A journalist is a grumbler, a censurer, a giver of advice, a regent of sovereigns, a tutor of nations. Four hostile newspapers are more to be feared than a thousand bayonets.
-- **Napoleon Bonaparte**

In the real world, nothing happens at the right place at the right time. It is the job of journalists and historians to correct that **-- Mark Twain**

Every journalist owes tribute to the evil one -- **Jean de La Fontaine**

In America the President reigns for four years, and Journalism governs for ever and ever **-- Oscar Wilde**
…

Mission IT-Rural

Summary of Media Coverage

English

www.fafaco.in

Formerly it-rural.com

The New Indian Express group

Date: 05/02/2005

Technology: ICT for Integrated Rural Development

The New Indian Express

Hyderabad • Saturday, 5 February 2005

News

IT sows seeds of change, reaches grassroot level

By D Sreenath

Kadapa, Feb 4: IT has percol-

Express

IT sows seeds of change, reaches grassroot level

By D Sreenath

Kadapa, Feb 4: IT has percolated down to the grassroots — quite literally. Take the case of Prakash Reddy, a young farmer from Atchavelli in Pulivendula mandal, who no longer buys groundnut seeds randomly. He's got IT-savvy thanks to it-rural.com, and is browsing the Net to select the right seeds suitable for his land and the local climate.

And Reddy is not alone: Farmers in about 30 villages of Pulivendula mandal now depend on this website, the brainchild of young IT professionals led by R.M. Thiruchelvam of Alampattu, Sivaganga district, Tamil Nadu.

Realising the rich resource potential of the Internet, Thiruchelvam and a group of friends decided to provide solutions for the agricultural needs of farmers. With commendable zeal, they took up the cause and today have reaped a rich harvest as their comprehensive information technology system, it-rural.com, is being implemented in 30 villages as a pilot project.

Comprehensive information about agriculture, crop patterns suitable for certain climates, the nature of soil, the demand for farm produce, diseases that plague crops and remedies that can be used are just a mouse click away.

Much planning went into this task: the team studied the problems and constraints and did an analysis of the social, economic and administrative problems that were ruining rural India. "We found that there was a complete absence of effective input validation for rural activities, particularly farming, such as accurate demand forecast, proper cultivation procedures, financial management, disease control, marketing and the like," Thiruchelvam told Express.

Technology

Initially, the team joined up with Loyola College at Pulivendula and conducted a household survey of 30,000 families in the mandal. The data was then fed into the computer. Soil samples were collected and analysed. With the data base ready, it-rural.com began giving suggestions to the farmers about suitable crops, pesticides and current market prices for the produce.

Awareness programmes were organised for farmers, bank officials and fertiliser and pesticide shop owners separately. "Initially, the farmers were a bit pessimistic. But once they understood that we were serious, they started to come to us," the enthusiastic IT professional said. Several satisfied farmers will bear testimony to that. Says Sarvothama Reddy of Yerripalli village: "Though we knew we were being exploited by traders and businessmen, we could not escape from their clutches for various reasons. But now there seems to be a ray of hope". In the next six months, the project will be extended to the remaining five mandals in Pulivendula. Chief Minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy's constituency, and subsequently to the remaining areas of the district.

d this dramatic moment when a searing pulse of light from an rstellar void of deep space. Hubble's latest image, released as it continues its journey from the exploding red supergiant star

na not guilty

tor Balakrishna coming out of the Nampally criminal court on after he was acquitted in the firing case. Expressphoto

turned hostile and retracted atements. Giving a clean chit to tor, Suresh and Chowdary said me unidentified persons opened fire at them while the maid servants denied that Vasundhara and Kanakaiah tampered with evidence.

IT professional Tiruchelvam interacting with the farmers. Expressphoto

The New Indian Express group

Date: 13/06/2005

Education: Unique Literacy programme (130 local students trained over 2000 illiterates)

NGO chalks out 100-day news-literacy strategy

By D Sreenath

EDUCATION

Kadapa, June 12: In 100 days, this NGO promises to turn illiterates into people with nose for news.

The NGO- it-rural.com - will first select some 2,000 inhabitants of 25 villages in Pulivendula mandal and teach them alphabets. This task will be entrusted to 200 select students from nearby educational institutions and not trained teachers. The bringing together of illiterates and students- transformed-into-teachers is expected to instill a sense of dedication among all concerned.

The classes will be held at flexible timings allowing the villagers to work in the fields in the mornings.

The curriculum has been prepared by it-rural.com. The NGO also supplies black boards, chalk, slates, story books and visual aids. In order to provide a better understanding to the participants of the training classes, the NGO has already installed computers at the panchayat offices and other important government offices in the village.

Started by service-minded NRIs, it-rural.com, intends to prevent villagers from being cheated by traders and others. Project coordinator RM Thiruchelvam says that illiteracy is the biggest factor in low agricultural productivity, backwardness of the rural areas and ignorance of welfare programmes.

According to the tutors' executive coordinator Raja Kullayappa, the initial results have been encouraging, especially from women.

The tutors were trained about teaching methods by professionals and a 35- member student monitoring team has also been formed, Kullayappa explained.

"After a few classes we gained confidence that we can also read and write within a short time, and it would definitely help us in our day to day life," says Eswar Reddy of E Kothapalli village.

"We hope to read for ourselves the postcards, addressed to us," said Veeramma of Errapalli village.

After the successful execution of this project, we will extend the programme to other parts of the district, Thiruchelvam stated.

Business Line

Date: 29/11/2006

Business: Collective Deals Helps Smaller & Marginal Farmers Too, To Directly Sell Produces To Markets

THE HINDU Business Line

Bangalore • Chennai • Coimbatore • Delhi • Hyderabad • Kochi • Madurai • Mangalore • Mumbai • Thiruvananthapuram • Tiruchirapalli • Vijayawada • Visakhapatnam

Growing leaders
Satyam initiative to set up school for leadership
4

At HSBC helm
Group CEO Green set to succeed Chairman Bond
5

New market
Singapore retail chain buys mosambi from AP
12

THE HINDU BUSINESS LINE • Tuesday, November 29, 2005

AP mosambi finds space in Singapore retail shelf

M. Somasekhar
Hyderabad, Nov. 28

A CONSIGNMENT of 500 kg of mosambi oranges, grown by farmers in Pulivendala mandal in Kadapa district of Andhra Pradesh, has been picked up by well-known retail chain, Mohamed Mustafa & Samsuddin Co of Singapore, for Rs 20,000.

