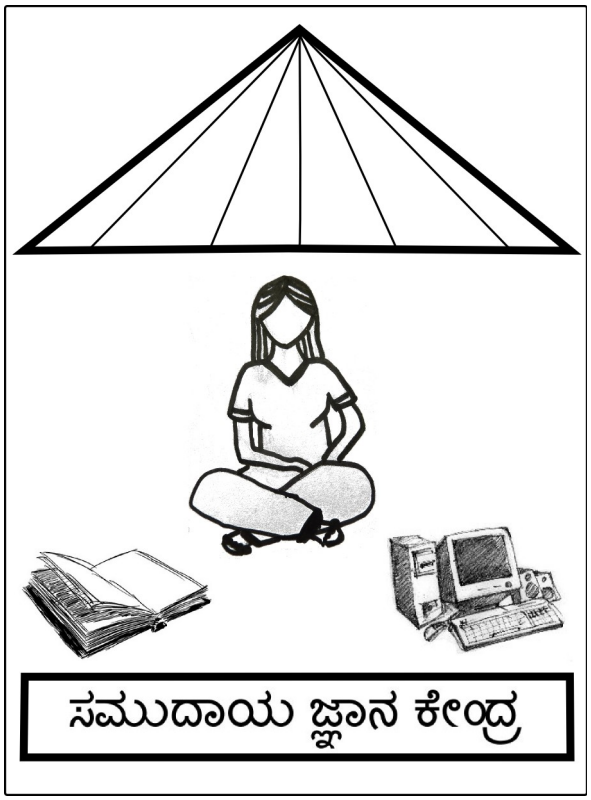
Exploring an institutional model for *Samudaya Jnana Kendras*: A research study



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KARNATAKA JNANA AAYOGA

IT for Change

Back Cover photographs (Clockwise, from top left) :

An entrepreneur running an *Akshaya* centre in Kannur, Kerala ;
Panchayat members using Skype to communicate local development plans with other villages in Bhuj, Gujarat;
A GRC-SK worker conducting registrations for a government health scheme at a service delivery cum gender resource centre (GRC-SK) in Meethapur, Delhi and
A Focus Group Discussion with young women who are continuing their formal education in Kanakagiri, Koppal district, Karnataka; conducted as part of a field study on community level information, learning and knowledge processes.

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-IT for Change team

Acronyms

AEC	Adult Education Centre
ATMA	Agricultural Technology Management Agency
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CEC	Continuing Education Centre
CSC	Common Service Centre
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DC	District Collector
DMU	District Management Unit
DRC	District Resource Centre
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GP	*Gram Panchayat*
GRC-SK	Gender Resource Centre-*Suvidha Kendra*
HRF	Hippocampus Reading Foundation
ICAR	Indian Council of Agricultural Research
ICT	Information & Communication Technologies
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
ILK	Information, Learning & Knowledge
ISS	Institute of Social Sciences
KKC	Karnataka Knowledge Commission
KVK	*Krishi Vigyan Kendra*
MIS	Management Information Systems
MoHD	Ministry of Human Resource Development
MS	*Mahila Samakhya*
MSSRF	M.S.Swaminathan Research Foundation
NeGP	National e-governance Plan

NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NLM	National Literacy Mission
NREGA	National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
NSSO	National Sample Survey Organisation
PCO	Public Call Office
PLP	Post Literacy Programme
PMU	Programme Management Unit
PPCP	Public Private Community Partnership Model
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
PUC	Pre-University Course
RSK	*Raita Samparka Kendra*
RTI	Right to Information
SC	Scheduled Caste
SCA	Service Centre Agency
SDA	State Designated Agency
SJK	*Samudaya Jnana Kendra*
SPOWAC	Society for the Promotion of Women & Child Welfare
SREP	Strategic Resource and Extension Plan
ST	Scheduled Tribe
TLC	Total Literacy Campaign
UID	Unique Identification Number
V-SAT	Very Small Aperture Terminal
VKC	Village Knowledge Centre
VLE	Village Level Entrepreneur
VRC	Village Resource Centre
NCT	National Capital Territory

Exploring an institutional model for *Samudaya Jnana Kendras* : An Executive Summary

Background

For Karnataka to be a real knowledge society, it is important to look beyond the opportunities which are emerging in the formal economy and formal education sectors; to understand and examine the transformative knowledge possibilities which have opened up vis-a-vis the daily lives of people and communities. The concept of *Samudaya Jnana Kendra* was conceived with this end in mind. This *Kendra* is supposed to conceptually epitomize and physically represent the idea of 'knowledge for everyone' in the lived community context, by recognising and invigorating those informal processes and institutions which have a major impact on the knowledge culture of people and communities. Knowledge, as we know, has always been a prime factor of development and positive change in societies. We recognize that information, learning and knowledge (ILK) are closely related concepts that can be placed in a continuum. Therefore, we often employ the composite term ILK, in this report.

