Key note address by Smt. D. Purandeswari, MoS (HRD) GOI at the 4th convention of National Alliance for Mission 2007 on "Every village a knowledge centre" delivered at IGNOU, New Delhi on 3-8-2007.

Mr. Chairman Sir, and other distinguished guests and friends,

I feel extremely honoured for having been invited to deliver the Keynote Address on Grameen Gyan Abhiyan at this 4th Convention of the National Alliance for Mission for 2007. The National Development Knowledge connectivity is an important component of Bharat Nirman and is intended to assist in the knowledge empowerment of rural families in order to bridge and eventually eliminate the rural - urban divide. The Mission 2007 has triggered a national movement for bridging the urban-rural divide and for ensuring knowledge connectivity relevant to the day to day life and living of the rural families. The avowed aim of the Mission is : (I quote)

> **"Taking the tools of ICT for enhancing agrarian and rural prosperity and well-being on the principle of social inclusion in access to technology" (Unquote)**

I understand that the National Alliance for Mission 2007 was established with an initial membership of 40 institutions

during a national consultation on 19-20, May 2004, organized by MSSRF under the competent and inspiring leadership of Dr. M.S. Swaminathan. Since then, the membership has risen to 130. A National Policy Maker's workshop was organized in the same year, which was the first convention of the Alliance and this was followed by the second Annual Convention held in the next year. The third Annual Convention, in 2006 provided an opportunity to its member institutions to reflect on objects of the Mission with greater re-dedication. It was emphasized that the capacity and potential of ICTs to make large quantum of information quickly and easily available in remote places could strengthen and increase its utility for rural development in India. It was, therefore, thought that innovative and successful application of ICTs in the agricultural and rural development sector by corporate and civil society organizations would further improve the possibility of the use of ICTs to enrich the livelihoods of the rural poor

While urban and industrialized India has witnessed impressive growth in the economy in recent years, life continues to be an unending struggle for survival for more than 700 million people in rural India. Such a pattern of growth cannot be expected to provide overall growth and stability of the society or the economy. Hence the need for social inclusion.

The relevance of social inclusion does not end here. Past experience of development agencies in rural areas have shown how the marginalized and oppressed sections of society, including women can be excluded from all such interventions by the dominant class/caste groups, unless these are designed on the principle of social inclusion. In fact, the access to knowledge and information by such groups is seen as the key to their socio-economic empowerment and to the eventual societal growth in various spheres. Viewed in this context, the urgent need for social inclusion acquires a special significance. The establishment of communication networks and rural knowledge centers on the scale visualized by the Mission is unprecedented anywhere in the world and can only be achieved through the collaborative efforts of all partners. Even more challenging is the task of converting these physical assets into genuine knowledge centers, which people are proud to own and support because they value the potential of these assets in transforming their lives.

The, Mission 2007 has triggered a national tele-centre movement for bridging the urban-rural digital divide and for ensuring knowledge connectivity in areas relevant to the day-to-day life and livelihood of rural families. The Government of India has included knowledge connectivity as an important component of Bharat Nirman or a New Deal for Rural India. A national

alliance has been formed for Mission 2007 — 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. In addition, with the generous assistance of Tata Trusts, the MSSRF has established a Jamsetji Tata National Virtual Academy for Rural Prosperity (NVA) and a Jamsetji Tata Training School. The NVA has currently 985 Fellows from India and 25 Foreign Fellows drawn from Afghanistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Kenya, Nepal, and Nigeria. These grass roots academicians are the torch-bearers of the rural knowledge revolution.

The Grameen Gyaan Abhiyan will be based on the following organizational structure:

a) Every block will have a village resource centre with the help of ISRO.

b) Every panchayat will have a gyan chaupal or village knowledge centre with the help of the Department of Information Technology, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, civil society organisations, NABARD and financial institutions, multilateral donors, the academic and private sectors, and bilateral and multilateral donors.

c) The last mile and last person connectivity will be achieved through combinations of the Internet and community radio, and the Internet and the cell phone.

A major role of the Grameen Gyaan Abhiyan movement will be the establishment of linkages between scientific know-how and field level do-how. For this purpose, village resource centres and village knowledge centres will have to be intimately linked with appropriate programmes such as the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan for literacy, the Yuva and Mahila Sakthi Abhiyans of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, the National Rural Health Mission, the National Horticulture Mission, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme, and so on.

I would now like to refer to the convergence of the concept of the Grameen Gyan Abhiyan to the various government initiatives in the rural sector in the field of education which is one of the most important segment in the overall socio-economic growth.

