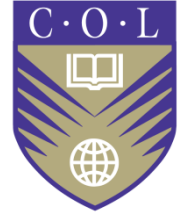


Empowering People for Prosperity: Lifelong Learning for Farmers



Programme at Arul Anandar College Madurai , Tamil Nadu, India, 6 July 2007

Empowering People for Prosperity: Lifelong Learning for Farmers

Sir John Daniel, Commonwealth of Learning

Introduction

Father Pushparaj; Members of the College staff; Mr Kamaraj and members of VIDAYAL; representatives of the Indian Overseas Bank; students; ladies and gentlemen:

It is a great pleasure to be back in Arul Anandar College. I have excellent memories of your warm welcome in 2005 when my wife and I came to the College for tea after a very interesting day in Govindanagaram for the ceremony to launch the Lifelong Learning for Farmers programme in that village.

Much has happened in the two years since I was last here - all positive. The villages involved in the Lifelong Learning for Farmers programme are more prosperous. Even more importantly, the people who live in those villages, especially the women, feel to have more control over their lives - they are empowered.

The great challenge of the 21st century is to help those who live in the millions of villages of Asia and Africa a chance to improve their lives. Here in this region of Tamil Nadu you are improving your lives and the world is watching you.

The World is Watching You. That was the title of my little speech when I spoke at Govindanagaram two years ago. The world wants to know how you have enriched and empowered yourselves here. What can we tell the world? What is the secret?

In fact it is not a secret. I shall summarize the impact of the Lifelong Learning for Farmers programme in ten points. But I think it has already been summarised much better in the brilliant dramatisation that we just saw by the women of VIDAYAL.

1. Start with the people

First, the project began with the people who wanted to improve their livelihoods, the people of these villages. Most development projects are conceived far away from the people concerned. Most are conceived on a grand scale. Most are imposed from the top down.

Lifelong Learning for Farmers did the opposite. The programme was conceived in the villages. It was designed on a local scale by people like the members of VIDAYAL. It is implemented from the bottom up: by the people and for the people.

But, as well as addressing some local problems, like the declining resources for agricultural extension; these village initiatives also responded to some global issues, like the emergence of a world market for agricultural produce; and some cosmic trends, like climate change and the lowering of the water table.

2. Use Local Resources

Second, we are using local resources, starting with the commitment of the people, but also harnessing the entrepreneurial spirit of the ICT kiosk movement, and, most importantly, showing the commercial banks new business opportunities in the villages.

3. Win-win-win

Third, the system is designed so that everyone wins. The farmers become more prosperous; the ICT kiosks have a growing business; the banks lend more money; the improved links between farmers and their markets benefit both producers and consumers; and the consortium of knowledge providers has the satisfaction of making an impact.

4. The individual within the group

Fourth, the L3 Farmers approach focuses on both the farmer as an individual and the village as a collectivity. The only way that everyone can win is for everyone to work together, knowing that a chain of human activity is only as strong as its weakest link. If I don't play my part in the system you lose; if you don't play your part in the system I lose. Sociologists call this cognitive social capital, which is just a name for the networks of cooperation and trust that allow a whole community working together to achieve more than the sum of the efforts of its members as individuals.

5. Clarify the model

Fifth - and this sounds like yet more academic jargon - we are constantly clarifying and refining the model. We want to see the success of L3 Farmers spread to other countries and it is doing so. I was in Sri Lanka at the launch of pilot projects there earlier this week. They have done a brilliant job adapting the essentials of your model to the somewhat different conditions of Sri Lanka. But they could not have

adapted the system without understanding why and how it works and the importance of the different elements of the model.

We are also taking the concept of Lifelong Learning for Farmers to Africa. You can be proud of the movement that has been launched here in Tamil Nadu in this region.

6. Training for Expansion

Sixth, if we want to expand the impact of L3 Farmers to improve more lives, we need trained people to initiate and coordinate the efforts. That is why it is so inspiring to be at Arul Anandar College today, where the principles of L3 Farmers and the expertise to harness information technology to development are going to become part of the college curriculum. The College will be producing graduates who can help to increase rural prosperity in modern and effective ways.

If the model that you have developed is to spread and be adapted intelligently to new circumstances we need trained local people who know how to use information technology to improve prosperity by bringing different players together.

7. Innovating with technology

Seventh, technology means innovation. Each generation of technology brings new advantages and every innovation spawns further innovation. I am delighted to hear that Arul Anandar College has been inspired by the 'Hole in the Wall' initiative of the National Institute for Information Technology. That project cemented computers into walls in poor areas of cities so that children could experiment with information and communication technology. You are planning to install a 'Light in the Wall' - a computer with a touch screen - in a big horticultural marketing centre so that farmers and traders can all have accurate and timely market information. It's another nice example of information and learning contributing to empowerment and prosperity.

8. Integrating L3 Farmers with other initiatives

Eighth, the Lifelong Learning for Farmers programme is being reinforced by other initiatives. I think particularly of VIDAYAL, a self-sustaining non-governmental organization which has linked together some 4,000 women in self-help groups to create some Rs. 50 million worth of savings and credit. VIDAYAL has been inspired by L3 Farmers to strengthen micro-enterprise in goat rearing with the help of the Indian Overseas Bank.

9. The role of an international agency

Ninth, although L3 Farmers is a local project - your project - it has benefited from the moral and practical support of an international agency: The Commonwealth of Learning. There is a saying that prophets are without honour in their own countries. Although the key ideas in L3 Farmers were developed mainly here in India, notably by our brilliant colleague Dr. Balasubramanian, it seems to help when an international

agency supports the venture. I am proud that the Commonwealth of Learning, which I lead, is that organisation

I am not talking about financial support, for the secret of L3 Farmers is that it uses local resources, but simply moral and intellectual support to the concept. We represent the world out there that is watching you. We are also taking these ideas and helping other countries to benefit from them.

10. Self-replicating success

Tenth, and finally, L3 Farmers is now having an impact beyond India. What you have begun here is self-replicating. I arrived this morning from Sri Lanka, where I met the President, His Excellency Mahinda Rajapaksa, and saw the first of six projects where the concept of L3 Farmers is being adapted and used. It fits very well with Sri Lanka's major national programme called *Gama Neguma*, which it describes as a new era of village up-liftment and village re-awaking. Gama Neguma is providing new infrastructure and organisation across the poorest villages of Sri Lanka. L3 Farmers is bringing the know-how about getting all the players to work together and take advantage of the government's investment to create prosperity and empowerment for the villagers.

Conclusion

Ladies and Gentlemen, members of Arul Anandar College and VIDAYAL: that is why I am so pleased to back here with you. You have created something very important in the L3 Farmers programme and its impact for prosperity and empowerment is beginning to spread around the world. But the world is still watching you to see how you sustain and develop the principles of L3 Farmers in the years to come. I thank you for your welcome, I congratulate you, and I wish you well.