This report is an attempt to address the question of what kind of community institution(s) can help address the ILK needs of communities, in the current context of an emerging knowledge society. It begins by analysing existing ILK needs and processes in communities on the basis of a primary research study. Then it goes on to review the current role of governments in this area, followed by an examination of some new convergent delivery models from across the country. On the basis of these assessments, the report attempts to develop an institutional model for the *Samudaya Jnana Kendras.*

Assessing community ILK needs

Any knowledge intervention can be successful only when it facilitates community level ILK processes in a holistic manner. This requires an effective mapping of ILK processes on the ground, which has to be as much informed by collective needs and social values and norms, as by immediate individual interests. Recognising this, we developed a community level ILK assessment framework, with the following components: nature of articulations of ILK needs by community members, the state of existing ILK infrastructure in the community, level of individual and institutional ILK skills in the community and the impact of mass media on community level ILK processes. Using this framework, we conducted a participatory ILK assessment study in the districts of Mandya and Koppal. The field work in these areas was respectively facilitated by *Samuha* and *Vikasana*, which are NGOs with considerable and long-standing community presence.

We adopted a participatory research design which primarily relied on the methodology of Focus Group Discussions with various groups in the communities. In addition to assessing community ILK needs,We also elicited ideas from the research participants on various aspects of designing a model for the SJKs. We also conducted key informant interviews with people who were identified as possessing the expertise to provide special insights in the area of study. Two consultations, one each at Koppal and Mysore, involving development workers, community leaders and articulate community members, were also conducted.

Our main findings from the participatory ILK assessment, the key informant interviews and consultations are highlighted below:

- The most commonly expressed information needs related to immediate gratification – for instance, information connected to livelihoods, educational opportunities and public service entitlements. This is only to be expected. It is rather unlikely that a community whose ILK needs at this level are not being addressed, will articulate higher level non-instrumental ILK needs. Non-articulation cannot be interpreted as a lack of higher level knowledge needs. The situation is somewhat similar to how, in post-independence decades, it was difficult to convince most marginalised communities about the necessity of schooling their children , since they felt that it will be of no use to them, in their given material and social context. In our field interactions, we found that more marginalised a group was, the less eager it was to

talk about ILK needs, which may appear paradoxical as these groups obviously have great need for ILK. This shows that the articulation of ILK needs is strongly tied to one's current contextual location, and recognition of concrete possibilities.

- Significantly, **when presented with the possibility of a community ILK centre , most people we interacted with were able to articulate a strong need for both (1) a very broad set of ILK activities in the community, including knowledge needs, aspirational life skills, a need for engagement with traditional knowledge, ILK needs related to strengthening local democracy and community building, maintaining good libraries, developing robust community media, ICT-enablement etc., and (2) ILK services to be provided, or at least facilitated, by public agencies, treating them as public goods.** These twin findings are very important for laying out the context of a possible new public intervention in the area of community ILK needs.

- Most people we interacted with had strong reservations about existing institutional efforts for addressing ILK needs. They felt that the public servants involved had a very top-down attitude, and carried out a standardised ILK delivery without taking note of the particular context. These kinds of ILK processes were simply not suited to adult ILK interactions, apart from being of little substantive value. There was also a feeling that strong vested interests get developed around public service delivery which cause deliberate withholding of information, and its use for illegitimate personal and political benefit.

- At the consultations, when this aspect of involved vested interests was probed in greater detail, we found an almost **unanimous view that for ILK activities to be effective and free from the manipulations of vested interests, they must preferably be separated from the service delivery parts of government machinery as well as from local politics.** There was a strong accent on context- specific flexibility and a strong community management role, as key factors in the success of any ILK intervention. Perhaps, the single most important issue that

was repeatedly asserted as key to a successful ILK intervention was that the community level facilitator of any ILK centre *must* posses certain personal qualities, which enable committed but humble facilitation. Any proposed centre has to be a welcoming public space, not only open to all, but which also pro-actively enables equality of participation.