The need for the Abhiyan has been triggered by a basic and substantial failure in educating our children. The rate of dropouts in the range of standard 1 to 8 is close to 60 per cent in rural areas. The people need basic numeracy and literacy as well as analytical skills and tools to harness resources from their environment. This failure can be attributed to the inability of literacy programmes to engage communities and also due to lack of resources and infrastructure, lack of trained teachers and

quality teaching material. The Abhiyan could address all these problems in a mission mode.

SSA is Government of India's flagship programme for the achievement of Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) in a time bound manner, as mandated by 86th amendment to the Constitution of India, making free and compulsory education to the children of 6-14 years age group, a fundamental right. SSA is being implemented in partnership with State Governments to cover the entire country and address the needs of 192 million children in 1.1 million habitations. The programme seeks to open new schools in those habitations, which do not have schooling facilities and to strengthen existing school infrastructure through provision of additional class rooms, toilets, drinking water, maintenance grant and school improvement grants. Existing schools with inadequate teacher strength are provided with additional teachers, while the capacity of existing teachers is being strengthened by extensive training, grants for developing teaching –learning materials, and strengthening of the academic support structure at a cluster, block and district level. SSA seeks to provide quality elementary education including life skills. SSA has a special focus on girl's education and children with special needs. SSA also seeks to provide computer education to bridge the digital divide.

A distinctive feature of the Abhiyan is to bring about community ownership of the school system by effectively involving the Panchyati Raj institutions, School Management Committees, Village and Urban Slum level Education Committees, Parents' Teachers' Association, Mother Teacher Associations, Tribal Autonomous Councils and other grassroots level structures in the management of elementary schools.

Even the smallest of interventions to augment the training material and quality of training imparted can make a huge difference to the educational system. Clearly investments in education will yield the highest dividends in the long run. Various innovative models to harness ICT for education have been developed under diverse situations by different agencies. For example, the MSSRF has set up ICT resource centers in Pondicherry; MP government's ICT resource centers have done sterling work in drawing children into learning and also facilitating teacher training programmes; Azim Premji Foundation's programme and Intel's Teach to the Future programme have tried to reinforce and enhance classroom teaching.

These represent good models of ICT in the service of education and are being incrementally scaled up. However, this is not enough. The need of the hour is to scale up these models

in a massive way. The education mission should not be seen as one more mission that Mission 07 empowers; rather it should be the primary mission. This calls for a joint efforts from all stakeholders across the spectrum – villagers, service providers, policy makers, technologists etc. They should all make a concerted effort and must come together in order to bring about a revolution in the sector.

Some of the potential benefits of bringing about such convergence are:

- Teachers (Indian as well as international) can network amongst themselves and share best practices. The teachers in the rural areas represent a valuable human resource. Development planners are not utilizing their energy in an optimal manner. This energy is being dissipated in all kinds of miscellaneous services. If provided the right kind of training, rural teachers could take the knowledge revolution a long way.
- In the present system of education, quality continues to be a major problem. Even after 5-6 years of schooling, children cannot compose a paragraph in their local language or do simple arithmetic. Perhaps VKCs can improve this by devising learning tools.
- Resources for self learning can be developed and shared. NIIT came up with a programme for children to

explore their creativity. I understand that ICT centers have been set up in remote villages of Madya Pradesh and the tribal children are exploring the system on their own. Children learn at their own pace through such resources.

- VKCs can become a significant delivery channel for knowledge resources and develop a two way communication.
- Lastly, VKCs, being anchored in community engagement, would help the Abhiyan to develop deep linkages with the community

As a single step, the rural knowledge revolution is likely to have the largest beneficial impact on the physical, economic, and social well-being of the more than 700 million people living in villages. Poverty will persist under conditions where the human resource is under-valued and material resources are over-valued. Once the Grameen Gyan Abhiyan spreads, there will be a perceptible impact on the parameters governing human resource development. This, in turn, will lead to a paradigm shift from unskilled to skilled work in villages. This is the pathway to achieving the first among the U.N. Millennium Development Goals, namely the eradication of hunger and poverty.

Although India has 1/3rd of the software engineers in the world, at the same time about 1/3rd of India's rural population continues to live under sub-saharan and African conditions. Social indicators seem to indicate that economic growth will run out of steam unless such inequitable conditions are addressed urgently.

With these words, I once again convey my thanks to the organizers of the Convention for sharing my perception with you and convey my best wishes for the success of the 4th convention.

Jai Hind.