The same 500 kg, if sold in the local market would fetch Rs 4,500 for the farmers. Mustafas, has placed a repeat order of one tonne and expressed interest in procuring fresh pomegranate and banana as well.

Facilitating this global exposure to the small farmers of Pulivendala, which is also the home town of the State's Chief Minister, Dr Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy, is a fledgling IT company, focussed on developing solutions to rural issues.

The Singapore company wants to sell the mosambi as fresh fruit product and the direct flight from Hyderabad to Singapore is helping in getting it airlifted and reaching them in a couple of days, explained Mr Thiruchelvam of the IT company.

- Mohamed Mustafa & Samsuddin buys 500 kg from Pulivendala Mandal
- One kg sold for Rs 40 against Rs 9 in the domestic market
- The retail firm has placed repeat order for one tonne
- It is also interested in pomegranate and banana

The company has expressed interest in sourcing pomegranate and bananas as well. Mosambi is grown in 4,000 acres in Pulivendala at present.

Similarly, the farmers also grow bananas, pomegranates and other fruits in the nearby mandals of the district, which is part of the dry Rayalaseema region of the State.

What it-rural.com, a start-up venture, has done is to install 11 computers in 11 panchayats of Pulivendala Mandal as part of its efforts to provide agricultural services to the rural people.

In the last one year, it has covered about 30,000 people and 6,000 farmers, cultivating in about 20,000 acres.

The entire data has been collected by 300 students of various colleges.

Mr Thiruchelvam told *Business Line* that there are plans to put in place Web-based solution connecting all the major panchayats and appoint personnel to handle them.

The system coordinates service providers (bankers, insurers), facilitates business activities (manufacturers, build operators and transferors, traders, food processing industries and carriers), establishing work force (labour, machinery).

Civil Society

Date: Feb/2007

Business Beyond Profit: ICT for Integrated Rural Development

Business

BEYOND PROFIT

Rethink money with us. What should the entrepreneur of the future be like? How can you get rich and still serve society? Do causes need bottom lines?

Nasscom goes to the grassroots

Vidya Viswanathan
New Delhi

INDIA and Bharat mingled at a conference organised by the Nasscom Foundation, the non-profit arm of the National Association of Software Companies (Nasscom). The meet was for its grassroots partners. The foundation got leaders from IT and the development sector to address people who manage IT kiosks. The objective was to get these telecentres to become knowledge centres.

The foundation's first project is to set up 100 Rural Knowledge Network (RKN) centres. After a change of CEOs, the foundation seems to be on course. It is partnering about 35 non-profits.

Some problems that telecentres said they face are lack of appropriate content, connectivity and money. But there are also innovative projects like Ramakrishnan Thiruselvam's IT-rural.com that has created a detailed databank of five thousand farms in Cuddapah district of Andhra Pradesh and helps farmers with crop management and finding markets. Mobile games for AIDs awareness have been developed by ZMQ Software.

LAKSHMAN ANAND

Ramakrishnan Thiruselvam's IT-rural.com has a detailed database of farmers

The speakers at the conference included Dr Ashok Khosla of Development Alternatives, Vijay Thadani of NIIT, J Satyanarayana of the National Institute of Smart Governance and Saurabh Srivastav, the chairman of Nasscom.

A majority of the Nasscom Foundation's partners in the Rural Knowledge Network run computer training classes. Many users visit to access email. But from the interchanges it was apparent that rural India, fuelled by stories of employment in the IT industry, has a large appetite for IT skills training. In one centre in rural Maharashtra where power supply is intermittent, we were told that classes start at 4 am. The question that lingered was whether rural youth would get really disgruntled if they did not get IT jobs after training.

The grassroots participants came to the conference with differing expectations. Prakruthi, an NGO which is located on the outskirts of Bangalore, was looking for funding. The NGO trains rural youth in employable IT skills and has placed people in companies like iGate at salaries of Rs 13,000. "Cognizant has 6000 employees. Just Rs 400 per employee would take us a long way. We have approached several companies but they are not interested," said Nazar PS of Prakruthi.

Rajen Varada of Technology for People, a non-profit which teaches computer skills to inner city girls in Hyderabad, had brought women coordinators from his centres. Varada, a technologist, said it was a problem to get local content. His centres run bridge classes for girls who are first generation learners. "I wanted to see if we could use technology to speed up learning. We paid Rs 3 lakhs to a consultant who visited us several times but never delivered. Creating content is expensive and research skills are not available," he explained.

Varada also pointed out that it was very tough to get anything from the IT industry. "It took us three months to get one internet connection from Tata Telecom, who are the Nasscom Foundation's partner for connectivity. We are now experimenting with setting up a wi-fi network in some locations," he said.

The participants found the session on content stimulating. John Hopkin's public health centre in India has developed games for children to spread awareness of AIDs. ZMQ Software, an e-learning company, developed this material. Zubi Qureshi, the founder of the company explained that about 25 per cent of their efforts are focused on developing learning solutions for the grassroots. The company has made a mobile game for AIDs awareness. Nine million people have downloaded it including people from Africa and Latin America.

ZMQ Software has developed a mobile game for AIDs awareness. Nine million people have downloaded it.

THE FARMERS' IT HUB : One of the most enlightening presentations at the Nasscom Foundation's conference was by Ramakrishnan Thiruselvam of IT-rural.com

His project has not only created pertinent content

for farmers, it even helps them manage their farms better and find markets for agricultural produce.

In just two months using 200 local college students Thiruselvam has digitised data for 30,000 people and 5,000 farms in Pulivendala, the mandal headquarters of Cuddapah district, Andhra Pradesh.

The database has master details on each farm and every member of a household. It has transactional data on what has been planted along with features like cultivation practices for crops. The database can provide information based on the farmer's land, size and location. It has facilities for scientists to offer advice and visit farms. It also has applications for updation, diagnosis tools and software to manipulate the database.

"Internet technologies can be used for integrated rural development," says 33-year-old Thiruselvam, a software engineer from a farming family.

In 2000 he sold his dot.com venture called getbusticket.com to start IT-rural.com. He has spent six years on it with his classmates funding him nearly Rs 55 lakhs.

"While running our dot.com venture we read a news story about farmers of Madanpally having to throw away their tomatoes," he says. "It occurred to us that this happens because a farmer has no information. He has to know the demand and supply position when he is planting a particular crop. Our database is updating in real-time so the farmer is aware of who has planted the same crop," he says.

