Empowerment of Women through Information and Communication Technologies: Observations from Village Knowledge Centers of Pudhucherry

Submitted by

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Chapter 1
Case Studies of the Benefits of ICT for Women

1.1 Information Village Research Project – An Overview

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) enables solutions and knowledge for a broad-based development in social, economical and political life. The importance of ICT and its socioeconomic relevance especially in developing countries, is gathering momentum. How far knowledge translates into progress and helps fight poverty, depends on an ongoing effort with multi-pronged outreach projects designed especially for the rural poor in countries like India. With its immense scope, ICT could be used as a tool to alleviate rural poverty.

The Information Village Research Project of M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation is known for its innovative use of ICT in rural development. It is renowned for developing local databases and local web pages that are relevant to the daily needs of local people. The project aims to delineate how information and communication technologies could be utilized in rural development programmes. The foremost criterion is to fulfill the information needs of rural communities, and use this as a springboard for advancement in all sectors.

The seeds of Information Village Research Project were sown during an interdisciplinary dialogue titled “Information Technology: Reached the Unreached” in 1992. Keeping in line with the MSSRF mandate “pro-poor, pro-women and pro-nature” orientation to development, a new project, namely the Information Village Research Project, was launched in 1998, with financial support from International Development Research Centre of Canada.

The foundation chose the Union Territory of Pondicherry the eastern coast of South India as its location for the new project, as part of its endeavor to take the benefits of emerging and frontier technologies to the rural poor. MSSRF was not a stranger to the rural families of Pondicherry. The staff of MSSRF had already established excellent rapport with the rural women and men through an earlier program, the Bio-Village Project. Operating since 1991, this project focuses on community asset-building based biological technologies. The new project was envisioned to complement the former, and derive benefits from the linkages. Other reasons include access to various government machineries, and redress of grievances of the people. There is a very high level of poverty in the rural areas. Out of a population of 22,000 around 4500 or approximately 20 percent of the rural families in the area, are officially classified as living below the poverty line, and half the population has a total family income equivalent to less than US$25 per month. Before the project began, the villagers shared 12 public telephones and 27 private telephones-less than one phone per 500 people.
The project set up Information Shops to link the villages. This has been done with the view to determine whether ICT can impact rural livelihoods. The Information Shops have later come to be called the Village Knowledge Centers. This has been done to stress the need for local-specific, demand-driven information, and for training rural women and men for value-added information. Value-added information is knowledge; so they are rightly called Village Knowledge Centers (VKC). The local language, Tamil, is used for all operations of these Knowledge Centers. Tamil script is used in the computer applications.

The Village Knowledge Centers serve the information needs of the community through an information infrastructure. The project employs not only high-end technologies such as interconnected computers and communication technologies, but also traditional technologies. A network consisting of Personal Computers (PCs), telephones, VHF Duplex Radio devices, Spread Spectrum, Email Connectivity through Dial-Up lines, VSAT etc., connect eleven villages near Pondicherry. This facilitates both voice and data transfer, and enables villages to access all the information that they need to improve their lives. Video conferencing facility is available in all the Spread Spectrum Connectivity villages. Self-help groups and students use this facility mainly to clarify the doubts.

The project not only uses high-tech tools of communication but also uses the conventional communication technologies in providing information relevant and useful to the rural people. Dissemination of information is also done through posters and bulletin boards displayed at the Knowledge centers. The information channel also includes a community newsletter namely “Namma Ooru Seidhi” which is distributed in all the villages. This caters not only to the needs of the community in a particular village where the centers are located but it also reaches the neighboring villages or hamlets. Public Address system (PAS) facility is provided in two fishing villages and this has been playing a significant role in disseminating timely information to the entire village very effectively.

Significant attention is given to content creation and its management, to meet the changing and growing local requirements. Providing correct and timely information is considered very important for the rural people to use and act upon it. In order to serve the people better, the content is updated regularly. The Value Addition Centers generates a number of databases to fulfill specific information needs of the local rural communities. As already mentioned, information provided in the Village Knowledge Centers through Internet Web page is location-specific and relates to prices of agricultural inputs and outputs, market, entitlements, bank loans and government schemes, healthcare, livestock information, education, employment opportunities, local bus timings, weather conditions, including wave heights of fishermen, Codex
Alimentarius, for different crops and micro-enterprise training. The people can gain access to various kinds of information. It also enables exchange of private information and transaction.

This project has shown that empowering people through access to timely and relevant information can make a difference in the life of the rural poor, and that ICTs can play a very important role in this effort. The success stories of these projects include saving lives of fishermen by the timely weather warning forecast of rough seas; improving the selling price of paddy using market information; finding employment for villages in Government departments, etc.

Open Knowledge Network is an important initiative of this project. It was launched in 2003, in partnership with One World International. The project, is still in an experimental stage, and its aim is to provide information to the poor, in the local language, by creating a network that would connect them world over. This would not only contribute to the integration of local/traditional knowledge into the project, but would also revive their interest in traditional knowledge in fields like agriculture, plant medicine and so on. This has a great potential to bring out the hidden or dwindling traditional and native knowledge available among the rural population. Through this network, access points from India and Africa share their local news through a World Space Satellite and Internet. The local news is produced in Tamil and Swahili, and the Meta tags are in English.

The Centres have contributed not only to information empowerment; but have also helped the rural people, particularly the youngsters, to get skill empowerment in computer applications. In the poor rural areas, it is seldom that children/students get the opportunity to work with computers even in their schools and colleges. The children generally make their initial foray into the world of computers by learning to draw and color in the Paint Program. They become so efficient in computer applications that they start teaching their friends and even the elders.

The Centres, through their network with various Government departments, voluntary/social organizations and educational institutions, also render services to the community, both women and men, by giving local specific and relevant training in jobs like cattle rearing, and small enterprises like pickle making, rope making, phenol and soap oil manufacture, and so on.

It must be mentioned here that the experiences of this research project are being integrated into the National Virtual Academy for Rural Prosperity (NVA), a new initiative of the MSSRF for ending hunger and eradicating rural poverty. As an up-scaling measure, through the NVA, the project hopes to reach a wider section of the population in this country.
There has been a positive impact on communities in terms of promoting development, social change, cultural values, solidarity, political awareness, community organization and participation. To illustrate this a few examples have been given in the following paragraphs.

The volunteers at the Knowledge Centres are very helpful to provide information using their database. In case they are unable to find the necessary data, they normally contact the Hub Centre. Sometimes they call the Chennai office when there is a need. They update the information for the community. They make sure that the information, particularly on government schemes/ entitlements, job opportunities, and educational details like scholarship, examination timetable/ results, new courses offered and so on, reach the community on time. They display the important news/ information on the notice boards. They also spread the information through oral communication to whomever they come across, and to those living near their houses. They request them to pass on the news to their relatives and friends. Because of this, the volunteers are now rightly called "Knowledge Workers".

The computer training for women and children within the vicinity of local villages ensures safety. They do not have to travel long distances and this saves both time and money. The Knowledge Centre has proved to be a great support system for students and youngsters who are setting out into the future, be it for further education, or employment or training. The database at the Centre has helped many, including girl students, to choose the proper course for education, or the right college or school, thus giving more opportunities for parents to involve themselves in their children's future.

A noteworthy aspect is that the dropout rate in schools had reduced when the children started to use the computers for learning through educational CDs. The results of the public examinations are available through the Internet at the Centre, and this has proved extremely beneficial to the students and parents. The schoolchildren are able to learn computer applications and generally have a hands-on experience with various computer skills.

Incorporating gender concerns in the implementation of the project has in fact helped to ensure that more than half of the volunteers operating the VKCs are women. This has a positive impact, as there is an increase in the number of women users at the Centres. In the evenings, some of the VKCs like Embalam and Kalitheerthalkuppam provide counseling for women. Self-help groups are formed, and many activities involving cottage industries are conducted. The Centre helps them learn to use the computer, and also to interact with men. In a way, it also encourages them to articulate, answer queries and offer assistance. Thus it has given them a platform in the community to take on anchor role; the women have gained more confidence and self-esteem.
This chapter mainly concentrates on the organization MSSRF and the structure of the VKCs in Puducherry. In the subsequent chapter, the methodologies used to do the analysis and the steps taken to do the study is discussed.
Chapter 2
Methodology of the Case Study

The present study laid emphasis on a multi-methodology approach. In order to have concrete evidence of the utilization of the ICT by women for their EMPOWERMENT AND TO DECREASE THE GENDER DIVIDE so as to bring a developed nation. It was decided that individual case studies would be collected at random from both the gender and from people of different age groups.

