bihar and West Bengal). NVA has also selected **31 International Fellows** from Afghanistan, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Panama, Philippines, Nepal, Kenya, Nigeria and Sri Lanka.

Training School

The purpose of the Training School is to provide skills and experience to the NVA Fellows, documenting the expertise of NVA Fellows (Gyanchaupal staff, Social Workers and Traditional Knowledge and Innovative Practices) and sharing these with the fellow rural communities, identifying the needs of Gyan chaupal staff and providing the necessary capacity building to the Gyan chaupal staff based on the needs. This

is in view of the mushrooming of Gyan chaupal movement. Different models of Gyan chaupals need quality human resource to run their Gyanchaupals (Village Knowledge Centres, Village Resource Centres, Community Service Centres, Community Technology Learning Centres, Community Information Centres, etc.).

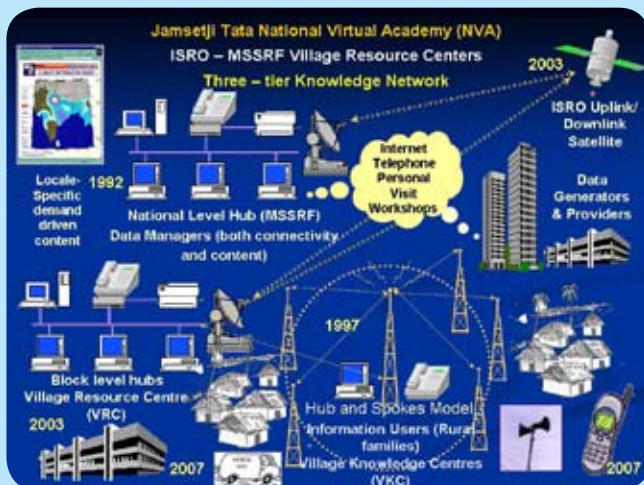
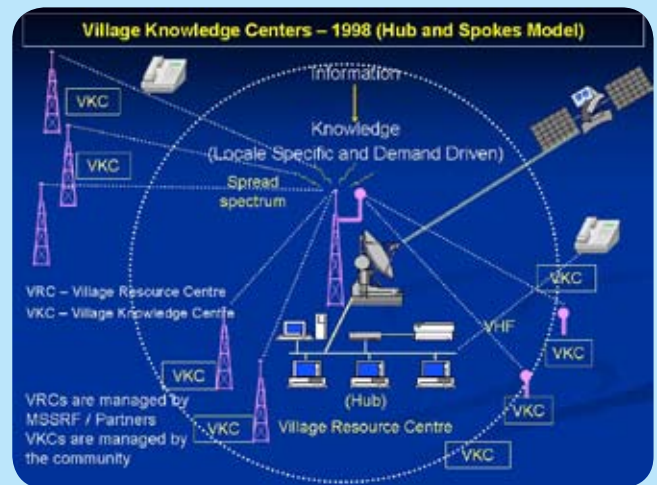
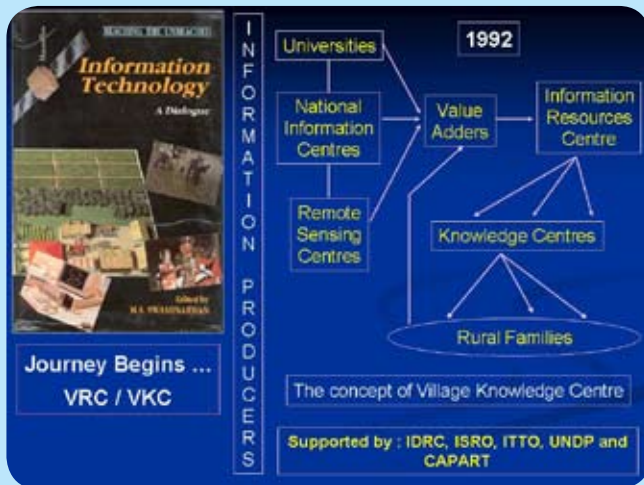
South-South Exchange Travelling Study Tours and Workshops

Out of the positive experiences with these Village Knowledge Centres, the idea was born to share this good practice with other global organisations from other parts of the world, which also are involved in the field of ICTs and rural development. The

objective is to learn from one another, be encouraged by a good example and be able to distinguish which experiences could be used straightaway and which ones need to be adapted to the local situation. Nationals from Ghana, Uganda, Ecuador, Guatemala, Peru, Thailand, Nigeria, Philippines, Bangladesh, Papua New Guinea, Malaysia, Camreoon, Cambodia, Kenya, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Chile, Colombia, Bolivia, Panama and India participated.

Way Forward

NVA will continue to focus on content and capacity building using different ICT and non-ICT tools for rural knowledge revolution.





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