The World is Watching You

The World is Watching You, Launch of Lifelong Learning for Farmers, 7 April 2005, Govindanagaram, Tamil Nadu, India

Remarks by: Sir John Daniel, President & CEO
Commonwealth of Learning

Transcript

It is a pleasure to be here with you in Govindanagaram for the launch of the Lifelong Learning for Farmers Project here and in the nearby village of Uppukottai along with my colleague Dr Balasubramanian, who has done such a wonderful job in conceiving and preparing this work.

I am here to tell you that the world is watching what is happening here in these villages of Tamil Nadu. They are watching because, if we are to make the 21st century a happier and more prosperous time for humankind than the 20th century, our key challenge is to help the millions of people in the rural areas of the world improve their lives. We believe that this project, Lifelong Learning for Farmers, has the potential to do that.

The role of the Commonwealth of Learning has simply been to bring together in a dynamic partnership four groups of people who hold the key to improving the rural economy.

I refer first, of course, to you, the villagers. We have helped you work together and decide what you believe are the keys to better livelihoods. You have formed associations, chosen leaders, and made commitments. Some of you have become very skilled in operating computers and creating websites. I honour you all.

Second, there are the banks. Finance is crucial to the development of the rural economy. The banks are eager to get more involved in lending to farmers if they can have rational hopes of steady returns. I am delighted that four senior bankers from the State Bank of India are with us. Their remarks to you have shown the depth of their commitment to the project. When all is said and done it is the local commercial banks, not the World Bank or other development agencies like the Commonwealth of Learning, that hold the key to renewing rural India.

Third, there are the providers of technology. Technology provides a new opportunity to re-energise the rural economy. Commercial ICT kiosks in villages, like these in Govindanagaram and Uppukottai, are turning the digital divide into a digital dividend. Today communities live by information and the ICT kiosk gives farmers and villagers easy access to the information that can change their lives. I congratulate
those who operate the ICT kiosks as well as nLogue, the Internet Service Provider that supports them. I also commend all those involved in the various commercial aspects of the project, notably those undertaking various functions in the contract farming that is an important element of this new approach.

Fourth, the essence of this project is to give the farmers the opportunity to become lifelong learners. The key here is to give you easy access to the information and knowledge that can improve your livelihoods continuously. I thank the universities and institutions in Tamil Nadu that have agreed to work together to provide this information and knowledge in a relevant and usable form. I am very impressed by the progress that has been made since my visit to Chennai in September. I am also very impressed by the way that local groups are taking this information and making it more widely available to other villages and other farmers in distance learning formats.

I give you an example. The key to productive learning is information that is simple and relevant. One element the project in these villagers is to increase the value of dairy farming. Good dairy farming starts with good cows. The partners in the project have worked together to produce a simple but scientific guide to buying a cow, and this is now being put into an open learning format so that it can be widely used.

In conclusion then, I am sure that something important is happening here. As I said at the beginning, the eyes of the world are upon you, because if this approach raises the quality of life for the people of Govindanagaram and Uppukottai it will be widely and spontaneously adopted across the world. Already there are signs that this is happening.

In the life of societies it is people who make change. I express my warm thanks to Dr Balasubramanian, whom we all know as Dr Bala, who is the source of many of the ideas behind this project and the catalyst for putting them into practice. He is doing a remarkable job and we at the Commonwealth of Learning count it a privilege to work with him.

My final word is for the farmers and villagers. Thank you for welcoming me to your village. This is your project, these are your livelihoods. I wish you success as you go forward with these new approaches. The Commonwealth of Learning is proud to accompany you on the journey. Thank you.