The systematic method followed by the investigator to achieve the objectives of the study is explained under the following heads:-

- Collection of information.
- Selection of Area.
- Selection of Samples.
- Selection of Methods and Techniques.
- Formation of Tools.
- Conducting the study.
- Analysis of the data.
- Classification and Tabulation.

2.1 Collection of Information.

After selecting the topic for the study, the investigator thought that it would be imperative to contact the concerned authorities to gather the required information. As M.S.Swaminathan Research Foundation had already trained the rural women to use the ICT, the investigator approached the organization to permit her to do a case study. The organization extended their help and provided all the essential facilities and details necessary for the study.

2.2 Selection of Area.

The Information Village Research Project of M.S.Swaminathan Research Foundation is known for its innovative use of ICT in rural development. It is renowned for developing local databases and local web pages that are relevant to the daily needs of local people. The project aims to delineate how Information and Communication Technologies could be utilized in rural development programs. The foremost criterion is to fulfill the information needs of rural communities, and use this as a springboard for advancement in all sectors.

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The rural population in and around Puducherry were already exposed to ICT since 1998 through MSSRF. They were giving an active participation and involvement in managing the ICT. This is very essential for the success of the project. The MSSRF program is based on a grassroots approach, where the electronic age brought into villages through a network of volunteers who first gather relevant information and feed them into an intra-net. The information can be accessed through nodes in different villages in the locality. Value addition to such means of basic information is brought about by the use of local language, and multimedia for the benefit of illiterate.

2.3 Selection of Samples.

"A sample is that part of a universe which we select for the purpose of investigation" (Deshpande1984).

"Random Sampling is that in which each unit of the population has the same chance or probability of selection" (Nakkiran 1986).

The investigator took utmost care in identifying the samples with the help of Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, Sustainable Agriculture, MSSRF, Chennai and the authorities at the Village Regional Center based at Pillayarkuppam, 10 km. from Puducherry. Based on the discussions the investigator identified 3 villages i.e. Embalam, Thirukanchipet and Veerampattinam for the case study. It was discussed to have samples from both the gender and children also. It was also discussed that the samples should be those who have been using the computers and the internet regularly at the Village Knowledge Centers (VKC). They were identified based on the benefits that they have attained after visiting the VKCs. From each village around 20 to 40 samples were selected.

2.4 Selection of Methods and Techniques.

Having determined the sample size and type for the study, the next step was to determine the best method of data collection.

"Data collection is the various means, methods and techniques used by the investigator in order to collect the relevant information for the study." (Kothari,1992).

"A method is a collective term denoting the various processes by the aid of which the impartial systematic knowledge is acquired" (Young 1975).
In order to secure a wealth of details regarding the "Empowerment of Women and the decrease in Gender Divide through ICT", the investigator took special care in drafting the interview schedule for the NVA Fellows, VKC workers and the users of the internet and computers at MSSRF VKCs. "Observation is one of the best method of collecting data as it can be done without anybody's awareness. Usually it is done side by side along with a schedule" (Kothari, 1992). Apart from the interview schedule it was also essential for the investigator to observe the functioning of the VKCs.

2.5 Formation of Tools.

Drafting of the interview schedule is a very technical job and it requires great care and efficiency. These were drafted with utmost care, to extract all relevant and essential information for the study. A set of questions pertaining to functioning and administration of the VKCs was administrated based on the following aspects such as facilities available, meetings conducted, training given, problems and suggestions. The interview schedule was prepared which consisted of simple and comprehensive questions so as to get the maximum information from the samples. The interview schedule was classified and drafted under 8 main heads.

- Personal particulars
- Knowledge about VKC
- Family background
- Agriculture /Fishing/Animal Husbandry
- Health benefits
- Educational benefits
- Government notifications
- General

2.6 Conducting the Study.

The investigator, having obtained the full consent of Dr. A. R. Thiagarajan, Content Manager, Open Knowledge Network (OKN), MSSRF, Puducherry conducted the interview in the identified villages and personally observed the activities at the VKCs. By this observation the investigator could come to a clear picture of how the ICT has penetrated in rural India. The main facts revealed by these observations are the ease with which they are able to make themselves aware of the world around them in almost all fields of their lives in spite of the bare primary education. The situation before and after the use of the computer/internet both in their family and in the localities were observed.

The NVA fellows and the VKC workers were interviewed based on the interview schedule prepared for them.
The users who accessed the facilities available at the VKCs personally or through the VKC workers were interviewed.

2.7 Analysis of the Data.

After the data collection the next step is to arrange for processing and analyzing of the data so that the inferences can be made. The facts collected were processed with a view to reduce them to manageable proportions. Only by such careful and systematic processing the data collected will lead itself to meaningful interpretations.

2.8 Classification and Tabulation.

Classification or categorization is the process of grouping the statistical data under various understandable homogenous groups for the purpose of convenient interpretation. A uniformity of attributes is the basic criteria for classification and the grouping of data is made according to similarity.

In this chapter the findings are tabulated and represented for analysis. On tabulating, the data is arranged in the form of rows and displayed in a compact manner. Based on this tabulation the analysis part of the methodology becomes simple and easy. The findings are given in the following chapter as “Results and Discussions”.
Chapter 3  
Results and Discussions

This chapter presents a compilation of the study “Gender Divide and Empowerment of Women through ICT”. The entire result of this survey is discussed under the following 3 heads.

- Demography of the study.
- Response of VKC Workers and Users.

3.1. Demography of the Study.

This part presents an overview of the demography of the 88 selected respondents. The responses have been recorded as individual case studies which reveal the positive and beneficial impact on the rural community.

Table 3.1 Details of Case Studies collected from the Village Knowledge Centers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Villages</th>
<th>No. of Case Studies</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embalam</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thirukanchipet</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veerampattinam</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>41</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on the interactive case studies with women, men and children, we come to a clear picture that the role of ICT has had a great impact on these villages. It is also clear that ICT has benefited the village in different ways. It has also fostered a sense of empowerment among women in the community. The entire village has got the feeling of togetherness and they help each other to get ahead. The women are very clear and confident that they have obtained a sense of liberty and they will be able to get things done without depending on any external agencies. Even those who cannot read and use the keyboard have benefited through the kiosk and the audio communication system. They are also confident that the women volunteers are true to their office and give them the correct and required information at the right time.

Analyzing the case study, it is observed that, in the village Embalam, more women have started using the web after joining the Microsoft Unlimited Potential Program (MUPP). In the village Thirukanchipet it is observed that men and women equally use the ICT facilities. In the village Veerampattinam, it can be stated that even though more men use the ICT facilities available at the VKC, the women have been inspired by the introduction to ICT and have started
raising voice against the suppression of women. It is noteworthy to state that they have reached the level of forming a Federation for Fisher women in Puducherry. Through the activities at the VKCs they have picked up courage and have become members of the village panchayat.

**Figure 3.1 Details of Case Studies from the Villages**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of the Respondents</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The percentage of the benefits of the use of ICT at the VKCs in 3 villages has been tabulated and the pie chart for the same is shown below.

**Figure 3.2 Benefits for the 3 Villages under Different Categories**

From this chart it is observed that from the entire lot of users of ICT, those accessing information related to education, employment and agriculture, live stock and fisheries are equal. We can also state that in the villages of Embalam and Thirukanchipet their main livelihood is
agriculture and livestock and in Veerampattinam their livelihood is fisheries. Secondly, we infer from the observation that they equally access educational and employment information. During the study we could observe that the younger generation uses these above mentioned information. Hence, this itself is a positive scaling for the use of ICT.

The next chart shows that the users coming under the category of using the Computer Assistance Learning Program (CALP) and MUPP are mostly students. Based on the interactive discussions with the students during the visit to the 3 villages we can infer that the rate at which the students grasp and learn is much greater. Another significant observation is that the dropout rate from the schools has decreased to a great extent. The students state that they are able to understand what the teacher teaches much better after learning the subjects through CALP. The +2 students and the college students state that attending the MUPP program supplements their education and carrier. The next observation is that the students are more inspired by the computer and they also state that they would like to become computer professionals. Hence, we can conclude that the students have gained self-confidence and self-esteem after getting exposed to ICT. Hence, they will learn much better and will shine much better when compared to their counterparts without an introduction to ICT.

