



**JAMSETJI TATA
NATIONAL VIRTUAL ACADEMY**



M S Swaminathan Research Foundation



BACKGROUND

Rapid technological advancements worldwide have widened the rich-poor and urban-rural divides. The challenge now is to enlist technology as an ally in efforts for economic, social and gender equity. In response to this urgent need, Mission 2007: Every Village a Knowledge Centre, a nationwide initiative was launched in 2003 by an alliance of over one hundred and fifty organizations belonging to government, business and industry, academia, civil society and financial institutions, with the aim of taking the benefits of Information & Communication Technologies (ICTs) relevant to human well-being to every village in the country by August 15 2007, which marks the 60th anniversary of India's independence. Value-added and dynamic information that is demand-driven and locale specific can greatly improve the productivity of labour and marginal farmers and the asset-less. The Jamsetji Tata National Virtual Academy (NVA) is hence taking the key step of training grassroot workers to use ICTs for agriculture and rural development. The NVA aims to convey such knowledge directly to villages thereby empowering rural and tribal families to achieve a better control of their own development and to build skills and capacities relevant to enhancing opportunities for sustainable livelihoods.

The Jamsetji Tata National Virtual Academy for Rural Prosperity (NVA) established in 2003 with generous support from Tata Trusts has become an important national institution for according recognition to outstanding rural women and men who have mastered the techniques of ICT and are now applying them in villages for the knowledge and skill empowerment of rural families. The first two Convocations of the Academy held in July 2005 and January 2006 were addressed by H E the President of India, Dr A P J Abdul Kalam who pointed out that the recognition of such talent in our villages marks the celebration of the core competence of rural India. The achievements of 43 women and 34 men drawn from eleven states who have been elected as Fellows of the Academy after January 2006 on the basis of a Peer Review process will be recognised in the Third Convocation of NVA to be held in August 2006. These Academicians will serve as the torch bearers of the rural knowledge revolution. They will be the pillars of the *Gram Swaraj* Movement. The Jamsetji Tata National Virtual Academy is proud to have such gifted and innovative women and men as its Fellows.

Rural women and men are rich in grassroot wisdom based on their experience of working with nature and natural resources, and have a clear understanding of the solutions needed to address the problems and aspirations of rural communities. Whether semi-literate or literate, they have the ability to quickly master new technologies. Rural transformation therefore can be brought about by enabling access to appropriate and relevant information using modern tools of communication and through participatory knowledge management. The pedagogic methodology of learning by doing is used to bring about a learning revolution in villages.

MSSRF - JAMSETJI TATA NATIONAL VIRTUAL ACADEMY FOR RURAL PROSPERITY (NVA)

Established on the occasion of the death centenary of a great visionary Jamsetji Nussarwanjee Tata, the NVA is supported by a generous endowment grant from the Tata Education Trust. The NVA carries forward MSSRF's pro-nature, pro-poor and pro-women orientation to technology development, with an emphasis on the five critical priorities identified at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002, namely water, energy, health, agriculture and biodiversity & ecosystem management (WEHAB) as well as climate related issues. NVA will facilitate access to e-governance, e-health, e-literacy, e-commerce and all other relevant areas related to work, income and health security.

Through the NVA, communications will be facilitated between scientists and rural communities in a two-way linkage so that locally relevant scientific and technological information reaches every village home, while simultaneously conveying traditional knowledge on sustainable management of natural resources from the village to technical experts for documentation and action. Lateral communications will also be enabled among rural workers through sharing of their own valuable expertise and experience. Thus, NVA serves as a participatory knowledge hub, bringing about synergy between traditional wisdom and modern science.