Thiruselvam's model is self-sustaining. Unlike proponents of village knowledge centres or the Common Services Centre (CSC) model floated by the government, Thiruselvam does not expect each computer installation to be profitable. The CSC model puts pressure on the franchiser to make money. That would tempt him to just run computer literacy classes or games to earn revenue, feels Thiruselvam.

"IT is just an enabler. We have to have a movement to create economic freedom. Computers can provide real-time accurate data for the administration. After this you have to win the confidence of the people," says Thiruselvam who understands the pulse of a village.

IT-rural.com earns an income by marketing farm inputs. "This is a semi-automated e-commerce model. We organise the logistics so that farm inputs reach the farmer. He does not have to travel miles by bus. We take advertisements and make sure all brands are available so the farmer has a choice. We also help with markets and tie up logistics for the final produce," explains Thiruselvam.

It took him 18 months to set up his pilot project. He went to a Loyola polytechnic college in Pulivendala and spoke to teachers and students. "These students have never been charged up in life. This was a chance to fire them up. I told them how I was motivated by stories of people who would do anything for their country. Initially they bantered. But in the end there was pin drop silence. I told them that collecting accurate data was their chance to do something for the country," says Thiruselvam in spotless English, speckled with all the right tech business jargon, although he studied in Tamil till college.

In three sessions he mobilised 200 college students and 20 teachers as volunteers. He trained them for a week. It took another week to explain his plans to villagers.

"This is a tough task. The strongest opponents have to be countered. Eventually they turn into your staunchest allies. They would ask me why I needed to help them. I had to appeal to their pride and sentiment. I told them I was a software engineer who was valuable globally. But I was often humiliated at immigration because they assumed that all Indians were poor and wanted to immigrate. I want to change that," he explains. He enlisted articulate and respected local people and traveled to 30 villages meeting around 40,000 people.

Then a questionnaire was designed. It took a week for the students to collect accurate data and another week to digitise it. Thiruselvam hired eight software engineers for eight months to create applications to enter and manipulate data.

Their database now covers 24 villages, 30,000 people and 7,000 acres. It contains the family's ID, citizenship ID and generation ID. Several applications have been built to access this data. About 11 systems assistants, who are agricultural graduates, manage the 11 computers in 11 panchayats. They are given enough time to update all data. The graduates interact with farmers. If a pest strikes a crop they take pictures and enter it into the database before the attack escalates. The computers are not networked. "We cannot wait. We just use CDs" says Thiruselvam.

Scientist Rama Subba Reddy helping farmers with sweet lime

IT-rural.com explains agricultural practices to farmers

Thiruselvam's database has master details on each farm and every member of a household. It has transactional data on what has been planted along with features like cultivation practices for crops.

But this is not merely an IT solution. Thiruselvam wanted to increase the incomes of farmers. He enlisted Rama Subba Reddy, a respected agricultural scientist who had retired after 40 years of service. The scientist willingly volunteered and visited farms.

The applications allow digital pictures of plant diseases to be uploaded so the scientist knows the problem before going to the spot. For example a worm was cutting the leaf of red gram lentil. Reddy suggested growing a different variety of red gram alongside the main crop, peanut. The seeds were available some 80 km away. The farmers collectively bought the seeds in bulk, thereby lowering costs.

Twenty-five per cent of saplings would get destroyed by pest. Reddy recommended an anti-pest powder that cost Rs 25 per kg. The saplings were saved.

All this advice increased the net profit of farmers by 50 per cent. "It is only a matter of information reaching in time and the material being easily available," explains Thiruselvam.

To help farmers sell produce, Thiruselvam got in touch with factories in Coimbatore that make masalas. The factories agreed to buy chillis and red gram lentils. By eliminating the middle- man and assuring quantity and quality, the profit margins of some farmers increased.

To ensure fruits like banana, pomegranate, sweet lime and guava were of good quality, IT-rural.com paid youngsters to harvest. "We got a red carpet welcome from fashionable retail outlets in Chennai when we graded and packed these fruits attractively," says Thiruselvam. IT-rural.com even exported a consignment of sweet limes to Mustafa, a store in Singapore where most South Asians shop.

"This showed that the farmer who would have got Rs 8,500 a tonne could get Rs 20,000. We paid them all by cheque. Their confidence increased. They are now exporters who get paid instantly instead of being farmers at the mercy of wholesale traders," says Thiruselvam.

The programme does not stop at increasing income. "We have data on illiteracy and malnutrition. We explained to villagers how these could be tackled with a very small budget," says Thiruselvam. Farmers have paid for mid-day meals in schools and a literacy programme.

He also used his database to create an appropriate audience for the horticultural department's annual event. "Earlier they called anyone to show numbers. Now if they want farmers growing sweet lime to come, we get them. Our involvement increases the project's credibility. We charge the government for event management. We will do farmer events for anyone" says Thiruselvam

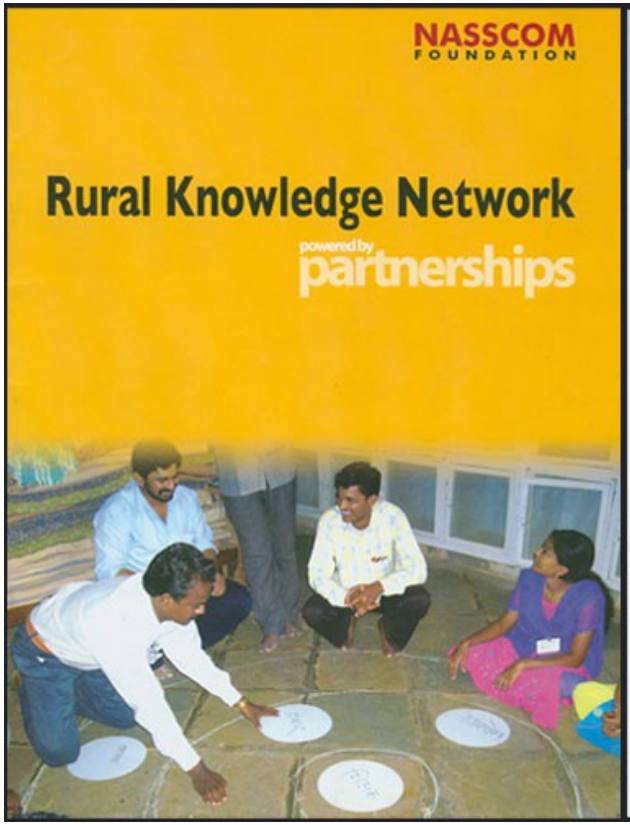
The Andhra Pradesh government has signed a MoU with him to set up 1000 IT-rural.com centres in Cuddapah. He has also agreed to create a database for Nasscom's rural partners.