![Figure 3.3 Benefits of the CALP and MUPP Programs.](image-url)
3.2. Response of VKC Workers and Users.

The interview schedule for the VKC workers mainly focuses on the technical aspects of the tools of ICT. The tools are used mainly to get the required information for the respective users. The usage of the appropriate tool depends on the purpose for which the user approaches the VKCs. The main tools that the workers have been using are Personal Computers, telephones, public address system, daily newspapers in the local language, local newspaper – Namma Ooru Seidhi, web sites, WHF Duplex Radio devices, Spread Spectrum Email, Data Bank in the locale language, Educational CD-ROMs.

The VKCs have been identified and placed villages where the computer and Internet facilities were not in existence. So, the village users have been trained by the VKC workers to use these facilities. During the interview the facts regarding to the usage of these facilities of ICT has been revealed.

The following briefings are a collection of the ideas gathered from the benefactors of ICT in the villages in and around Puducherry. The net packs a whole lot of information and news. It contains snippets of information, medical news, employment news, telephone numbers and addresses of important government departments. Youngsters and children use the web sites for sending greetings to friends and relatives. Students benefits in lines of the educations also. They learn the use of MS OFFICE and Front page and are able to design excellent web sites of their own. They have also learnt the use of PhotoShop.

The study shows that in general, the rural people – irrespective of their age, sex or level of education have something to learn and imbibe form the village knowledge centers. The tradesman improves his business and the farmer learns about availability of quality seeds/seedlings or about organic farming, cultivation practices, crop management, fertilizers, vermicompost, and livestock management. People get to know of government schemes / entitlement related to agriculture, related activities; the young women and men learn about several technical courses and self-employment training programs. The young men seeking jobs get to know of vacancies and opportunities or higher educational details. Children and school students learn drawing. They also watch the CD-ROMS and the data bank and get to know about science much better. This has helped the students to be more attentive in school and helps them to score much better marks in exams. They have also learnt to lead a healthier and better life.

The use of the ICT is multi-facets. Therefore some broad categorization has been followed to indicate the various kinds of impacts of the ICT. Based on the response of the
workers and the users of the VKCs, the benefits of the ICT that the people at the grass root level have attained are categorized and compiled under the following heads.

- **Education**
  - Access to Web-site related to 10th and 12th Time-Table and Results
  - Scholarships
  - Higher Education

- **Employment**
  - Small Scale Cottage Industry
  - Vocational training programs
  - Government advertisements
  - Loan schemes

- **Agriculture & Animal Husbandry & Fisheries**
  - Contacts with the agricultural and veterinary colleges
  - Access to related web sites
  - Use of the kiosk system

- **Health care**
  - Local data bank containing details about health and hygiene
  - Home remedies

- **Miscellaneous**
  - Government Notifications, Plans and Schemes
  - Daily Newspaper – Tamil and English
  - Weather Report
  - Contact details for emergency such as police, hospitals, etc.

3.2.1. Education

Publication of the 10th and 12th standard examination time table in the web is highly valued by the students those respective standards. Earlier it was very difficult to get the information regarding the exams, and they were very anxious about applying well within the last date.

The results also come in the net and we get to know the results correctly without much confusion that used to prevail earlier in front of the schools. The education department has a number of scholarship schemes for the students based on their family financial back ground, caste, etc. The dates of issue of applications for these scholarships are available on the net and it is got in time without running to the concerned department everyday.
The application forms for higher educations are available in the net. Based these, the users is able to apply for the same. They tell that they are aware of different colleges and courses and they can choose for the course of their choice. Through the case study of Vaishnavi we come to know how the ICT has catered to the needs of the students. There are many more such students in the village of Embalam and Thirukanchipuram who have benefited out of the facilities of ICT available in their villages.

Name: Vaishnavi
Education: 12th Standard
Village: Veerampatinam

My name is Vaishnavi. I've taken the 12th Standard public exams. I've taken the computer science branch. I want to do B.Tech. Computer Science. In the 11th and 12th Standard syllabus we have computers. I took the help from the center for learning HTML. I could do much better in the class. All my classmates used to learn from me. I was very happy that from the center I could learn so much. Some of my friends went tuition but there also they were not taught so much.

3.2.2. Employment

Educated youth finds that the ICT is highly beneficial. It has helped them become aware of the job opportunities abroad, as well as in army, navy, coast guard, air force and other government departments and private sectors. It also provides a lot of information on self-employment and the government schemes related to it.

The training given for the small scale industry has helped the rural housewives to a great extent. Those who were initially idling at home have become a source of income to their families. Through the case of study of Indra Kanthi of Embalam village we come to know how the data bank available in the VKC has made her a source of income to their family in spite of her minimal education. There are many more in all the 3 villages who have benefited out of these facilities in their villages.

Name: Indra Kanthi.
Education: 9th Standard
Village: Embalam.

My name is Indra Kanthi. I've studied 9th Standard. I could not persuade my studies due to family circumstances. I am now the VKC worker for the past 1½ years.

Earlier I never used to come here. But when I came to the Milk Society for the treatment for my cow, the then VKC volunteers helped me. VKC volunteers motivated me to join the Self Help Group. From then I started to come to the center. First my neighbors used to make fun of me. But now seeing me how I have learnt the computers and use the Internet they are asking me to take them to the center. I know how to use the Internet, data bank, MS Office and CALP also. I am able to access the web sites for the daily news and refer to the weather report for the agricultural purpose. Access the timetable and results for the 10th and 12th standards.

Now my children are very much inspired by me to learn the computers. They study better. My husband is very proud that I handle the computers very easily. We were given training to prepare soap oil and phenol. But after referring to the data bank I got the proportion
of the chemicals for the preparation. Now, we earn minimum of Rs. 2000/- per month through this. We supply these to a few factories and shops. My husband and my family members encourage me very much. I have in fact lost the feel of hesitance and shyness of talking to men and I feel more confident after coming to the VKC.

3.2.3. Agriculture & Animal Husbandry & Fisheries

Men like Krishnamurthi from Embalam village, Perumal from Veerampatinam village and many other farmers and fisher men in their villages find the ICT useful in the farming and fishing related activities. Through the case study we come to know how the ICT has catered to the needs of the agricultural and fisheries related activities.

Name: Krishnamurthi
Education: B.Com.
Village: Embalam.

My name is Krishnamurthi. I work in the Fisheries Department. I am also a farmer. There is an MSSRF Knowledge Center in our village. Through this, farmers receive a lot of help and information. The center also brings experts from the different agricultural and veterinary colleges and gives us training on different innovative methods of farming. They also tell us whenever agriculture department is distributing fertilizer, pesticides, and other farm aids at a subsidized rate. I also come to center for the market rates of crop seeds and grains so that we are able to go to the agricultural market when the rates are affordable or reasonable. This has helped our village a lot. The data bank and the kiosk system are very much useful to the uneducated and the minimal educated farmers.

Name: Perumal
Age: 50 years
Village: Veerampatinam

I am Perumal. I am a resident of this village. After the start of the center there is a lot of improvement in the village. The public address system used for the announcement of the important information like weather report and ration shop details. Another important contribution of the ICT facility through the VKC is we are better aware of all the government loans / advertisements / schemes. Earlier we used to depend on the leaders and others related to the politics for such information. Now, we get all these at our door steps at no loss of our self esteem.

They organize a lot of camps like health, legal and social awareness. As a result our village is much cleaner. They are aware of the cleanliness aspect and keep the surroundings clean. Ladies have become less quarrelsome for unwanted things and have become more constructive. This is a positive sign of growth for our village. I hope that our village will come up very well as a result of such computer trainings for students and ladies.

3.2.4. Health care

Many people have benefited by the simple herbal and nature-cure prescriptions available in the data bank. The main advantage of the data bank is every thing is available in the local language. Mothers like Vasugi of Embalam village and Poongavanam of Thirukanchpet village and many others from the village find the ICT useful for their family health.
and for minor ailments. Through the case study we come to know how the ICT has helped the rural people in these lines.

Name: Vasugi  
Education: 10th Standard  
Village: Embalam.  
"My name is Vasugi. I’ve studied 10th Standard. I am a petty shop owner. I have 2 children. My first child was very under weight and small when she was born. In the computer center from the data bank I got nutrition tips for the improvement of my child’s health. The data bank is in Tamil so I was able to use it easily. My daughter’s health has improved a lot. Now, she is studying in the government school opposite to the center. After the school she goes to the center. Using the tips for pregnant women during the second pregnancy I was able to take care of my son from the womb and now he is much healthier than my daughter. Now, I do not have time to go to the computer center."

