

**Inauguration of the
Village Knowledge Centre of Kalitheerthalkuppam**

**An address by
Maureen O'Neil
President
International Development Research Centre**

February 20, 2001

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It is with great pleasure that I take part in this inauguration of the Village Knowledge Centre here in Kalitheerthalkuppam. Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) has for long been a strong proponent of bringing information and communication technologies to rural communities for their benefit. It is our belief that these technologies offer unique opportunities for communities to address fundamental development challenges and improve their condition.

IDRC—through its program on Information and Communication Technologies for Development—is proud to have supported the important research work in this field carried out by the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation in the Pondicherry region. Through this project, a number of Village Knowledge Centres were established to demonstrate how information and knowledge acquired through ICTs can have a positive impact on the population and help resolve some of their most pressing problems. I congratulate you on this work that has been recognized by national as well as international observers as innovative and providing important knowledge on how sustainable rural ICT development can be achieved.

I am pleased to announce that IDRC recently signed an agreement with the Swaminathan Research Foundation for a second phase of this project, to be carried out during the next three years. The experiences gained from this project, we believe, will help guide the development of rural ICTs not only in India, but also in other areas of the world where rural communities can be empowered by the introduction and use of ICTs in their daily lives.

However, ICTs are only a tool in this process. Research results from the previous phase of the project, recently completed, have clearly shown that it is the

¹Pronounce as is French : Qu'à littire tal coupnames

imagination and dedication of the members of the community themselves that truly constitute a village knowledge centre. It is only if the technologies are put to meaningful use by the members of the community that ICTs can truly be an effective tool for progress. We have witnessed wonderful examples of how rural communities found new and innovative ways to address their own development challenges through the use of ICTs. I am told that, in the nearby village of Veerampattinam², fishermen are monitoring sea conditions through satellite images, thereby avoiding life-threatening weather conditions and increasing the possibilities of a good catch. We have also seen groups of women use ICTs to come together to resolve common problems and improve their quality of life. Through a Village Knowledge Centre, women of another village learned about savings and loan cooperatives and were able to set up a village micro-credit program. The accounts of the program are now administered by this group of women using the Centre computers.

So it is with great pleasure that I hereby declare the Village Knowledge Center at Kalitheerthalkuppam officially inaugurated. I hope that all members of this community will take advantage of this Centre. It is particularly important to give children the opportunities to use ICTs since their use will become an integral part of all activities in the future. We are still, however, at the learning stage and your active participation will help find how Village Knowledge Centre can be most useful to people, here and in other countries. You are now part of the “Global Village”.

Thank you again for the privilege of being here today in your community for this important event.

² Pronounce as in French : vi-ram-es-patinames