"This will have to be a national movement. A similar database can be created across the country in one year if there is urgency," says Thiruselvam.

NASSCOM® FOUNDATION

Date: November/2006

Bottom-Up Approach: Resource Partner To 'NASSCOM Knowledge Network'



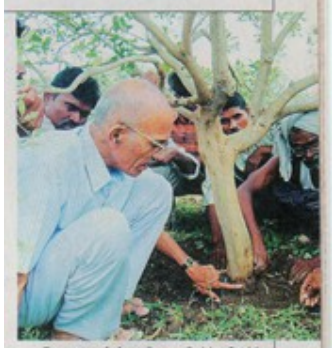
Rural Knowledge Network - Powered by Partnerships

Donor Partner	Resource Partners	Connectivity Partners	Implementation Partners
GTL Limited	Azim Premji Foundataion	Qualcomm	Ambuja Cement Foundation
Hewlett Packard	Cause an Effect Foundation	Tata Teleservices	Byrraju Foundation
Microsoft India	Media Lab Asia		Forum for Integrated Development & Research
NASSCOM	Microsoft India		Grameen Sanchar Society
Xansa	IT-Rural.com ✓		GTL Foundation
	Tata Consultancy Services		Kutch Mahila Vikas Samiti
	UNICEF		M S Swaminathan Research Foundation
			Pathway India
			Population First
			Rotary Club
			Sanskriti Samvardhan Mandal
			SEWA
			South Indian Federation of Fishermen Societies
			Students Partnership Worldwide - India Project Trust
			Suraj Foundation
			Technology for The People

THE WEEK

Date: 01/04/2007

Agriculture: ICT for Crop Life-Cycle Management



Expert opinion: *Rama Subba Reddy*

ANDHRA PRADESH

Portal to prosperity

Farmers of Pulivendla village go hi-tech

By Lalita Iyer

The good life for Pulivendla farmers is just a mouse click away. Recently, Singapore retail chain Mohammed Mustafa & Samsuddin Co. placed an online order worth Rs 20,000 for 500kg of sweet lemon they grew in their fields. It would have fetched Rs 1,500 in the local market. The company is planning to airlift another tonne of farm-fresh sweet lemon, and other fruits like banana and pomegranate, which are grown in 4,000 acres in Pulivendla and nearby mandals of Kadapa district in the dry Rayalaseema region.

Facilitating this global exposure to farmers in about 30 villages of Pulivendla, which is the hometown of Chief Minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy, is it-rural.com. It also gives farmers comprehensive information about crop patterns, nature of soil, crop diseases and remedies.

The Web site is the brainchild of a group of young IT professionals led by R.M. Thiruchelvam. Six years ago, he and his classmates sold their successful dotcom venture, getbusticket.com, to start it-rural.com. Thiruchelvam's friends, who have since left for the US, still fund their pet project. They have spent Rs 55 lakh till now.

Before embarking on the new venture, the team did an extensive study of the social, economic and administrative problems in rural India. With the help of Loyola College in Pulivendla, they surveyed 5,000 farms and 30,000 families in the region to create a database of cultivation practices, each farmer's land size and location, and soil analyses. Agricultural graduates manage the computers in all the 11 panchayats.

Awareness programmes for farmers, bank officials and fertiliser and pesticide shop owners followed. "Initially, the farmers were pessimistic," said Thiruchelvam. "But now they have realised that Internet technology can be used for integrated rural development."

Prakash Reddy, a young farmer in Atchavelli, no longer buys groundnut seeds at random, but browses the Net to select seeds suitable for his land and the climate. Rama Subba Reddy, a retired agricultural scientist, is available on call for advice on an alternate crop, a particular pesticide or a new seed.

Thanks to Thiruchelvam's intervention, masala factories in Coimbatore have agreed to buy red chillies and lentils from Pulivendla farmers.

Next on his mission is illiteracy and malnutrition. Many farmers have come forward to pay for mid-day meals in schools and to support literacy programmes.

The state has signed an MoU with Thiruchelvam to set up 1,000 it-rural.com centres in Kadapa. The National Association of Software and Service Companies (Nasscom), too, has signed a contract with him to create a database for its rural partners. ■

Information Technology

Date:June/2007

Technovators: ICT for Integrated Rural Development

technovators

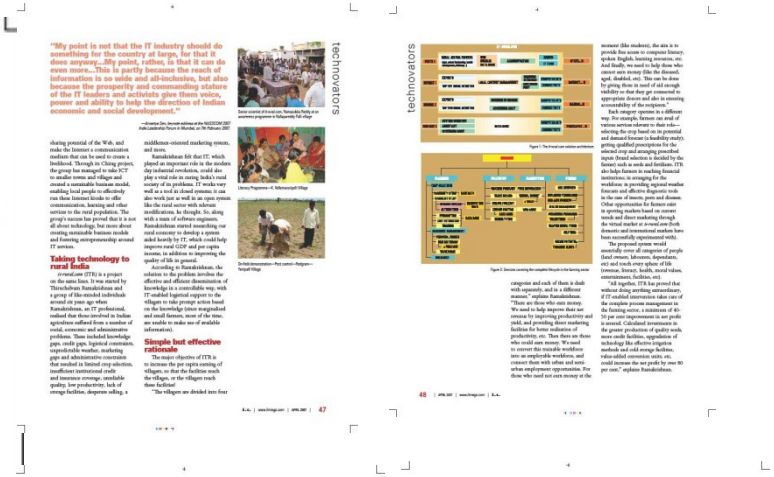
Helping Rural India Ride The IT Wave

A look at some of the projects attempting to take the benefits of information technology to rural India shows just how much common sense and sound use of existing technologies can achieve. One such project is *it-rural.com*

There is nothing unusual about information technology benefiting the urban, tech-savvy population. But if it starts making a difference to rural India—which is undoubtedly the major chunk of our economy—it is definitely worth noticing.

We took a detailed look at the work of IIT-Madras' TeNeT group in the July 2006 issue of 'I.T.' This group not only works on creating technologies to make the last mile link cheaper so that telephone and Internet can reach more areas, but also explores methods to help rural India realise the information-

46 | | | | I.T.