Name: Poongavanam  
Qualification: 8th Standard  
Village: Thirukanchipet.  
"I am Poongavanam. I’ve studied 8th Standard. My husband is a driver. I used to come to the center with my friends for the self-help-group. Later I learnt computers from the center. I am now working as the Knowledge worker. I prepare the monthly expenditure of the self-help-group using MS-Excel. I type in Tamil. My father-in-law asks me about the agricultural market rates. Earlier, my mother-in-law used to criticize me telling that I am sitting on chair and working like men. Once, she had severe cold. Taking the tips from the data bank and the home remedies I gave her first aid as our usual doctor was out of station. She recovered fast. That itself gave a good impression of the center. Now seeing how much I work, she is surprised and does not tell anything. I am myself, surprised to see how much I have learnt after using computers. We have organized a lot of health camp and training camp for small-scale industry. Now our family income has increased because of the small-scale industry."

3.2.5. Empowerment  
Observations made in the 3 villages show that the introduction to the VKCs has increased the confidence of the rural women to a great extent. They are able to express their ideas much better. They state that they are able to contribute a steady income regularly to their family. They are much better respected in the village and by their family members and relatives. They have gained more self-confidence and contribute their ideas even at national levels. This is evident from the case study of Vimala Periandy of the Veerampatinam village, Usharani and Lakshmi of Embalam village.

Name: Vimala Periandy.  
Education: 10th Standard  
Village: Veerampatinam  
"My name is Vimala Periandy. I’ve studied till 10th Standard. I am a social worker and have raised voice against suppression of women. I’ve supported the 33% reservation for women. Earlier, though, from my childhood I have always had the feeling that women need to..."
brought to the lime-light like the men. I got the courage to raise the voice for women only after coming to the MSSRF center to learn computers and Internet.

The computer center is in the Panchayath office. In the office in one half the Panchayath meeting used to go on. In the other half the computer center used to function. The computer center was managed fully by ladies and so we had to be seated on chairs to operate the computers. It was then that I got the courage and asked for a women representative in the Panchayath. The dealings in the Panchayath for settling problem related to women were highly partial. This could be made fair only when we had a representative for us.

In our community men are very dominating. They do not relish the ideas and suggestions given by women. The women folks of our community stand behind the men for everything and depend on the men folk to lead the situation. In other community women the concept of gender divide is less and women are equally empowered. That is the main reason why our entire community is still standing behind comparatively. Women are stopped with the bear school education. I strongly feel that only when people are taught to think they start progressing. That thinking capacity was lagging very much in our community people. Our community ladies have started thinking only after coming to the center and started using computer. The computer and Internet has given us the rights to sit equally with men and get solutions to social problems related to women. It is the computers and Internet that has changed the lives of the entire fisherwomen folks in and around Pondicherry.

Name: Lakshmi
Education: 10th Standard
Village: Embalam

My name is Lakshmi. I’ve studied 10th Standard. I am a member of the Temple Trust. I am the now the Daramakartha. I learnt computers through the MUPP program. We belong to the Dalit community. In our community ladies are never given priority for anything. The men will join together and decide and tell what we have to do. Through the computer training in the MSSRF center I became more aware of how ladies are recognized. I attended different training programs.

I joined the self help group. Now, I am the leader of the group. I have motivated around 45 ladies in my community to join the group and come for the different training programs. So, our community people have started asking me suggestions. Seeing this, my brother was surprised and now for each and everything he asks me. My husband is very much against women coming out and doing such work. But, now seeing that we are doing something constructive he remains quiet.

I want to learn more. I am very much interested in learning and working with computers. My mother does not even know to write her name. But, I am aware of many things. Even after my schooling I did not have the motivation to do so much. After a big gap from schooling and computer learning I am able to feel the extent to which my thinking has improved. I feel the improvement and the up-lift in my thinking. I surely feel that if each and every women starts getting this feeling we will be able to achieve great things and bring a better world.

Name: Usharani
Education: 10th Standard
Village: Embalam

My name is Usharani. I’ve studied 10th Standard. I came here out of curiosity about what is a computer in 1999. Then I started learning and now I know to fully to operate it. I went as a trainer to Nagapattinum. I’ve received the NVA fellowship also. I received it from our President Abdul Kalam.
My husband is employed in the local agricultural co-operative society. Earlier, he used to hesitate but later seeing the extent to which we work he allowed me to go. In case I need to go anywhere I keep everything ready for all at home and only then I go. This does not disturb anybody’s routine. So no one will be affected by this.

I went to Geneva for the World Summit on Information Society. My husband was very proud of this recognition. He feels very happy when my neighbors approach me for help. He tells that when ladies join hands together can do a lot constructive.

My family has benefited a lot after me coming to the computer center. My 2 sons are good in studies. They learnt computers from me. My elder son is doing engineering (EEE) and my younger son is doing 12. I am very clear that the village itself has changed a lot after the introduction of computers by MSSRF. Everything is open to everybody. Ladies especially earlier used to do the household work and then used to idle in the house. They never even used to bother about the road in front of their houses. But now the entire village ladies have become more socially awakened. We are all very much recognized and respected because of the social and volunteer work.

3.2.6. Miscellaneous

The other benefits that the rural population of the 3 villages has attained are the details about the government notifications, plans and schemes. The local daily both in Tamil and English are available on the net. The weather report which is essential information for both the fishermen and the agriculturists are also available on the net. The emergency services like the police and the hospital information are also available.

Based on the study the above mentioned charts and case studies have been prepared in this chapter. The next chapter concludes the entire study and survey. This chapter also gives a few suggestions for better empowerment of the rural women through better ICT facilities. The ideas suggested will surely give them more knowledge and information and channel the majority of the rural population towards economic and social advancement. The key idea is to make the information dynamic, so that the rural population can make use of it and apply it for their economic and social development and finally uproot them from the grass root level and uplift them in the society.
Chapter 4
Conclusion

The report focuses on the two-fold need to address the gender divide and reduce inequalities related to women. The report also identifies ways to use ICT actively and effectively to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women.

It is clear that the importance of Information and Communication Technologies is not the technology as such, but it’s enabling function in access to knowledge, information and communications. It is increasingly becoming the important elements in today’s economic and social interaction. In the span of one generation, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has brought about a lot of changes globally. Any nation that capitalized on ICT has recognized significant returns on their initial ICT investments. Therefore, Information and Communications Technologies for Development (ICT4D) is an initiative aimed at bridging the digital divide (the disparity between technological "have" and "have not" geographic locations or demographic groups) and aiding development by ensuring equitable access to up-to-date communications technologies.

Although the role of information technology for women’s empowerment acquires greatest significance yet it requires highly sophisticated and learned society as a basic ground. Close observation of the scenario in India indicates that the state like Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra are marching ahead in the field of ICT while the state like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa are lagging behind. Uttar Pradesh, with a low female literacy level, low female enrolment in higher education, and low female enrolment in technical colleges is still lacking behind in providing basic infrastructure to utilize full potentials of ICT. Policies formulated in this direction are also silent based on gender issues. Thus there is a need in the state to raise the literacy level and awareness among women folk towards participation in technical education. Knowledge empowerment of rural women is one focus point where the Government policies and strategies can look for good results in bringing socio-economic lift to our rural economy.

Looking at our domestic scenario, women in general allocate more time to the household, often in a critical period of their career. This lowers their productivity in the external labor market, and by lowering learning-by-doing in remunerative skills, lowers future earnings as well. Perceptions and power magnify the distortions. Others doubt women’s ability, but women doubt themselves, and this self-doubt further harms their prospects. In these circumstances, ICT and its applications can definitely offer great benefits to society and to women. They can
reduce this waste of potential human resources since they facilitate flexi-time activity, lower location constraints, and make it feasible for women to maintain and upgrade skills.

It is also imperative that participation of women in this technology should rise relatively, if ICT uniquely compensates for some of women’s special disadvantages. To account this some are as follows: The problem of commuting from one place to another is a major handicap for them as they depend on male still for this purpose. In the conservative traditional background, the male is often a decision making person in a family even for the higher studies or marriage of a woman. The analysis suggests that the Internet will give women more time, educational opportunities and money even if they continue to give priority to others’ needs. These changes can take time and have to battle entrenched prejudices, whether those of women or their employers. Therefore, special conditions and policies are required to aid the process. Self-employment offers real advantages for women since it allows women to fit in their reproductive roles, work from home, and gives them a flexible work schedule. Countries like US, Canada, Mexico and Argentina have documented a rise in women’s self-employment. Therefore, our study suggests that self-employment can significantly improve women’s position. Throughout the chapters we have seen several case studies on how these suggestions have proved the progress in reality.