These distinct imperatives and principles that should inform the design of any new initiative in the area of community ILK emerging from our interactions with community members and development workers were re-affirmed by our case studies of some large-scale existing State ILK interventions as well as some new age ICT enabled community information and service centres. These case studies and the insights therefrom are detailed in Sections 1B and 1C respectively, of the report.

A brief review of governmental ILK interventions:

We studied three large scale existing State ILK interventions, in Karnataka : the agricultural extension system, the adult education programme and rural public libraries. These are interventions with a wide scope and long history, and our examination of them was by no means exhaustive. It was tuned to the objective at hand, of identifying learnings which could help us in devising strategies to address communities' informal ILK needs, in the new context of a knowledge society.

The agricultural extension system is by far the most intensively invested in, among the State's ILK interventions. It has numerous facets involving multiple agencies, and there have been a few system overhauls as well, since this ILK area has been perceived as really important. Because of such investments and attention, there is not really any dearth of agriculture related information in the system. However, both our primary field studies and review of secondary literature reveal that very few farmers access or depend on the State's extension system for information related to agriculture and allied activities. How can this be explained? To begin with, ILK delivery is a very specialised process, quite different from service delivery. It is not just a matter of having the required information. It needs adequate attention to demand-side processes, chiefly the processes at the interface of the community with the extension system. A closer examination reveals that insufficient attention to these processes at the last mile is at the root of the failure of our current agricultural extension systems. Instead of focusing on specialisation in ILK delivery, the agricultural extension system seems to be moving in the opposite direction, of further converging it with service delivery ,

There has been a gradual but clear shift from an ILK focus in the agricultural extension system, making ILK functions secondary to service delivery functions which appear more immediately gratifying and measurable.

In terms of insights from the case of the agricultural extension system for a new approach which can comprehensively address a broad range of ILK needs of the community, it is fairly evident that the supply side processes are not the main aspect that require working on. **The supply side focus has to abate in favor of a new approach stressing the demand side, or the community-end dynamics. This requires examining strategies for specialising and developing core competencies in the area of ILK delivery functions. This necessitates their separation from service delivery functions, and cultivation of a participatory knowledge culture at the community level, that can be fed into by experts, as appropriate.**

A brief study of the Adult Education Programme in Karnataka confirmed the lack of a participatory knowledge culture, and the failure to locate ILK activities in the community's felt needs, as the key problem areas. The Programme focuses on the instrumental element of basic literacy, despite the widely acknowledged fact that neo-literates relapse very frequently in the absence of the rootedness and immersion of literacy programmes within the larger ILK context of the community. Whether literacy triggers wider ILK engagements or whether ILK activities situated in people's felt needs and context build the hunger for sustaining literacy is an interesting exploration. However, the Adult Education Programme, seems to be moving towards reducing its community presence, and focusing on instrumental, and more easily measurable, goals. The insights for building a new comprehensive ILK approach from a review of the Adult Education Programme are similar to the learnings from the review of the agricultural extension system. Further, adult education needs to be recognised as a broad, self-motivated and self-driven engagement with community based ILK processes and activities. It is only through strengthening the latter that individual-oriented goals and number-driven targets of literacy and adult education can be improved. We also briefly examined the *Mahila Samkhaya* programme of the Government of India which is guided by the motto ' education for empowerment'. This programme helps marginalised women organise themselves in knowledge-activity oriented self help groups. While acknowledging literacy to be an important area of work, the programme focuses on building a larger engagement with knowledge and community processes, which thinking can help us envision an alternate strategy for adult education.

The rural public library system in Karnataka is quite extensive. There are over 5000 *Gram Panchayat* libraries in Karnataka, making it a state with one of the largest rural library networks. However the dynamism and responsiveness of these libraries to community level ILK needs to be re-examined. Field interviews and research reveal a gradual loss of any reading culture, that may have existed, to the pull of audio-visual media. Many people we spoke to, including community members, seemed to suggest that very few people in villages read books, even if literate. Our field study as well as secondary literature reviews indicate that the books available at the village library may often not be very relevant to user needs and preferences. In many cases, the book lending system itself is not functional, mainly from a fear that books may not be returned, which indicates a lack of community engagement and inadequate local community spiritedness. Our field visits also found that the dynamism, or even the bare functioning, of the village library largely depended on the dynamism of the library supervisor. This once again affirms the centrality of community-end processes, and the need to focus on getting them right.