"My point is not that the IT industry should do something for the country at large, for that it does anyway...My point, rather, is that it can do even more...This is partly because the reach of information is so wide and all-inclusive, but also because the prosperity and commanding stature of the IT leaders and activists give them voice, power and ability to help the direction of Indian economic and social development."

technovators

sharing potential of the Web, and make the Internet a communication medium that can be used to create a livelihood. Through its Chirag project, the group has managed to take ICT to smaller towns and villages and created a sustainable business model, enabling local people to effectively run these Internet kiosks to offer communication, learning and other services to the rural population. The group's success has proved that it is not all about technology, but more about creating sustainable business models and fostering entrepreneurship around IT services.

Taking technology to rural India

it-rural.com (ITR) is a project on the same lines. It was started by Thirukeshari Ramakrishnan and a group of like-minded individuals around six years ago when Ramakrishnan, an IT professional, realised that those involved in Indian agriculture suffered from a number of social, economic and administrative problems. These included knowledge gaps, credit gaps, logistical constraints, unpredictable weather, marketing gaps and administrative constraints that resulted in limited crop selection, insufficient institutional credit and insurance coverage, unreliable quality, low productivity, lack of storage facilities, desperate selling, a middlemen-oriented marketing system, and more.

Ramakrishnan felt that IT, which played an important role in the modern day industrial revolution, could also play a vital role in easing India's rural society of its problems. IT works very well as a tool in closed systems; it can also work just as well in an open system like the rural sector with relevant modifications, he thought. So, along with a team of software engineers, Ramakrishnan started assembling the various components and developing a system, aided heavily by IT, which could help improve rural GDP and per capita income, in addition to improving the quality of life in general.

According to Ramakrishnan, the solution to the problem involves the effective and efficient dissemination of knowledge in a controllable way, with IT-enabled logistical support to the villagers to take prompt action based on the knowledge (since marginalised and small farmers, most of the time, are unable to make use of available information).

Simple but effective rationale

The major objective of ITR is to increase the per capita earning of villagers, so that the facilities reach the villagers, or the villagers reach these facilities!

"The villagers are divided into four categories and each of them is dealt with separately, and in a different manner," explains Ramakrishnan. "There are those who earn money. We want to help them earn more revenue by improving productivity and yield, and providing direct marketing facilities for better realisation of productivity, etc. Then there are those who could earn money. We want to convert this raw/idle workforce into an employable workforce, and connect them with urban and semi-urban employment opportunities. For those who need not earn money at the moment (like students), the aim is to provide free access to computer literacy, spoken English, learning resources, etc. And finally, we need to help those who are in need of help (the old, the infirm, aged, disabled, etc). This can be done by giving them in need of old enough viability so that they get connected to appropriate donors and also in ensuring accountability of the recipients."

Each category operates in a different way. For example, farmers can avail of various services relevant to their role—selecting the crop based on its potential and demand forecast (a feasibility study); getting qualified prescriptions for the selected crop and arranging prescribed inputs (brand selection is decided by the farmer) such as seeds and fertilisers. ITR also helps farmers in reaching financial institutions; in arranging for the workforce; in providing regional weather forecasts and effective diagnostic tools for pests, diseases, and other problems. Other opportunities for farmers exist in spotting markets based on current trends and direct marketing through the virtual market at *it-rural.com* (both domestic and international markets have been successfully experimented with).

The proposed system would essentially cover all categories of people (land owners, labourers, dependants, etc) and touch every sphere of life (revenue, literacy, health, moral values, entertainment, facilities, etc).

"All together, ITR has proved that without doing anything extraordinary, if IT-enabled interventions take care of the complete process management in the farming sector—starting from the 'M' (or pre-cultivation) to the sale of the harvest. Calculated investments in the greater production of quality seeds, more credit facilities, upgradation of technology like effective irrigation methods and cold storage facilities, value-added extraction units, etc, could increase the net profit by over 80 per cent," explains Ramakrishnan.

47 | | | | I.T.

48 | | | | I.T.

technovators

Reaching the common person

All this sounds good. A Web portal that can provide all the information to the farmer, act as a virtual marketplace, connect the seller and the buyers directly, and so on. But, ultimately, what matters is the how? How do you take such ICT services to farmers? Where do they go for computers and the Internet? The farmer may not even understand English or might not know how to operate a computer. In order to tackle all the hurdles that lie between the rural public and its access to relevant IT, the ITR project has been designed and implemented in such a way that at all levels the farmer can connect to the best information services.

The architecture of the solution operates at various levels, according to Ramakrishnan. At the Panchayat level, the Information and Data Processing Centre (IDPC) or kiosk is provided with the necessary computer kits, with Internet connectivity. A systems operator and an assistant help the villagers to communicate with the system through the *it-rural.com* portal. The system maintains information in English as well as in the regional language to overcome the linguistic barrier. ITR owns the kiosk; hence, it is not a franchise model, per se.

The relevant computer kits and Net connectivity are also provided at the mandal/taluk level. Two business transaction controllers and two rural experts control this level. At the district level, the headquarters is provided with the necessary computer kits and with Net connectivity. Three business transaction controllers, five rural experts (for the top five business activities of the district), two Web experts and five governing bodies manage this level. And at the state level, a full-pledged IT team (to handle software, hardware, content development and Web page design), rural experts and administrators take charge.

The system coordinates service providers like bankers and insurers, facilitates business activities like manufacturing, construction, trading, food processing, logistics, etc, establishes a work force and creates an integrated database of the macro, personal and professional details of the rural population. The system also helps build an automated databank of regional language-based standardised information and optimised solutions, and gathers volunteers to provide a wide range of services within the reach of the rural population.

So, at the heart of the system, you have the database that holds personal information, agricultural base data and agricultural transaction data, and the dynamic data bank that is constantly updated with information based on expert inputs. At the core is also a virtual marketplace to buy and sell agricultural produce on an international scale; a workforce creation wing that brings together employees and employers; and the manpower and volunteer backing that helps run the whole system—even conducting occasional workshops and campaigns on various relevant issues.

"If you ask me what IT can do best in the process of knowledge dissemination, the answer would be proper utilisation of the strength of Relational Database Management Systems (RDBMS) combined with n-tier architecture. Basically, we change the present scenario of 'Villagers vs Experts' into one that could be termed as the 'Data of the villagers vs Digitised version of the knowledge of the experts' scenario. This would create a big turnaround in the process of rural development," says Ramakrishnan.