We can also safely conclude that the success of the project is the bottom-up approach. In this approach, the significant step to success is involving the local volunteers whether literate or not, to gather information. The gathered information is fed into the Internet and provides access through nodes in different villages. The next significant aspect is the information is in the local language. For those who are illiterate the facility of multimedia is used.

This study is also supplemented with the observations of women folks in few villages being encouraged by MSSRF’s project. After the inception of VKCs in these villages, the women are encouraged to visit the information centers. Based on the observations we can come to the following conclusions.

- The selected samples belonged to the age 15 to 50 years.
- All the Knowledge Workers in the Village Knowledge Centers are women.
- The women are now aware of information that is local, national and international. They are able to access the different websites and get to know things.
- The handling of computers and answering the questions raised by men has given women new confidence and status, and influence in the community.
- The information provided in the VKCs are the most essential information related to the specific village. i.e. agricultural inputs (such as seeds, fertilizers, pesticides) and
outputs (rice, vegetables), market (potential for export), entitlement (the multitude of schemes of the central and state, government, banks), health care (availability of doctors and paramedics in nearby hospitals, women’s medical needs), cattle diseases, education (public examination results, colleges, course, hostels), employment opportunities, transport (road conditions, bus timings) weather (appropriate time for sowing, areas of abundant fish catch, wave heights in the sea) and micro enterprises training.

- Among the selected samples the entire lot of women is housewives. They started coming to the center to learn computers, later became experts in the handling these ICT tools.

- There is an increase in the number of women users.

- These volunteers have also inspired their children who are proficient in the usage of the computers and internet. They have also inspired other family members.

- The volunteers gather information, feed it into the Internet and provide access through nodes in different villages.

- The greatest advantage of the ICT facility in MSSRF is the raw information available in the local language can be feed into the internet. In the case of illiterate users the data in available to them in the multimedia.

- Women have formed Self Help Groups and they also help other women in training related to new economic opportunities like incense stick manufacturing, pickle making, phenyl and soap oil production and ornamental artifacts from seashells.

- Initially, those who criticized these volunteers later joint hands with them and are leading a better life.

- This shows a positive sign of togetherness the villages.

- Among the selected samples majority of the members belong to the Dalit community.

- Though they live in straw huts and earn a daily livelihood by working as coolies in the farms and lands they are able to talk about computers and work with them.

- They are able to foresee a bright future of their children.

Information and Communication Technologies can be effective instrument for increasing choices for women particularly, rural women, for multifaceted empowerment. The ICTs can be effective tools to expand the knowledge among the rural women and that can enhance their abilities to negotiate for their resource share and participation. But it would be important to review the potential for ICTs in two broad approaches namely, their application directed to
rural women as primary users of this technology and their application directed to improve the quality of life in rural communities that would assist rural women to improve their lives.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are for everyone and women have to be an equal beneficiary to the advantages offered by the technology, and the products and processes, which emerge from their use. The benefits accrued from the synergy of knowledge and ICT need not be restricted to the upper strata of the society but have to freely flow to all segments of the women population. The gamut of areas in which ICT can put a greater control in the hands of women is wide and continuously expanding, from managing water distribution at the village-level to standing for local elections and having access to lifelong learning opportunities. ICT in convergence with other forms of communication have the potential to reach those women who hitherto have been not been reached by any other media, thereby empowering them to participate in economic and social progress, and make informed decision on issues that affect them.

The paper explores the avenues created by ICT enabled networking processes for women in the areas of empowerment and governance, the hindrances faced in engendering of these processes and goes on to suggest ways to ensure that greater benefits accrue to women in a distributed manner. Women are the source of wealth in any given culture or community because of the numerous roles they play. The entire study comprehensively looks on their relevance for the global prosperity with their active role in achieving the target.
Appendix A
EMBALAM VILLAGE

WOMEN:

Name: Alli
Education: 5th Standard

My name is Alli. I’ve studied 5th Standard. I have a daughter and a son. My husband owes a timber shop. I am the leader of a self help group. My children used to visit the computer center and learn a lot from the CDs shown to them. The CDs help them in their studies. They have improved a lot in their studies.

Name: P.Elavarasi
Education: 12th Standard

My name is P.Elavarasi. I’ve studied 12th Standard. I am a MUPP volunteer. I learnt MUPP in MSSRF. I belong to the third batch of the MUPP program.

Even without basic knowledge of computers I was found it easy to learn computers. I help MUPP students. Later on I was taken as volunteer for the same. I involve myself in web design. I even help the college students in designing their project reports. I regularly use the web and search using GOOGLE and YAHOO. I loaded in the Internet the web pages that I design.

My family members earlier used to think what ladies can do. But now seeing the extent to which I am able to work they are surprised and allowed me to go as a MUPP volunteer. My family is an agricultural family. So we are regularly in need of the market rates and weather reports. I remember when I was a child my father used to go to the agriculture market and return only after a couple of days. Sometimes he used to grumble about the low rates. But, now I regularly see the rates through the Internet and tell my father and brother. We can feel the rate at which this has reduced the family anxiety.

Name: IndraGandhi.
Education: 9th Standard

My name is IndraGandhi. I’ve studied 9th Standard. I could not persuade my studies due to family circumstances. I am now the VKC worker for the past 1½ years.

Earlier I never used to come here. But when I came to the Milk Society for the treatment for my cow. The then VKC volunteers helped me. VKC volunteers motivated me to join the Self Help Group. From then I started to come to the center. First my neighbors used to make fun of me. But now seeing me how I have learnt the computers and use the Internet they are asking me to take them to the center. I know how to use the Internet, data bank, MS Office and CALP also. I am able to access the web sites for the daily news and refer to the weather report for the agricultural purpose. Access the timetable and results for the 10th and 12th standards.

Now my children are very much inspired by me to learn the computers. They study better. My husband is very proud that I handle the computers very easily.

We were given training to prepare soap oil and phenol. But after referring to the data bank I got the proportion of the chemicals for the preparation. Now, we earn minimum of Rs. 2000/- per month through this. We supply these to a few factories and shops. My husband and
my family members encourage me very much. I have in fact lost the feel of hesitance and shyness
of talking to men and I feel more confident after coming to the VKC.

Name: Kalaiarasi
Education: 12th Standard
My name is Kalaiarasi. I’ve studied 12th Standard. I am a MUPP student. I have benefited a lot from the use of computers. I have gained a lot of confidence because of this. I am now working as a data entry operator and am earning a salary of Rs.2000 per month. This contributes to our family income. Now, my parents have accepted me to persuade my studies through post.

Name: Kasthuri
Education: 10th Standard
My name is Kasthuri. I have received the NVA fellow award in 2005 from the President Dr. Abdul Kalam. I had always felt that women in the village are lagging a lot behind, when compared to those living in the cities. This is the main reason for me to decide that we in the villages should come out and uplift ourselves. I have given training for many women of our village in the use of computers.

Name: Lakshmi
Education: 10th Standard
My name is Lakshmi. I’ve studied 10th Standard. I am a member of the Temple Trust. I am the now the Daramakartha. I learnt computers through the MUPP program. We belong to the Dalit community. In our community ladies are never given priority for anything. The men will join together and decide and tell what we have to do. Through the computer training in the MSSRF center I became more aware of how ladies are recognized. I attended different training programs.

I joined the self help group. Now, I am the leader of the group. I have motivated around 45 ladies in my community to join the group and come for the different training programs. So, our community people have started asking me suggestions. Seeing this, my brother was surprised and now for each and everything he asks me. My husband is very much against women coming out and doing such work. But, now seeing that we are doing something constructive he remains quiet.

I want to learn more. I am very much interested in learning and working with computers. My mother does not even know to write her name. But, I am aware of many things. Even after my schooling I did not have the motivation to do so much. After a big gap from schooling and computer learning I am able to feel the extent to which my thinking has improved. I feel the improvement and the up-lift in my thinking. I surely feel that if each and every women starts getting this feeling we will be able to achieve great things and bring a better world.

Name: Malathi.
Education: 12th Standard
My name is Malathi. I’ve studied 12th Standard. I am a Knowledge worker for the past 1½ year. My friends introduced me here.