BRIDGING THE URBAN - RURAL DIGITAL DIVIDE THROUGH THE FELLOWS OF THE NVA

“Grassroot academicians” with a commitment to social wellbeing and who have taken initiatives for the benefit of their community are eligible for being elected as Fellows of the NVA. Such rural and tribal women and men are ideal for training, re-training and re-tooling the other members of the village society. NVA Fellows represent a wide range of competencies and expertise – agriculture, education, micro-finance, environment, health, marketing, disaster management and numerous other fields. Some have, with tremendous grit and determination, raised themselves out of dire poverty or difficult life circumstances to undergo training and acquire skills for self – employment, which they have in turn shared for the benefit of their community.

Others are repositories of traditional knowledge and many are innovators in rural technology. Yet, however diverse their interests may be, and whatever their background, the common link among them is a special spirit of service that each of the Fellows possesses, and the inherent quality of leadership each individual has demonstrated. It is this quality that is sought to be employed for motivating and empowering village communities to bring about rural prosperity, which is the objective of the Academy.

THE KNOWLEDGE REVOLUTION

Value-added information is appropriately referred to as knowledge. As the movement towards knowledge empowerment gathers momentum, it becomes a revolution. Through an inclusive use of local language and multimedia format, the focus is on the people, their contexts and their information needs in areas such as:

Governance: Information on entitlements and on methods of accessing the entitlements (e.g. bank credit, inputs, etc); legal literacy on rights and obligations

Education: Literacy and techniracy (i.e., technical skills)

Health: Disease prevention, detection and cure; nutrition with particular reference to maternal and infant nutrition

Agriculture: Crops, livestock, fisheries (inland and marine), agroforestry and forestry; quality and trade literacy

Livelihoods: Opportunities for on-farm and non-farm employment, micro-enterprises supported by micro-credit, new skills and training in agro-processing and agri-business; producer cooperatives and companies

Commerce: Producer-oriented marketing, quality management, matching production with demand

Environment: Conservation and enhancement of natural resources, with specific attention to land care, water conservation and sustainable use, conservation of flora and fauna and management of common property resources

Disaster management: Methods of managing drought, floods, cyclones and rare events like tsunami.

Through appropriate training and capacity building opportunities, the Fellows will become master trainers spearheading a Knowledge Revolution in rural India. To quote Professor M.S. Swaminathan; “The Green Revolution helped to improve the production of wheat, rice and others crops, but a Knowledge Revolution can lead to the enhancement of human productivity and creativity in every area of human endeavour. While equipment like computers and innovations like the Internet are important for facilitating the rural knowledge revolution, only rural women and

men can help to shape the direction and relevance of this revolution. This is where the Jamsetji Tata National Virtual Academy for Rural Prosperity is playing such a critical role”.

Suitable rural women and men who have been identified and elected as Fellows of the National Virtual Academy will gain in social prestige and recognition, and will become role models in their respective villages. The ultimate goal is to elect one woman and one man from each of the 600,000 villages in India. The Fellows are nominated by NGOs, academic and research institutions, government as well as private organizations working in rural areas all over the country, and will be chosen on the basis of their computer literacy, leadership qualities, their capabilities and their dedication to work for their community. The Fellows will need to make a commitment to running Village Knowledge Centres for at least three years and will serve as the torchbearers of the Knowledge Revolution in Rural India. They will be not only information providers for the local community, but will also serve as conduits for conveying grassroots wisdom and traditional knowledge to scientists and academics thereby facilitating two-way communication.

PROCESS OF NOMINATION

As the first step, nominations are requested from a large number of institutions and organizations having direct links to rural areas all over the country. Partners of the NVA, Mission 2007 Alliance partners, academic and scientific institutions, Government agencies, private sector companies as well as NGOs working in the field of sustainable development, join hands to participate in a nation-wide search for such rural transformation agents. In keeping with the values of the NVA, a special effort is made to involve men and women working for development in agroclimatically difficult or geographically remote regions and for biodiversity conservation and gender equality.