Sustainable and scalable

It is very rare for any system that's based entirely on service-oriented promises to sustain itself in the long run. Stepping down from a visionary plane to a practical one, we have to admit that for a system to be self-sufficient and sustainable, it needs to have a successful business model.

Ramakrishnan explains, "The system has been designed in such a way that it generates sufficient revenue through its unique revenue generation model (semi-automated e-commerce), in order to make it not only highly service-oriented but commercially viable as well. The major revenue stream are the transaction-related service charges from the buyers and sellers (e-purchasing and the virtual market); the service-related charges from the service providers such as bankers, insurers, recruiters, etc; facility-related charges for application forms, ticket reservation, browsing, DTP services and so on; and income from business promotion (online ads, etc) and from event management (product demonstrations and awareness programs)."

"Since sound economics is the core objective in the process of rural development, striking a balance between service and business is very important and we should be clear on what kind of services should be charged for and what should be free of cost," he adds.

Successful pilot, promising future

The project has been piloted successfully over the past 18 months, in the 12 panchayats and 30-villages of Pallavadu mandal in the Kadapa district of Andhra Pradesh. "We operated 11 information and data processing centres covering 24 villages. One project leader, eight software engineers, one senior retired agri-scientist, four advisors, two administrators, 11 systems operators and 11 assistants (at the panchayat-level) worked for 18 months on the pilot and proved our objectives as both possible and feasible," says Ramakrishnan.

ITR is now in the process of executing a Memorandum of Understanding with the government of Andhra Pradesh, which has requested it to scale up the project to cover the entire Kadapa district by establishing 1000 information and data processing centres. That is a clear sign of the success of the model. "As another benchmark, NASSCOM has recognised our IT-oriented rural development initiatives by selecting *it-rural.com* as a resource partner for its Rural Knowledge Network Programme," adds Ramakrishnan.

ITR's work extends beyond this project too. For example, it has found a few major drawbacks in the government's new scheme to establish 1,00,000 CSC centres across the country through the franchise model. "We are discussing this with the concerned executives and our opinion has been received well. We feel that contributing our experience to this scheme could strengthen the large-scale effort," says Ramakrishnan.

It's ITR's belief that rural development initiatives should be considered and projected as a movement for the development of the entire nation, which should be driven by passion and powered by information technology. The model developed by them might well be applicable to other developing nations as well, but we must first wait and watch how well it is rolled out across our own country and how well the common person uses it.

After all, the success of any project lies not only in its successful implementation, but also in how well the beneficiary recognises the value of the facility and uses it.

Jayasri Gopalakrishnan Vikram

50 | | | | I.T.

THE FINANCIAL EXPRESS

http://www.financialexpress.com/fe_full_story.php?content_id=155879

BusinessWeek

http://www.businessweek.com/globalbiz/content/jun2007/gb20070629_887666.ht

e-agricu

http://www.e-agriculture.org/news/foot-pilgrimage-domain-ict4agr

etv

tv9

ZEE news

Date: 05-Aug-2010

The undue setback

FROM THE SOUTH

YSR's IT plan for farmers hits Andhra wall

SREENIVAS JANYALA
HYDERABAD, AUGUST 4

SIX software engineers who invested their own money to take agriculture research to farmers through information and communication technology find themselves in a spot because the Andhra Pradesh government has reneged on its promise to fund the project.

The pilot project itrural.com, which was praised by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) as a "remarkable venture", enabled 40,000 farmers in Pulivendula mandal of Kadapa district to use latest agricultural practices which helped them increase earnings. The home district of the late Y S Rajasekhara Reddy, Kadapa is now the turf of his son and MP Jagan Mohan Reddy who, with his aspirations for the CM's job, has been giving the Congress sleepless nights.

As CM, YSR had asked the engineers to take the project to all of Kadapa and later to other districts. He sanctioned funds under the Centre's Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana which encourages innovative projects. Since YSR's death, the team has been trying to procure funds without success.

A scientist helps farmers as part of the project

Agriculture Department's Special Chief Secretary Racheal Chatterjee said: "We thought the IT Department should handle it. So we transferred the project there. I don't know what happened after."

Under the project, each farmer was given advice on the latest agricultural practices based on the size of his land, soil quality of the field and suitable crops to be sown, and the quality of seeds to be used. The project created a database of all farmers in Pulivendula, the composition of soil in each field, earlier crops, diseases, water quality, seeds and fertilisers used.

During the first phase of the project, farmers not only increased their earnings but due to the good quality of the crops, received orders from Singapore for supply of sweet lime and pomegranates, while several retail outlets placed orders for other harvests.

"For four years, we walked hundreds of miles through the mandal. Since it was our pilot project, we had no salaries. We spent over Rs 10 lakh of our own money to sustain the project as well as ourselves," said Tamil Nadu-based Thiruchelvam Ramakrishnan who initiated the project.

The project took off in 2006 and the team mapped 20,000 acres of agricultural land owned by 40,000 farmers in 30 villages under 12 panchayats of Pulivendula mandal.

As the project was being tested in Pulivendula, YSR took a keen interest and asked the team to submit a proposal to receive funding of Rs 2.7 crore under the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana to take it to the next level. The project was approved by the state-level committee for agriculture, and the state-level sanctioning committee okayed the funding of the project. But from here on, the entire project got caught in a bureaucratic tangle and the file was transferred through many departments.

"When we got a chance, we told YSR who demanded answers from officers of the departments through which the file had passed. He was told that since the state share of Rs 920 crore under the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana had been cut down to Rs 300 crore, funds could not be allocated for this project. A week before his death, YSR called us and said he was putting the project on hold temporarily till he could arrange funds from some other source. Till now we have made presentations and got clearances from three Chief Secretaries, three Principal Secretaries of Agriculture, and three Commissioners of Agriculture, but the file hasn't moved," said Thiruchelvam.

THE HINDU

Date: 26-Apr-2012

Government needs to harness IT for innovative Agriculture

FARMER'S NOTEBOOK

Government needs to harness IT for innovative agriculture

The model disseminates site specific knowledge at no cost to farmers

M.J. PRABU

There appears to be a general consensus that the country's agriculture sector can do better with some encouragement, motivation to youngsters who are driven with a passion, and a dream to do something for the rural poor.

"Ironically the government which keeps talking about encouraging youth to take up agriculture, does nothing to help us chip in," says Mr. R.M. Thiruchelvam an IT professional from Alampattu, Sivaganga district Tamil Nadu.