My husband is an agriculturist. He asks me the market rates for the seeds, fertilizers and the harvested grains. We have benefited a lot because of the Internet facilities. Earlier the corner
shopkeeper used to tell us the market rates. But that never used to be correct. So he used to go to Pondy to know the rates from the agricultural market. Then come back and fix a tractor and take the harvested grains to the market. Some times the rates used to get revised. If the rates are not to our expectations we will have to wait with the grains in the tractor. Sometimes, we used to dispose it at whatever rate it is on that date even for a lesser rate.

But now, after knowing the current rate from the Internet we fix a tractor and then take the grains to the market. Our anxiety has reduced to a great extent. Not only that cost wise also we have benefited.

Earlier, I used to be scared by the term computer. But now I am able to work freely with it. I feel proud that I am able to teach college students the usage of computers and Internet.

Name: Pavitha
Education: B.Sc.

My name is Pavitha. I’ve studied B.Sc. I came to the center as it is close to my house. I saw the 10th and 12th Standard Public Results in the MSSRF center. It is through the center that I came to know the issue of application forms for B.Sc. Degree in Bharathidasan Government College for Women, Puducherry. Though initially I was a bit shy later on I started learning computers. I use the computers freely and I know to browse in the web also.

Name: Rukmani
Education: 10th Standard

My name is Rukmani. I’ve studied 10th Standard. I am an associated with MSSRF right from the beginning. I learnt computer in this center. We have organized a lot of training programs, health camps and have motivated many ladies to join the self help group. In our village we have a lot of practices for cultivation, cattle management, medical practices and such things. I have contributed these to the Open Knowledge Network.

Name: Selvarani
Education: 9th Standard

My name is Selvarani. I am a housewife and have studied till 9th standard. I was inspired by my friends to come to the computer center. My son is very much inspired by me and is doing well in studies. He is doing B.Tech (EEE). My husband is an agriculturist and he gets help from me for his work.

I was very much fascinated that I could also do so much. I overcame the shyness and now I have received the NVA fellow from our President Dr. Abdul Kalam. I am a member in the Village Development Council and a self help group and the Non-formal Adult Education programs. Through these I am able to help small farmers and other women folks of my village. The different ways I have helped them are Life Insurance, arranging for training programs for small scale industries, organizing health camps for women and children. In fact I have a long way to go. I feel that in the villages we should be more productive only then we will be able to reach the goal of Mission 2007 as our Professor has told.

Name: Vasantha
Education: 5th Standard
My name is Vasantha. I've studied 5th Standard. I have 2 sons and a daughter. They are studying in college. I belong to the Thamarai self-help group. My sons often visit the computer center in our village. They use the computer for their academic work. They also ask me to help in typing their project reports. My sons’ classmates’ call them over the phone ask doubts and discuss and learn. I am very clear that it is through this center we have got an awakening about the charm of being educated.

Name: Vasugi  
Education: 10th Standard

My name is Vasugi. I've studied 10th Standard. I am a petty shop owner. I have 2 children. My first child was very under weight and small when she was a baby. In the computer center from the data bank I got nutrition tips for the improvement of my child’s health. The data bank is in Tamil so I was able to use it easily. My daughter’s health improved a lot. Now, she is studying in the government school opposite to the center. After the school she goes to the center. Now, I do not have time to go to the computer center. I have got a lot of other health tips and now my son is lot healthier than my daughter.

Name: Vembarasi  
Education: 8th Standard

My name is Vembarasi. I’ve studied 8th Standard. I am a member of a self-help group. I always take part in all important gathering held at the MSSRF Village Center at our village. My son comes to the center to learn computers and play games. We get different kinds of information like ration card registration, eye camp, etc. from the center.

Name: Usharani  
Education: 10th Standard

My name is Usharani. I’ve studied 10th Standard. I came here out of curiosity about what is a computer in 1999. Then I started learning and now I know to fully to operate it. I went as a trainer to Nagapattinum. I’ve received the NVA fellowship also. I received it from our President Abdul Kalam.

My husband is employed in the local agricultural co-operative society. Earlier, he used to hesitate but later seeing the extent to which we work he allowed me to go. In case I need to go anywhere I keep everything ready for all at home and only then I go. This does not disturb anybodies routine. So no one will be affected by this.

I went to Geneva for the World Summit on Information Society. My husband was very proud of this recognition. He feels very happy when my neighbors approach me form help. He tells that when ladies join hands together can do a lot constructive.

My family has benefited a lot after me coming to the computer center. My 2 son are good in studies. They learnt computers form me. My elder son is doing engineering (EEE) and my younger son is doing 12. I am very clear that the village itself has changed a lot after the introduction of computers by MSSRF. Everything is open to everybody. Ladies especially earlier used to do the household work and then used to idle in the house. They never even used to bother about the road in front of their houses. But now the entire village ladies have become more socially awaked. We are all very much recognized and respected because of the social and volunteer work.
MEN:

Name: Dakshinamurthi
Age: 47 years
Education: 8th Standard

My name is Dakshinamurthi. I am working in a Co-operative bank in Embalam. My wife is a volunteer in the MSSRF center. She has learnt a lot through the center’s training programs. This has financially helped our family. We are now like a dual earning family. My wife helps me in many ways. She has become an asset to the family. Regularly we get information about different government schemes and training programs from the center. The Internet is a boon to our village. There is a drastic progress in the education for children after the arrival of the computer educational CD put in the center for the children. Overall there is a lot improvement in the village.

Name: Jagadeesan
Age: 59 years
Education: 5th Standard

My name is Jagadeesan. I cultivate paddy in my land for a living. Through the center I get news about the weather forecast, good grain and seed rates and fertilizer rates. I regularly get information regarding loans and some government subsidies and I immediately avail it. I feel that the center is doing a wonderful job. There can be more computers for the students to work. I did not learn computers. What is the use now? In this center our village girls help us for everything. I am confident that they give me the correct information. I will encourage my family younger generation ladies to learn computers because now everything is that only.

Name: Kaliaperumal
Age: 50 years
Education: 8th Standard

My name is Kaliaperumal. I am an agriculturist. I come to this center for the news related to agriculture and animal husbandry. My son comes here to use the Internet. I can tell confidently that the exposure of computers to the ladies has helped our village a lot. The ladies do many good things now. Earlier, they used to simply sit at home, chat with the neighbors and finally develop some kind of quarrel. Now, they are inspiring the younger generation to be constructive and this is a positive sign to growth of a society.

Name: Narayanan
Age: 27 years
Education: 10th Standard

My name is Narayanan. I have studied 10th Standard. I am working on shift basis in a mill. So I find a lot of time to spend in the center. I come for mainly for the employment news. I have observed that in the center many ladies and youngsters come. They learn computers. Nowadays,
ladies come forward to do a lot of social work. In our village the ladies form groups and contribute money from their own pocket and use it for many constructive purposes.

Name: Pandurangan  
Age: 55 years  
My name is Pandurangan. I am a member in the Temple Trust. I do agriculture. Earlier, we never knew the intricate techniques in agriculture to increase the production. After the introduction of the MSSRF center we have become aware of new types of seeds and techniques. We get a lot of latest information like fertilizers, market rates and weather report. These things are very useful for farmers like me. They conduct a lot of workshop for ladies and farmers.

Name: Sundar  
Age: 40 years  
Education: B.Sc.  
My name is Sundar. I am a teacher. I have a tuition center. I have learnt MS Office from MSSRF center. If I had doubts I ask the knowledge workers. I feel that our village has financially and economically benefited after the arrival of this ICT facility. Our village folks regularly visit the center for all kinds of news related to agriculture, animal husbandry, government notifications/loans/schemes, etc. More of our village folks have realized about the awareness of education after the arrival of this center. I have used the computer to teach the students using the CALP. They grasp much better.

The computers have exposed the women in the right manner. Through the SHP they can give training in fashion design. They can also be given training from the Agricultural College, Coimbatore. The center has given our village people a glimpse of the facilities available in the towns. These facilities should be updated frequently.

Name: Venkatesan  
Age: 30 years  
Education: 10th Standard.  
My name is Venkatesan. I have studied 10th standard. I am the leader of the Youth Service Group of our village. The MSSRF center of our village is doing a lot of constructive work. Through this center we get a lot of information about farming, health, government advertisements and other employment information. That too the agriculture related information is very useful for the entire village. We are mainly agriculture based people and we do not have much knowledge about other things. Now, in the center they give training to ladies and youth in different small scale industry and computer. Now, almost all ladies know to use the computers in our village.

