

**Fourth Convention of the National Alliance for Mission 2007: Every  
Village a Knowledge Center**

**Indira Gandhi National Open University, New Delhi, 1-3 August, 2007**

**Statement**

1. The goals of the National Alliance, which now consists of nearly 400 partners representing every section of the ICT for Development Community, are to bridge the urban-rural digital divide and to empower rural women and men to derive economic and social benefits from new information and communication technologies in all areas relevant to their lives and livelihoods. The Fourth Convention of the Alliance, which was attended by 300 members, noted with satisfaction that considerable progress has been made during the last 4 years in achieving this goals of the Alliance and that both government and industry have taken major steps in extending the power of ICT to rural India through significant initiatives. The Common Service Centre Programme of the Department of Information Technology, Government of India will cover 100,000 villages with the necessary ICT infrastructure, while ITC Ltd is extending the benefits of its e-Choupal programme to 45000 villages. Thus, the individual strengths of the Alliance Partners may vary, but their collective strength is considerable. Bridging the urban-rural digital divide on the basis of social inclusion for access to ICT is therefore an idea whose time has come. The experience gained so far also indicates that the internet and new educational and communication technologies including the community radio and the cell phone provide manifold opportunities for rural families.
  
2. The Jamsetji Tata National Virtual Academy for Rural Prosperity has now 1010 Fellows (593 male and 417 female) and 25 foreign fellows. The Academy represents the celebration of rural genius and creativity. The last mile and last person connectivity has now become possible thanks to new technologies like the cell phone. Hence it is important to give greater attention to capacity building and content creation. A priority step in content creation should relate to the empowerment of rural families with knowledge relating to their entitlements. Knowledge is the key to social and economic development in villages. Experience also shows that the goals of "Literacy, health and food for all" can be achieved soon through innovative applications of ICT, as for example, imparting adult literacy to the workers employed under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme (NREGP)

3. The National Alliance is wedded to the philosophy of divergent approaches but converged goals. The Alliance Partners would like to see a perceptible improvement in the income, work and health security of rural families as a result of the Gyan Chaupals (Village Knowledge Centers). The Village Resource Centers being established by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) at the block level enlarge the technological opportunities available to rural families in areas like health care, natural resources management and disaster management. Together with CSCs, they can help in transforming rural India's computing and communication capability on a large scale. CSCs, VRCs and VKCs offer a platform for service providers for undertaking need-based and demand-driven knowledge connectivity.
4. **A shining urban India and a suffering rural India will be socially and politically disastrous.** There is therefore an urgent need for strengthening public-private-people partnerships on a win-win mode for all concerned. CSCs, VRCs and VKCs can facilitate the implementation of the Financial Inclusion strategy of commercial banks and financial institutions. They can also provide a Market for Corporate Social Responsibility. CSCs, VRCs and VKCs can play a major role in reducing the transaction costs and non-performing asset rates of rural credit through ICT supported credit and extension initiatives by the banks and corporate sectors. Government should provide the policy framework and back-end infrastructure, such as electricity or other sources of power in villages. Regulatory policies conducive to organized progress should also be put in place. The partnerships should result in a socially sustainable and financially viable models of rural digital empowerment. The State Wide Network (SWAN) should go to villages. Gram Sabhas should be fully involved in providing policy oversight at the village level. At least one woman and one male member of every gram panchayat should be trained as Knowledge Managers. They could become fellows of the NVA, so that about 500, 000 trained knowledge managers are available as soon as possible. Such a process will help to reduce the transaction costs of development delivery systems.
5. Government shall endeavor to translate its commitment to overlay knowledge connectivity over rural physical connectivity as stated in its Bharat Nirman Programme by creating a Rural Knowledge Coordination Committee and Rural Knowledge Fund.
6. Village Knowledge Centres are the facilitating centres for community based knowledge management. The convention categorically emphasized that such a process is vital for converting growth into human development. The Fellows of National Virtual Academy could play a major role in facilitating community based knowledge management. The

convention further stressed the need for transforming service centres and other telecentres into knowledge centres.

7. VKCs, CSCs and VRCs can also play a major role in promoting Technology Mediated Open and Distance Learning (Tech MODE) and can be linked to many Open and Distance Education Universities such as IGNOU. ICT can also help in enlarging the canvass for self-directed personal-strategic learning among rural community and strengthen the horizontal transfer of knowledge in addition to the vertical integration.
8. The convention called for sensitizing various types of policy makers regarding the role of VKCs and VRCs in strengthening the development process.
9. From August 15, 2007, which represents the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of India's independence, Mission 2007 will be developed into a Grameen Gyaan Abhiyan movement of the National Alliance partners. The aim of the Grameen Gyan Abhiyan is to cover all the 240,000 panchayats in the country with Gyan Chaupals and Village Resource Centers by the year 2010. In this task, the National Alliance welcomes and appreciates the assistance extended by international partners both in the public and private sectors. The help extended by IDRC, Canada and SDC of Switzerland has been extremely valuable. The assistance of Microsoft and other International business leaders in ICT innovations and applications has also been invaluable. The National Alliance hopes that more international partners will join the Alliance, so that a Global coalition of all concerned and committed to taking the benefits of ICT to villages in a socially meaningful manner can be proved, as envisaged under Goal 8 of the UN Millennium Development goals.
10. On the occasion of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of India's 'tryst with destiny' the Convention will like to emphasize the wisdom underlying the following statement of Jawaharlal Nehru "The future belongs to science and those who make friends with science".