Clearly, the village library has little relationship with the local ILK ecology and processes. Instead, it functions as a standalone institution; a mere repository of books and some other reading material. One is surprised by the lack of institutional linkages of village libraries to other large-scale ILK interventions such as the agricultural extension system and the adult education programme. Especially, in the case of the Adult Education Programme , the Continuing Education Centres were supposed to house a library, but no attempt was made to link them with the existing libraries. A comprehensive community level ILK initiative will require an across-departments, institutional (and not ad-hoc) convergence, that can link to, and service, all departments' ILK mandates.

While the State's performance in its development role has a mixed report card across the country; in the ILK space, even the concerned departments and senior officials seem to accept that the current strategies are simply not working. Hence, there is an urgent imperative to look at new approaches. **This time, the focus should be on convergence of specialised across-the-sectors information delivery functions, with stress on developing appropriate community-end processes, with close involvement of the community.** Fortunately, ICTs provide just such a convergence opportunity, with possibilities of community-end ownership and flexibilities. Some experiments are being done across the country for developing community level convergences, and we have examined four of them for the present study.

ICTs for community level convergence – Lessons from across the country

The countrywide Government of India programme of Common Service Centres (*Nemmadi* Centres in Karnataka) is a bold and ambitious initiative for setting up 1,00,000 centres, one each for 6 villages. These centres are supposed to deliver public services as well as commercial services of various kinds. The centres are mostly owned by corporate groups and run by village entrepreneurs. We will not go into an in-depth discussion of this interesting initiative, because ILK functions are clearly not a priority here (except for a very few easily monetisable ones, like providing examination results). There is certainly a move towards converged service delivery, at the community level. However, such a convergence, especially if owned and managed by corporate players and completely based on business models, does not serve the purposes of community ILK needs. Unfortunately, expansive and unsubstantiated claims of those in charge of these programmes of being able to deliver practically everything through these centres, have blocked specialised ILK convergent initiatives. **Our field assessment of Common Service Centres reveals that they are not suited to take up most of the required ILK functions, and it is important to have a separate ICT enabled convergence of just community ILK functions.**

The *Akshaya* programme of the Government of Kerala is a Common Service Centre-like scheme, but here the main player is a public agency, the Kerala State IT Mission, and not a corporate. Also, unlike the Common Service Centres in other states, *Akshaya* centres, though run by village entrepreneurs, have a close relationship with *gram panchayats.* Such close involvement of public agencies has enabled *Akshaya* centres to fulfill some ILK functions. Even when these functions are not monetisable, the centre operator feels obliged to facilitate them because his/her centre is organically linked to, and in many ways dependent on, these public agencies. However, the focus remains on service delivery, and even this arrangement does not seem adequate to comprehensively, and in a sustained manner, address community ILK needs.

The Village Knowledge Centres of M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) in Puduchery are a good example of community owned ILK centres. The agenda and work plan of the centres is set locally, by a Managing Committee consisting of community members. The community also contributes funds for running the centres, apart from providing rent-free space and community volunteers.

However, an absence of integration of the initiative with government systems means that these centres are not able to facilitate key areas of government ILK roles and functions. This leads both to sub-optimal use of these centres and ineffectiveness of this otherwise well-resourced ILK initiative. The MSSRF Centres also focus largely on apolitical information and training without taking an active role in the local governance processes. While this may have helped the centres stay above village politics and thus ensured continued support from all sections of the community, non-involvement in political work such as facilitating right to information, helping organise social audits, supporting *gram sabhas*, facilitating community-generated information etc., may reduce their relevance to the community, and the considerable community voluntary energy that could be mustered through these activities remains unaccessed.