STUDENTS AND CHILDREN:  
Name: Angaikanni  
Education: 12th Standard
My name is Angairkanni. I’ve studied 12th Standard. I am a MUPP student. I got the information about this program from friends and have joined this class. In fact I learn much more than what my school friends learn in the town centers.

Name: Maragadam
Education: 12th Standard
My name is Maragadam. I’ve studied 12th Standard. I am a MUPP student. I come from the neighboring village. I got the information about this program from friends and have joined this class. My parents have decided to get me a computer after seeing how I learn. I feel proud that I the few ladies who know to use the computers in and around my village.

Name: Rajkumar
Age: 21 years
Education: B.Tech (EEE).
My name is Rajkumar. I am a B.Tech student. I got job in Chennai. From the day when I was a student I used to visit the center. My mother is Selvarani who is a volunteer of the MSSRF. She learnt to use MS Office in spite of her minimum education. She was the one inspired me to study well and do B.Tech. Initially, in fact I learnt MS Office from her only. I come here for employment news, government notifications, etc. I browse and read my e-mails. I am not hesitant to talk to ladies.

Name: Sakthivel
Age: 20 years
Education: B.Com.
My name is Sakthivel. I am a student of Tabors Arts College. I am doing B.Com. I am a MUPP student. After joining this program I feel all the more reassured. I am confident that with B.Com. Degree and computer background I will be able to get a much better job than my college mates. After coming here I am more confident. I am not hesitant to talk to ladies. Sometimes I will have to ask them for some doubts in MS Office. I come here to get information for our family about the market rates. I do not feel bad asking them. I feel that when ladies work in the fields equally with men, what is wrong if they work in the offices by sitting equally with men.

Name: Santhanakrishnan
Age: 18 years
Education: 10th Standard
My name is Santhanakrishnan. I was not able to continue taking my 10th Standard exams as I fell sick. Now I am coming to this center for more than 1 year. I read the newspaper and use the computers. I have benefited a lot from the newspaper. After learning computers, I am confident that I will be able to work in office. I am not hesitant in asking the MUPP volunteer doubts in MS Office.

Name: Venkatachalapathi
Education: B.A Student.
My name is Venkatachalapathi. I am doing B.A Economics in Tagore Arts College. I come here to learn to use computers. I came to know about the MUPP program. So I will be joining the course. I would like to do MA and do further higher studies and become like our president. I am learning to the web also. After coming to the center I am more confident.
Appendix B
THIRUKANCHIPET VILLAGE

WOMEN:

Name: Janaki.
Education: 10th Standard

My name is Janaki. I've studied 10th Standard. I received NVA Fellow. Earlier my husband never used to allow me to go alone anywhere. I was allowed only to go to the petty shops nearby. But after the introduction of computers in our village by MSSRF joining with a few friends I came to learn computer. I became a member in the self help group. Now, I go to the town alone without my husbands help itself. I have learnt many things like how to save money with a profit. I have learnt to make many small scale industry products. Earlier we were dependent on the Panchayath leaders and MLAs and party workers for any information. But through the center we get the news first. Now, the party people sometimes get the news from us.

I have 2 daughters both have benefited a lot from the center. Earlier, my husband used to grumble I have 2 girl children only what will I do. But now he never does that. My elder daughter is in 12th standard and she has a very high aim about higher studies. My 2nd daughter is very much inspired by me to learn the computers. She studies better.

Name: Jayanthi
Education: 10th Standard

My name is Jayanthi. I've studied 10th Standard. I am a leader in the self help group. My husband gets the agricultural and weather report from the center. We are basically agricultural family. In our community they do not encourage women much and ask them any suggestions. But after learning to use the computer my status in the family has changed. My husband asks me everything. He tells it is good that ladies know many things. He tells that this is good for the family. We refer to the data bank for livestock maintenance, small scale industry, health tips, health and hygiene, etc.

Name: Malarvizhi.A
Education: 9th Standard

My name is Malarvizhi. I've studied till 9th standard. I am a NVA Fellow. I am a Bio-village council member. We in the village are not aware of many things till the center came. But now I am clear we know a lot. From the data bank we come to know about many things. The CALP program has helped our village children a lot. We have organized many health awareness for the ladies and they are now more enlightened.

Name: Pazhiniammal
Education: Night school

My name is Pazhiniammal. I've gone to the night school. I am a coolie. I learnt computers from the center. I know typing in Tamil and I will type the expenditure of the self help group in MS EXCEL. I learnt it from my son. I feel that when an illiterate like me can do so much using computers why educated children who are young can't learn more. This attitude has inspired my son to do social work and help many people and he is a recipient of the NVA Fellow award. When I used to work in the center people used to tease me telling “officer going to center and sitting in the chair” and “what does she know - uneducated women”. But seeing the extent to which I work, educated people have started coming to the center and have started learning computers. I can call this as a learning revolution for our village.

Name: Poongavanam
Qualification: 8th Standard

I am Poongavanam. I've studied 8th Standard. My husband is a driver. I used to come to the center with my friends for the self-help-group. Later I learnt computers from the center. I am now working as the Knowledge worker. I prepare the monthly expenditure of the self-help-group using MS-Excel. I type in Tamil. My father-in-law asks me about the agricultural market rates. Earlier, my mother-in-law used to criticize me telling that I am sitting on chair and working like men. Once, she had severe cold. Taking the tips from the data bank and the home remedies I gave her first aid as our usual doctor was out of station. She recovered fast. That itself gave a good impression of the center. Now seeing how much I work, she is surprised and does not tell anything. I am myself, surprised to see how much I have learnt after using computers. We have organized a lot of health camp and training camp for small-scale industry. Now our family income has increased because of the small-scale industry.

MEN:

Name: Anandan
Education: Primary Education.

I am Anandan. I hardly remember going to school. But I know to read and write Tamil. I am an agriculturist. My daughters come here to learn computers. They tell me the market rates and weather reports. I also read the notice board in the center. The center is fully occupied by women only. So I feel hesitant to come here sometimes. So I tell my daughter to get me the information from the center. My daughters study well in school and the computers help them a lot. Now, through the center they came to know about the tailoring training in the town and they have joined there. The information revolution is really a boon to our village.

Name: V.Innarasu
Education: 10th Standard

My name is Innarasu. I've studied 10th Standard. I've learnt computers from the center. In our village people were not much aware of their health particularly ladies. After the introduction of computer in the center the ladies referring to the data bank have become more health conscious. They feel that they need more hygienic and healthier environment. We fought for this and we could get some benefits. We have a better environment. My anxiety is the increase in industry that has lead to pollution in our village. The government should make arrangements for pollution free environment for each village. Already the towns are polluted and nothing can be done there. Atleast the villages should be spared.

Name: P.Jayaraman.
Education: 10th Standard.

My name is P.Jayaraman. I've studied 10th Standard. I was a volunteer in the Knowledge Center for 3 years. I was awarded the NVA fellow in 2006. I've helped my village people in many ways. I belong to the Dalit community. The government has many schemes for us, that to for the agricultural and cattle farming poor. Earlier, we were not aware of such schemes only after becoming a volunteer in this center we came to know of such schemes. Many of our village people have benefitted out of such schemes. I feel that after the introduction of computers in our village more ladies are seen coming out and exchanging healthy ideas among themselves. The introduction of computers is a boon for every village. Every village should have such facilities in a larger scale.

For every coin there are sides. We should view everything with a positive attitude. Our village has got a glimpse of the Information and Communication technology. This has brought so many changes in our village. Then I can imagine the extent to which the following generation
will benefit. The next generation is going to have a better future as the computers is going to bring them everything at their desk and it is left to them to choose the right thing. The center should provide them with proper firewalls and security so that the growing youth do not get spoilt because of the second side of the coin.

Name: Suresh.
Education: 12th Standard.
My name is Suresh. I’ve student till 12th Standard. I’ve received the NVA Fellow in 2006. I was a knowledge worker in the MSSRF center. Through the center I got the opportunity to help many of my village people. We came to know about the different schemes in the government like the certificates for birth and death, resident certificate, caste certificate, etc. The vision for my village is that all should become an educated citizen and my village folks should be aware of all possible things for their up-liftment. For this I feel the computers are the main and only source of up-to-date information.