Several problems

Mr. Thiruchelvam left a lucrative job as well as business plans nine years ago to take up the cause of rural development.

With the support of like-minded friends he and his team did four years of intensive study of the social, economic, and administrative problems that are wrecking rural India.

The team designed a comprehensive web system, it-rural.com to provide information and communication to increase the "per capita earning" of villagers.

Specific knowledge

"The model disseminates site specific knowledge at the village level at no cost to farmers. It is an employer-employee model. So a local person is not going to own the knowledge centre.

"It is designed to overcome typical constraints such as social, geographical, and commercial barriers that are prevalent across the world in taking technology to the grassroots," explains Mr. Thiruchelvam

IDEAL TOOL: *Thiruchelvam (left) interacting with some groundnut farmers of Andhra Pradesh.*

It comprehensively addresses the key components of agricultural sector such as good quality and yield, better price realization to farmers, balanced production and strengthening institutional credit systems.

Lack of input

"There is no effective input validation available at the grassroots in the present system for rural activities, particularly farming. Information on demand forecast, cultivation procedures, input supply management, disease control, marketing, glut in production, desperate selling, impact of drought and flood are absent," he says.

The team wanted to showcase the model on a large scale to prove its efficiency. Their hard work yielded results. The Andhra Pradesh Government provided an opportunity for them to carry out a pilot project in Pulivendala, Kadapa District, Andhra Pradesh. About 30 villages, 12 Panchayats, 40,000 people and 20,000 acres of agricultural land benefited.

But the success lasted only for a short while. Sudden developments in the state political scene saw these youngsters grounded due to lack of financial support.

In fact, for the past two years Mr. Thiruchelvan is running from one state to another to meet different officials and experts to explain and showcase his findings.

He believes that this concept can definitely provide a key to unlock different problems in the rural sector. But sadly, he has been ignored or refused an appointment.

Ideal tool

"IT is an ideal tool today for addressing several glitches a farmer faces. We are very eager to get the Government interested in this.

"But sadly we are not able to get any opening in the government circles. Recently I had to keep calling for an appointment with a Secretary to Government and literally begged his secretary to get me an appointment," he says in a voice chocked with emotion.

The secretary initially granted him 20 minutes but shortened it to 10 minutes and rushed through his concept.

"He asked me to contact the officials in his department but till date they have not responded," he says with frustration and sadness.

Cant he try to take this concept further with private funding agencies rather than depend on the Government?

Seems daunting

"In India, a major part of agriculture activities is still under Government control. To reach out to hundreds of farmers we need the Government's support and funding. Even at the state level we require the local University and the state agriculture departments' support. But getting it seems daunting.

"If any Government is prepared to encourage us we are ready to join hands on a PPP model (public private partnership) as we are sure that this concept will benefit small farmers," says Mr. Thiruchelvam hopefully.

Despite several attempts by The Hindu, the Agriculture Secretary was not available for his comments on this proposal.

For more details contact Mr. R.M.Thiruchelvam, Originator and Project Director, website: www.it-rural.com, email: thirurm@gmail.com, mobile:9840374266.

it-rural.com
IT CARES RURAL

IT Solutions For Farmers' Woes

THE HINDU

Pride of place
South Tamil Nadu has the unique distinction of sending five of the 12 Chief Ministers to the Assembly in elections held post-Independence – Page 6

COIMBATORE CONNECT
calling all readers to connect with us for all things Coimbatore at
twitter - @KovaiConnect
www.facebook.com/KovaiConnect

winner

CHI

romote

e for getting
are of water
te coconut
r coconut

l areas.
s 2011

KEY ISSUES

- Water for coconut tress and better price for its produce
- Facilitating value addition to coconut based products

Electorate
2,16,972
(as on April 29, 2016)

Polling stations
256

Voters

Male
1,05,643

Female
1,11,317

Others
12

IT solution for farmers' woes

R. VIMAL KUMAR

TIRUPUR: A group of five computer professionals from different parts of Tamil Nadu are now a mission to implement an Information Technology-based comprehensive farming solution in Tamil Nadu.

They had successfully implemented it in Andhra Pradesh.

With elections around the corner, the group members are meeting the farmers' groups in the State.

The aim is to explain how the Information and Communication Technology-based Agriculture focused Integrated Rural Development mooted under the forum of Mission-IT Rural can improve yield and marketing avenues so that the farmers could in turn pressurise the political parties/candidates to get an assurance of implementing the same when they come to power.

During a visit to Palladam to meet farmers' groups/forums, the team leader R. Thiruchelvam explained to *The Hindu* how the project was implemented on a pilot basis at Pulivendula block in Kadapa district of Andhra Pradesh a few years ago.

R. Thiruchelvam at a mosambi field in Pulivendula block in Andhra Pradesh.

These professionals themselves met the entire project expenses.

"Under the project, we first opened information and process management centres at all the 11 villages under the block.

Base data of farmers were obtained and computerised the requisite information needed for specific crops so as to generate solutions to the farmers depending on the season, soil and water availability," he said.

The data collected on sowing helped farmers against raising same crops all over the block to avoid any glut in the market.

Similarly, the information of pest breakouts helped take preventive measures.

According to Mr. Thiruchelvam, the project resulted in yield increase by up to 20 per cent.

Mosambi and pomegranate harvested from there were exported for first time.

"Success helped us entering into an agreement with Andhra Pradesh Government to expand the scheme to other blocks though it did not take place later due to political changes."

The idea of IT solution was germinated in the minds of Mr. Thiruchelvam, Utham Kumar, S. Jayakumar, S. Vijay and G. Venkatesh after seeing farmers' hardships due to price crashes and poor marketing possibilities.

Photographs exhibition begins

THE HINDU

Date: 22-11-18

Press Meet Coverage at Madurai On Veppankulam Initiative

Politics

Tomato, onion prices can be stable: Expert

A.RAGU RAMAN | DC
CHENNAI JULY 3

Can the issue of inflation in the prices of tomatoes and onions be solved through Digital India project? "It can be solved if farmers are connected both physically and digitally," said Thiruchelvam Ramakrishnan, an ICT expert, originator and project director, Mission IT-Rural.

Last month, as the price of tomatoes touched a high of Rs 120 per kg the lack of rain was cited as the reason for low production and high price.

A few months ago it was tur dal and the government suddenly woke up to the situation and hurriedly imported pulses from other countries.

"If the price is high then farmers cultivate tomatoes on a massive scale, but in the process bring the prices down as it would be not profitable for them to even transport to the markets," Thiruchelvam said.