The *Suvidha Kendras* of the Mission Convergence initiative of Delhi government started as a scheme to provide information about public services to women in marginalised communities. They have now expanded to servicing the entire community, and have also taken up functions such as identifying vulnerable households in the community. What is most interesting about this initiative is its innovative networked governance model. At the apex is Mission Convergence as a specialised agency of the state government. The *Kendras* are run by NGOs, which in turn are supervised by mother NGOs, as well as specialised district level bodies of Mission Convergence. **This model ensures that the resources and accountability that are associated with governments are obtained by the *Kendras* even while taking the benefit of NGO's superior skills in community level work.**

Our primary and secondary research provides useful guidelines for identifying the principles that should inform any new community ILK initiative, and developing the design of a possible community level ILK institution, the *Samudaya Jnana Kendra* (SJK). Part 2 of the report explores in detail the questions of what should such a new institution do, and what will it look like.

Functions of *Samudaya Jnana Kendras*

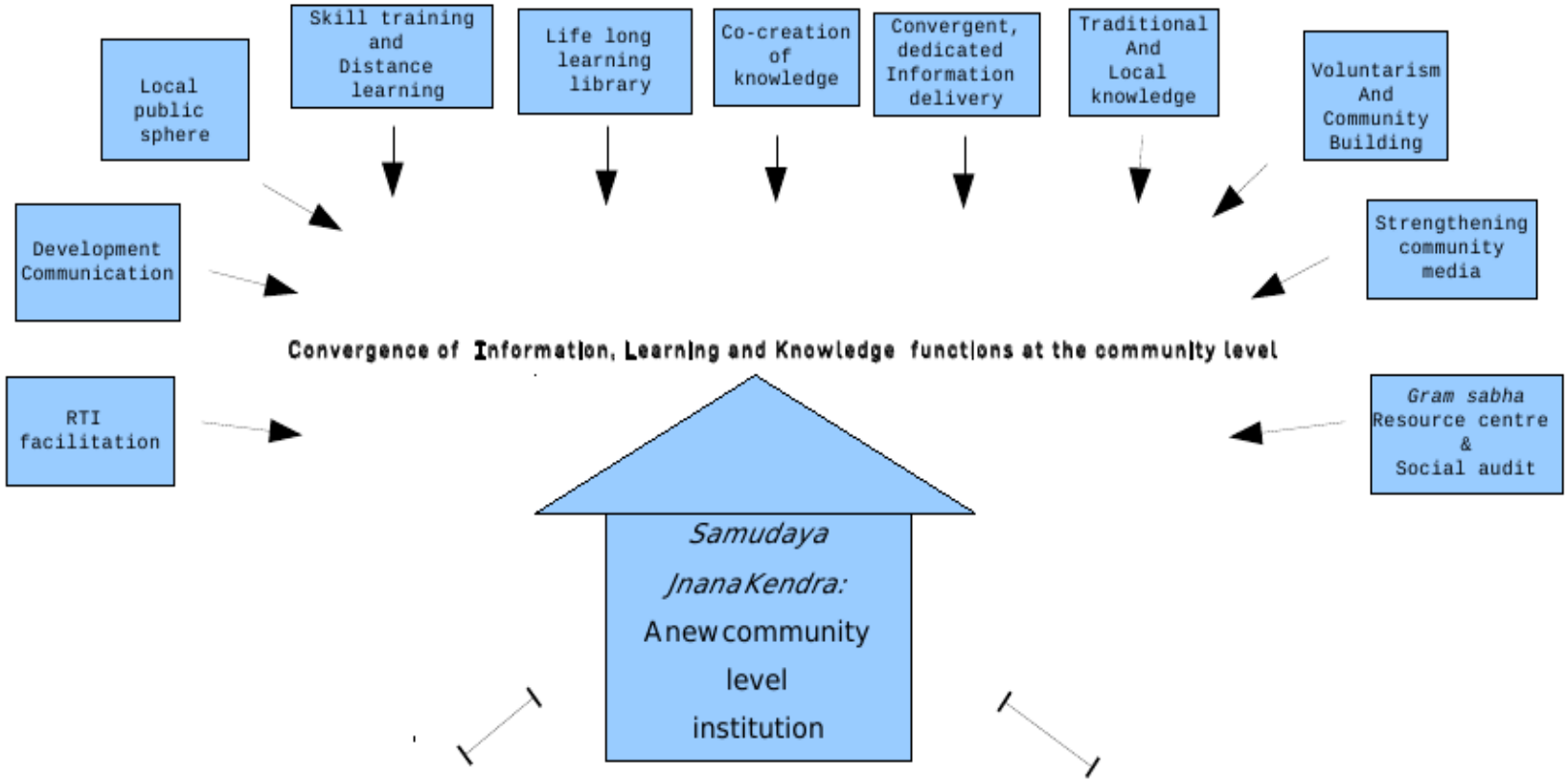
Section 2A of the report lists the various community level functions that SJKs could, and should, perform. We describe then them under 14 headings, covering functions such as right to information, development communication, skill building, local media, engagement with traditional and local

knowledge, facilitating co-creation of information, assisting in social audits and acting as a *gram sabha* resource centre.