STUDENT AND CHILDREN:

Name: Angappan
Education: 10th Standard.
My name is Angappan. I’ve taken the 10th public examination. I come to the center to learn computers. Now, that it is vacation for us I am having a lot of time to come to the center. I use the data bank. I have learnt a lot from it. I’ve started learning MS OFFICE also. I learn it with the help of the VKC volunteers. I am interested in taking the computer science group in the +1 and +2. In future I would like to become a computer engineer.

Name: Rajalakshmi
Education: 12th Standard.
My name is Rajalakshmi. I’ve taken the 12th public examination. Now, that it is vacation for us I am having a lot of time to come to the center. I come here to learn computers. I’ve started learning MS OFFICE also. I learn it with the help of the VKC volunteers. I am going to tailoring class also. I came to know that with the help of computers we do designing for the dress materials. So, when the results come I will be having computer knowledge also. I will be doing fashion designing for my degree.

Name: Thyagarajan
Education: B.Com Student.
My name is Thyagarajan. I am a student of commerce in Tagore Arts College. I come to the center daily to learn computers. “The knowledge of computers and a degree of commerce” is what is asked in the papers for job often. So I feel that I will have a brighter future. I would like to do MBA for higher studies. I am also going to join in the MUPP program.

Name: Manohar
Education: 10th Standard
My name is Manohar. I am a studying in the 10th Standard. I am coming to the center to learn to use the computers. I am learning MS OFFICE. I use of computers has given me more confidence. I am interested in becoming an engineer.
Appendix C

VEERAMPATTINAM VILLAGE

WOMEN:

Name: Kuppammal
Education: 10th Standard

I am Kuppammal. I come to the center to know about the training given to women through the self help group. I also come here to get details about the subsidies that the government gives. It is after coming here that we got loan for the purchase of the catamarans. Earlier the Panchayath used to give us such information. It never used to reach us in time. Moreover we were at the mercy of the Panchayath leaders. They used to give first to the dears and near. But now after the public address system everybody is aware of everything. The introduction of the computer, public address system and the newspaper in the village has helped in uplifting the entire village.

Name: Maheswari.
Education: 10th Standard

My name is Maheswari. I've studied 10th Standard. I am now the VKC worker for the past 1 year 3 months. My husband is a fisherman.

Earlier, my friends and I used to clean the temple premises. Seeing our social awareness Bakyalakshmi of MSSRF motivated us to join the centers activities. First, I did not know that I could even learn computers. But after the training that I underwent my husband and family members were surprised. Seeing me work my husband also wanted to learn computers. We have 3 children so we decided to buy a computer at home and I taught my husband and children computers. Now, I am having better awareness. Our children are having better environment and are in a better position than me. We were given training in different small-scale industry. Now, I am able to contribute to the family income in a reasonable way.

In our community ladies are never given any priority. We are not even allowed to stand in front of men. Now, this center is in the Panchayat building. The panchayat meeting will be held here only. While the meeting is going on we will be working sitting on the chair in the computers.

Name: Porkalai
Education: 12th Standard

My name is Porkalai. I've studied 12th Standard. I am a Knowledge worker for the past 1 year 3 months. My husband is a lorry driver. Earlier he did not like my coming to the center. He used to tell why everybody would find fault of me. But still wanted to learn computers. So I came. Vimala Akka inspired me. First, I had a lot of hesitance to come to the center. I used to think that the computers are only learned men's job. But now I can also do like them. Now, I feel freer to express my feelings and I am no shyer. Here, in the VKC they teach how to speak to others, that to officers and outsiders.

The greatest gift that VKC has given us is we are well aware of all the government loans / advertisements / schemes. It is all because of the Internet and computers. We need not go through the white and white man in between.

The data bank, CALP and MUPP are all a great gifts for out community.

Name: Senthamarai.
Education: 6th Standard

I am Senthamarai. I have not studied much. I myself am able to learn computers. Then my son who is in 10th standard will be able to do much better. He is a young boy. So I inspire
him to learn as much as he can. I have become old. Now, what is the use of me going and learning? I took a long time to even type my name. So, for my generation this is enough. I feel that the coming generation will be far ahead because they have a very fast media for teaching them to learn much faster.

Name: Valli
Education: 12th Standard
My name is Valli. I've studied 10th Standard. My daughter has learnt computers in the center. Her school teacher appreciated her very much for doing well in the class. My daughter’s classmates used to take help from her. I felt really proud because my daughter has been recognized by students of higher community and town brought-up class-mates. All this is only because of the computers and Internet.

The introduction of the center in our village has enlightened us in many aspects which we were not aware of earlier. We did not know much about the health, legal and government schemes pertaining to women. Now, we are well informed about all these things.

Name: Vimala Periandy.
Education: 10th Standard
My name is Vimala Periandy. I've studied till 10th Standard. I am a social worker and have raised voice against suppression of women. I've supported the 33% reservation for women. Earlier, though, from my childhood I have always had the feeling that women need to brought to the lime-light like the men. I got the courage to raise the voice for women only after coming to the MSSRF center to learn computers and Internet.

The computer center is in the Panchayath office. In the office in one half the Panchayath meeting used to go on. In the other half the computer center used to function. The computer center was managed fully by ladies and so we had to be seated on chairs to operate the computers. It was then that I got the courage and asked for a women representative in the Panchayath. The dealings in the Panchayath for settling problem related to women were highly partial. This could be made fair only when we had a representative for us.

In our community men are very dominating. They do not relish the ideas and suggestions given by women. The women folks of our community stand behind the men for everything and depend on the men folk to lead the situation. In other community women the concept of gender divide is less and women are equally empowered. That is the main reason why our entire community is still standing behind comparatively. Women are stopped with the bear school education. I strongly feel that only when people are taught to think they start progressing. That thinking capacity was lagging very much in our community people. Our community ladies have started thinking only after coming to the center and started using computer. The computer and Internet has given us the rights to sit equally with men and get solutions to social problems related to women. It is the computers and Internet that has changed the lives of the entire fisherwomen folks in and around Pondicherry.

MEN:

Name: Perumal
Age: 50 years

I am Perumal. I am a resident of this village. After the start of the center there is a lot of improvement in the village. They organize a lot of camps like health, legal and social awareness. As a result our village is much cleaner. They are aware of the cleanliness aspect and keep the surroundings clean. Ladies have become less quarrelsome for unwanted things
and have become more constructive. This is a positive sign of growth for our village. I hope that our village will come up very well as a result of such computer trainings for students and ladies.

STUDENTS AND CHILDREN:

Name: Rajalakshmi  
Education: Teacher Training.  
I am Rajalakshmi. I am doing Teacher Training. I came to know about the teacher training course from the center. I was a knowledge worker here. I was also awarded the NVA Fellow for helping the village people with the right information. Our community is very much illiterate and particularly ladies are not much literate. We were not aware of many things till the center came. We were given training in different small scale industry like mushroom cultivation, kitchen garden maintenance and making of sea shell ornamentals. The computer training given in the center gave me the courage to come out and do many constructive things like the other community people.

Name: Vaishnavi  
Education: 12th Standard.  
My name is Vaishnavi. I've taken the 12th Standard public exams. I've taken the computer science branch. I want to do B.Tech. Computer Science. In the 11th and 12th Standard syllabus we have computers. I took the help from the center for learning HTML. I could do much better in the class. All my classmates used to learn from me. I was very happy that from the center I could learn so much. Some of my friends went tuition but there also they were not taught so much.

Name: Kapilraj  
Education: 7th Standard.  
My name is Kapilraj. I am studying in 7th Standard. I've learnt computers on my own after coming to the center. I am well versed in MS OFFICE and Front Page. I help all my friends who come to the center to learn computers. I do all possible things in the computers so they call me Bill Gates. I am really proud of the recognition given to me. I study well in school. In future I want to become an engineer. My parents have told that they will get me computers when I go to the 9th Standard.

Name: Gouthaman  
Education: 8th Standard.  
My name is Gouthaman. I am studying in the 8th Standard. I've learnt a lot from the center and my teacher at school encourages me to learn more. Being an expert in computers and our profession being fishing I would like to learn more and become a marine engineer. They say that nowadays the ships are operated using computers. I have learnt that there are different types of ships.

Name: Santosh  
Education: 10th Standard.  
My name is Santosh. I am studying in the 10th Standard. I come to the center for the past 3 years. I come here with my friends. Our parents do not scold us. A Earlier, I used to I've learnt a lot from the center and my teacher at school encourages me to learn more. Being an expert in computers and our profession being fishing I would like to learn more and become a marine engineer. They say that nowadays the ships are operated using computers. I have learnt that there are different types of ships.