"We have to collect the live crop variety details sown in the particular area. In case, there are shortfalls in supply we know when the particular crop will reach the market. Based on that we can plan and avoid the price inflation," he said.

"If we set up the information and process management centre in every village under the Digital India project, the crop life cycle management can be optimised. Instead of giving them details through mobile apps, the government should interact with the farmers through these centres and help them to have a balanced production and enhanced price for their production," he added.

Thiruchelvam Ramakrishnan, originator and project director, Mission IT-Rural. —DC

He and his team have been working in the domain of ICT for agriculture for last 15 years. These centres have already been tested at the ground level in Pulivendula mandal in Kadapa district, Andhra Pradesh. They were provided with computers and internet connection.

The project was aimed at using ICT for addressing farmers' problems and helping them in the selection of right kind of crop, organising quality inputs, effective crop protection measurement and remunerative price for agriculture produce.

"These centres not only control price spikes, but also help farmers to be professional in farming and marketing their products," he said.

"Farmers need to be empowered with live crop variety production data before starting their cultivation. This will help them know how many farmers in how many acres have sown a particular variety of the crop and when it is expected to give the yield. So, they can avoid the mass production of goods at one time which is when they face a price crash," he added.

These centres can also give a forecast of demand and manage agricultural machinery such as tractors for farming purposes.

THE HINDU

Date: 22-11-18

Press Meet Coverage at Madurai On Veppankulam Initiative

Going the ICT way for agricultural growth

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Madurai

While a group of farmers were protesting in New Delhi, a team of IT professionals from Tamil Nadu presented a village-level Information and Communication Technology (ICT) solution for farming solutions.

An MCA from Madurai Kamaraj University and a native of Alampattu village in Sivaganga District, Thiruchelvam Ramu said, "ICT has been playing a key role in industrial revolution and in providing solutions for real-life complex problems. At the same time, ICT is yet to unleash its full potential in the farming sector. To use ICT tools to help sustainable rural development, I left my job 12 years ago. With the support of my friends U P Uthamkumar, S S Jeyakumar and G Vengateshkumar in IT, I intensively studied social, economic and administrative problems in rural India for four years."

"A major observation we made was that there was no effective input validation such as demand forecast, cultivation procedures, input supply management, disease control and marketing available at the grass root in the present system for rural activities, particularly farming. Since the rural sector depends heavily on agriculture, they are unable to find a solution when agriculture fails," Ramu said.

"We developed a comprehensive web system called it-rural.com. It provides an ICT-driven, agriculture focused, integrated solution to increase the per capita income of farmers. It also helps to improve the quality of their life through a series of facility-related services in a sustainable way. This model comprehensively addresses the key components of agricultural sector such as optimal quality and yield, better price realisation for farmers, balanced production and strengthening institutional credit system," he said.

Talking about proof of effectiveness of the concept, he said, "We got an opportunity to carry out a pilot project in Pulivendala, Kadapa district, Andhra Pradesh. We started the pilot project investing our own funds of ₹1 crore. The State and the Centre and other major bodies like National Association of Software and Services Companies (NASSCOM), Instrumentation Laboratory (IL), Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (CDAC) and Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) have appraised the model as a unique, proven and replicable model.

As per our plan of scaling-up the model to cover the villages of Kadapa district, a proposal was submitted on Public Private Partnership mode which was approved by the government in March 2008 under the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana, a Government of India scheme. But due to a sudden political crisis that happened around that time, the project was not implemented. We were not disheartened. Nevertheless, we wanted to move forward and take the mission to a greater level," said Ramu. "Around that time, a farmer committed suicide during the protest in Delhi. We submitted our project at the Prime Minister's office. The officials appreciated our efforts and assured implementation. Till now we have not received any response from the Prime Minister's office," he added.

"Our project will definitely provide the sustainable development in agricultural growth. We tried to meet the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and explain our project. In memory of my mother Kalyani, we formed the Kalyani Memorial ICT Farming Solutions Foundation. From this Trust, we plan to implement this project at my native place. Illupai village in Ariyalur district has called us to implement this project in their village. Very soon we are going launch this project in Illupai and at my native village," Ramu stated.

THE HINDU

Date: 22-11-18

Press Meet Coverage at Madurai On Veppankulam Initiative

'Chettiya Kanmai' renovated

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
SIVAGANGA

A group of software professionals who had formed 'ICT in agriculture' to offer solutions to agriculture challenges through Information and Communication Technology has launched a strategy for village water source revival - rejuvenating water bodies and cleaning up supply channels.

Launching the first project at Veppankulam in Kallal block on Wednesday, the technocrats with the active participation of farmers and villagers, have renovated the 24 acre 'Chettiya Kanmai', which covered an 'ayacut' area of 60 acres and cleaned up two supply channels, running into 4.5 km long.

Under 'Mission Water,' they proposed to renovate six more water bodies in the village before the onset of monsoon and showcase the model for the state, said Thiruchelvam Ramu, heading the mission. "The Chettiya Kanmai is as good as what it was 25 years ago," he said.

He said the project was launched in his native Veepankulam as the village which had witnessed 'three time cultivation' in a year presented a picture of desolate for want of water. With monsoons playing truant in recent years, continued farming could be possible only if water sources in the villages were rejuvenated and readied to store rain water.

Villagers could send requests to renovate water bodies by visiting their website 'missionwater.in', he said adding once 'Mission water' received requests, it would collect half of the total cost from farmers and villagers, the stake holders and the balance from corporates and NGOs, he said. If the corporate companies were made to channelise the funds earmarked for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities, all the water bodies and supply channels in the state could be renovated, he said. Each village would have a fund manager to ensure transparency in the collection of local funding and external funding, he said. If all the water bodies in the state were renovated and made ready to store water during monsoons seasons, there would be no need to rely on Cauvery water, he opined.

Mission Water's maiden project received an impetus when Mr. Rajendra Singh, known as 'Waterman of India,' visited the village and appreciated the work. He called for decentralised approach for water management system and people's participation.

FaceBook
https://www.facebook.com/share/v/19dqADdYUs/?mibextid=oFDknk

The Hindu
https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-tamilnadu/ict-based-solution

Times of India
https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/madurai/branding-their-rice-veppanku

Global Bihari
https://globalbihari.com/farmers-agitation-resolving-the-minimum-support

… With your support and guidance, we would accomplish our mission of ‘Transforming Rural Sector Through ICT’

Thanking You