The list is indeed long. However, these functions are synergistic, and best performed together, rather than separately. In fact, separately, many of these important functions may not be viable to be successfully carried out. **Being able to perform such a range of very important community functions will enhance SJK's appeal to state and non-state development actors who would be able to provide support for such an initiative, and this will also motivate community based actors to actively engage and participate.** The knowledge society context enables convergence of these ILK functions, and also their separation from service delivery related functions and core political activities. This is a prime design principle that will inform the model of SJKS that we present in Section 2B of the report. The schematic diagram on the adjoining page discusses various proposed functions of the *Samudaya Jnana Kendras.*

An Institutional model for *Samudaya Jnana Kendras*

The *Samudaya Jnana Kendras* (SJK) have to be at a place where all sections of the society, even those with less mobility, like women, can easily and regularly access it. There must therefore, eventually, be an SJK in each village. It should work on a public goods model, supported by public resources. As discussed, ILK activities are difficult to monetise successfully. For other reasons too, the SJK should be exclusively devoted to ILK activities, and avoid service delivery activities, to the extent possible. **It should have around it, the sanctity that is associated with an institution of knowledge. Borrowing a phrase used by the Karnataka Department of Public Libraries notes in one of its documents about libraries, the aim of being 'a people's university' should inform the positioning of the SJK.**



Core Principles of SJK

a) Respect for community autonomy and self-determination of local level ILK processes
b) Supporting a participatory knowledge culture
c)Clear separation of service delivery and ILK functions
d) Deepening democracy at the village level
e) Firm commitment to inclusion of marginalised groups

Structural Elements:

a) Community ownership and management
b)Accountability to *gram sabha*
c) Autonomy in local level functioning with resource support and guidance from a dedicated State agency --*Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan*
d) Co-funded by different departments from their budget for ILK activities
e) Involvement of NGOs in resource support and capacity building of SJK facilitators

SJKs will perform core knowledge functions, such as library functions and activities related to engagement with traditional knowledge; development information functions, like interaction with specialists and skill building; and democracy related ILK activities, like assisting social audits and being a gram sabha resource centre. Getting involved in political functions can however be tricky, possibly embroiling the SJK in the divisiveness of local politics. To prevent this, the *panchayats* should not directly supervise SJKs. Instead, **SJKs should be a body of the gram sabha, managed by a gram sabha instituted committee.** One of the *panchayat* members should represent the *panchayat* on this committee. Also, strong norms of not getting into divisive politics, (similar to the norms guiding other institutions of knowledge such as schools or universities) should be internalised in the SJK system.

As mentioned earlier, much of the failure of existing ILK initiatives can be attributed to the lack of development of a 'participatory knowledge culture'. For adult ILK interactions, especially of the informal kind, development of such a culture is a primary imperative. SJKs would, most of all, be the embodiment of such a local culture of participatory knowledge. The physical space of SJK and all its processes should be informed by this basic principle.

A state level specialised agency, *Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan*, will need to be set up to ensure that the SJK system functions as required. This agency will provide resource support to SJKs and linkages with other departments and agencies to facilitate their ILK activities. But foremost, it will ensure that the principles of 'participatory knowledge culture' are promoted throughout the ILK delivery chain, from top to bottom. It is vain to expect that the village level SJK facilitator will posses all the desirable qualities that are not (to whatever extent possible) also built upstream in the ILK delivery chain. It may appear to be a formidable task, as indeed promoting true democracy is also almost an impossible challenge. However, having such a normative framework for the SJK system is something that it cannot work effectively without.

Instead of seeing SJKs as an outpost of the government's ILK machinery, the various departments and agencies involved have to see themselves as providing resource support to the 'primary institution' of SJK. The community/ *gram sabha* ownership of SJKs provides the legitimate basis of such a bottom up relationship. However, these different departments and agencies should be able to seek accountability from the SJK system for fulfilling their community end obligations, for which a proper

monitoring and reporting system should be devised through the *Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan*. Since, the SJK system will save these departments and agencies resources that they otherwise commit to community presence, it should be possible to fund the SJK system and the *Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan* through the ILK/ communication budgets of these various 'client' agencies.

