Literature Review: Community Knowledge Workers and Village-based Knowledge Systems

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The literature on community development and rural reconstruction is voluminous and it spans six decades starting with the writings of Gandhi and Tagore during the 1930s and 1940s. During the 1950s the United States launched community development programs in some 60 nations around the world, mainly in Asia and Latin America. The community development (CD) projects recruited civil servants that was known as a multi-purpose village-level worker and placed them in villages to help meet what were perceived to be the "felt needs" of the village people (Holdcroft, 1984).

Community development programs blossomed in the 1950s, but in the early sixties, the specter of a looming Asian food shortage shifted the attention of developing countries and donors from community development to food production programs (Ford Foundation, 1959). As a result, many Ministries and Departments of Community Development in developing countries were shunted aside in the late fifties and Ministries of Agriculture became the lead agency to deal with food production and rural problems. Agricultural development was given primary attention by developing countries and most donors during the 1960s (Eicher and Witt, 1964). But agricultural growth with an emphasis on increasing food production did not solve many deep-seated rural problems.

In the early seventies, the World Bank launched integrated rural development (IRD) programs with a commitment to smallholder production and an overarching goal of reducing rural poverty. But, Binswanger (1988) points out that many of the IRD projects failed because they were introduced into an adverse macro-economic environment, and they suffered from a lack of government commitment, lack of profitable technology, neglect of service institutions, lack of beneficiary participation and an inability to solve complex coordination problems.

Binswanger (1998) sums up the integrated rural development (IRD) experience as "painful lessons" that helped many donors prepare new types of community projects over the past decade that are known as community-driven development (CDD). Broadly defined, CDD gives community groups and local governments control over planning decisions and investment resources (World Bank, 2007). The CDD model has attracted the attention of many donors and developing countries. In fact the World Bank reports that currently more than 9 percent of Bank lending uses this form of development model. The government of India has just announced a new goal of placing a village knowledge worker in every village in India (National Knowledge Commission, 2007). For a summary of the literature on CD, IRD and CDD see Binswanger's timely survey article on empowering the rural poor (Binswanger, 2007).

With the emergence of the 'new agriculture' and the availability and rapid uptake of information and communication technology (ICT) tools, the governments are refocusing

development resources in rural areas. Excellent recent reviews and studies provide information on the vision and momentum towards bringing information and knowledge to the village level (Arunachalam, 2004; Kuriyan and Toyama, 2007; Dossani et al., 2005). The following list of publications and web links serves as a useful resource on community development and village-based knowledge systems.

Arunachalam, Subbiah. 2004. Information and communication technologies and poverty alleviation. *Current Science*, volume 87, no. 7, p. 960-966.

Binswanger, Hans. 1998. Agricultural and Rural Development: Painful Lessons. *In International Agricultural development. Third Edition.* Edited by, Carl K. Eicher and John M. Staatz., Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press: 287 – 299.

Binswanger, Hans P. 2007. Empowering Rural People for their own Development. *In Contributions of Agricultural Economics to Critical Policy issues.* Edited by K. Otsuka and K. Kalirajan. Malden, MA.: Blackwell Synergy: 13 - 27.

Dossani, R., D.C. Misra and R. Jhaveri. 2005. Enabling ICT for rural India. Asia-Pacific Research Center, Stanford University, USA.

Dutz, Mark A. Editor. 2007. *Unleashing India's Innovation: Toward Sustainable and Inclusive Growth.* Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

Ford Foundation. 1959. *Report on India's Food Crisis and Steps to meet It.* New Delhi: Ministry of Food and Agriculture and Ministry of Community Development.

Eicher, Carl, K. and L. W. Witt. Eds. 1964. *Agriculture in Economic Development.* New York. McGraw-Hill.

Holdcroft, Lane. 1984. The Rise and Fall of Community Development, 1950 – 65. *In Agricultural Development in the Third World.* Edited by Carl K. Eicher and John M. Staatz. Baltimore, MD.: The Johns Hopkins University Press: 46 - 58.

Katyal, J.C. 2007. State of Technology Transfer: Proposal for a New Extension Model. CCS Haryana Agricultural University, Hisar, India.

Kuriyan, R. and K. Toyama (eds.). 2007. Review of research on rural PC kiosks. April 2007, Microsoft Research India. http://research.microsoft.com/research/tem/kiosks/

National Knowledge Commission. 2007. *National Knowledge Commission: Report to the Nation 2006.* New Delhi, National Knowledge Commission.

Swaminathan, M.S. 2005. Mission 2007: Every village a knowledge center. The Hindu, November 25, 2005.

TERI Knowledge Center flyer (2007), The Energy and Resource Institute (TERI), New Delhi, India: www.teri.org

World Bank. 2007. *World Development Report 2008: Agriculture for Development.* Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

Web links:

Kalam, AJP Abdul – President of India (2004), Village Panchayat Knowledge Centers for Rural Prosperity. India-US Million Book Digital Library Project http://www.new.dli.ernet.in/UDL-Talks-May2004/President.pdf

Indian Women for community development through Village knowledge centers (2007) http://www.telecentre.org/en/news.detail/38111

Rural Knowledge Telecentres of Sri Lanka (2007) http://nanasala.org/

Jamsetji Tata National Virtual Academy for Rural Prosperity (NVA), M S Swaminathan research Foundation, Chennai: http://www.mssrf-nva.org/

Grameen Gyaan Abhiyan (Mission 2007) - Indian Telecentre Network http://www.telecentre.org/en/community.detail/101450/

Research on Rural PC Kiosks, Technology for emerging markets, Microsoft Research India— http://research.microsoft.com/research/tem/kiosks/

Strengthening of Services Deliveries through Knowledge Centres for realization of Mission 2007- Every Village a Knowledge Centre -- http://www.apdip.net/projects/undp/in05/view