GUIDELINES FOR NOMINATION

Guidelines have been developed for the proposers' reference, setting out the general parameters sought for in a Fellow of the NVA. It is the nominating organization's responsibility to identify appropriate women and men with potential to be elected as Fellows, as well as to thoroughly review their contributions and prepare a profile of each individual along with an assessment of special abilities, in order to justify her/his selection. The guidelines may be summarized as follows:

- NVA Fellowship is open to residents of villages in any part of the country.
- Nominees should be grassroots workers who possess leadership qualities with social consciousness and commitment to serve the community.
- Fellowship is awarded not only on the basis of previous achievements, but with the expectation of continued involvement and participation in the NVA programme for a minimum of three years.

- Fellows must be willing to spend a few hours daily on training/ information dissemination or other community work and be available when required to travel for workshops, training courses, etc.
- Minimal prior ICT training is required.
- Fellows have to be proposed by a nominating organization. Self – nominations are not accepted.
- Proposer’s assessment is essential and should outline the nominee’s special abilities and potential that justify her/his selection.

Criteria for acceptance are based not so much on conventional education as on competencies and practical skills – the most important criterion being a commitment to social causes and an ability to take initiatives for the welfare and upliftment of the community. The principle of social inclusion is to be adopted in the selection process, and it will not be on the basis of patronage.

TRAINING & CAPACITY BUILDING

Once inducted, the Fellows undergo orientation courses to familiarize themselves with the larger NVA programme and to have interactions with their peers and with Fellows from other batches or from other parts of the country. Based on their individual interests and competencies and on the needs of their own village communities, further training will be imparted from time to time to upgrade their skills. Since several agencies have agreed to support the training of this cadre, NVA arranges for capacity building training to the fellows through Mission 2007 partner institutions spread all over India.

Fellows are invited to periodic participatory Knowledge Management Workshops organized to assess and prioritize their felt needs for functional literacy in information and communication technology, health, education, market and natural resource management in their locality and also evaluate indigenous knowledge



and experience available with them and on exogenous knowledge including disaster preparedness to be acquired from formal research. The NVA fellowship will equip them to address these needs. The Village Knowledge Centres managed by the fellows of NVA, are becoming catalysts of agrarian and rural prosperity.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF FELLOWS

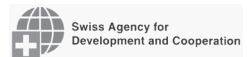
The NVA Fellowship is not only meant as an award for past work, but is intended as an investment for the future by reinforcing their commitment to the process of bringing about rural transformation and prosperity, which is the objective of this Academy.



- Fellows will play an important role as trainers and social mobilizers in their village area.
- Fellows are expected to serve the rural community by applying and sharing their own skills and competencies, as well as by spreading the knowledge they have acquired through the NVA training programmes.
- Fellows should access and provide information that is dynamic and demand-driven and should be relevant to the day-to-day life and work of rural women and men.
- The NVA Fellows will aim to build skills and capacities of the rural poor with a view to enhancing livelihood opportunities, and empower vulnerable people to make better choices and have better control of their own development.
- Fellows will be the link to have meaningful dialogue with scientists, policymakers and other experts by carrying queries and feedback from the village communities, to as two-way learning process.
- Fellows will help to give meaning and content to the provisions of the Right to Information Act.
- They will initiate documentation of traditional knowledge and promote the use of indigenous technologies that are ecologically sustainable.
- The NVA's pro-nature, pro-poor and pro-women orientation to technology development will be carried forward by the Fellows.
- They will undertake activities that promote the WEHAB priorities (water, energy, health, agriculture and biodiversity & ecosystem management), as well as raise awareness on climate related issues.
- Both traditional and modern technologies will be used by the Fellows to spread relevant information to the villages. There are numerous ICT tools - internet, cable TV, video-conferencing, radio, cellular phone, English language

and vernacular press or other print media. Street theatre, puppetry, art and music have also proved to be effective for communication. No particular tool is believed to be superior, rather an appropriate mix of these tools that would benefit the people the most is advocated.

- NVA Fellows will show the path to end urban-rural digital apartheid.



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