The SJK should be run by a *Jnana Sahayaki,* selected by the management committee, and be supported by one or two staff. The selection of right staff for SJKs is of central importance. They should be appointed on a three year contract, with a transparent but rigorous method of evaluation involving both community and outside actors. District-wise NGOs should be selected to provide very regular training and resource support to the SJK system. A few days of training every month should be compulsory. These, or other, NGOs should also be involved in the monitoring and assessment system. District level management committee for SJKs should involve prominent public interest actors, and it should provide guidance and supervision to the district level presence of the *Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan.*

Since the extensive public library system in Karnataka comes close, as a starting point, to the desired SJK system, and also since the library function will be subsumed into the SJKs, as a starting point, **these libraries should be converted to SJKs.** However, the much broader vision and functions described for SJKs need to be kept centrally in mind. Also, to learn about how SJKs can be run most effectively, pilots should be launched in some places. Some of these pilots can be conducted by NGOs, and others directly by the proposed *Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan* (or the anchor department) to test different kinds of possibilities. **Extensive public consultations should be taken up around the SJK concept**, and the outcomes of these should be used to frame new policies, and, as appropriate, new institutional systems in the area of community ILK needs.

Introduction – What are we setting out to do, and why

The vision of the Government of Karnataka is to see the state emerge as a vibrant knowledge society in the shortest possible time. The *Karnataka Jnana Aayoga* (Karnataka Knowledge Commission) was set up to offer advice and help the government respond pro-actively in this context. Two important areas in a knowledge society context clearly, are the sectors of the formal economy and formal education. Considerable progress has been made in these areas in Karnataka, especially in the fields of IT and IT-enabled services, and higher and vocational education. These areas remain the focus of attention for governments and other public interest actors because the knowledge society gains in these areas are most obvious and relatively immediate. Some amount of work is also being done in the area of school education in Karnataka to harness knowledge society possibilities.

However, a vision of a true knowledge society (a term often used somewhat interchangeably with 'information society') goes much further. As the World Summit on the Information Society in 2003 laid it out:

"We, the representatives of the peoples of the world, assembled in Geneva from 10-12 December 2003 for the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, declare our common desire and commitment to build a people-centred, inclusive and development-oriented Information Society, *where everyone can create, access, utilize and share information and knowledge, enabling individuals, communities and peoples to achieve their full potential in promoting their sustainable development and improving their quality of life (emphasis added)*, premised on the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and respecting fully and upholding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights".

The crucial accent here is on information/knowledge enablement of all, in their everyday community life. Therefore, in order to transform Karnataka to be a vibrant knowledge society, it is important for us to look beyond the opportunities which are emerging in the formal economy and education sectors; to understand and examine the transformative knowledge possibilities which have opened up vis-a-vis the daily lives of people and communities. It is with such a vision in mind that the idea of *Samudaya Jnana Kendra* was conceptualised by the *Karnataka Jnana Aayoga*.

As the new vision of a knowledge society is largely based on the observations of the paradigmatic impact of new Information & Communication Technologies (ICT) most consequent changes on our social structures and institutions are driven by the private-sector logic of autonomous development that has dominated the field of ICTs. However, for the present task at our hand to build a 'knowledge society for all' in Karnataka , it is crucial to complement these autonomous, private-sector led developments with some appropriate government- and/or community-led actions, initiatives, and possibly, new institutions. This insight is implicit in the envisioning of the *Samudaya Jnana Kendras.*

These *Kendras* are envisioned as the conceptual anchor and the physical embodiment of this idea of 'knowledge for everyone' in the lived community context : an idea of knowledge that is not limited by any boundaries of institutions or disciplines, Knowledge here is seen as a live community flow of ideas and beliefs, and of information and learning. Of course, all of us greatly rely on and participate in such community knowledge flows. This could be in the form of knowledge regarding livelihood related activities and practices, participation in informal systems for community governance, accessing mass media (including newspapers, books, films and T.V. programmes), participation in community events, the shared experiences of cultural observances and even participation in informal social interactions (which includes just chatting with friends). There are some existing institutions that attempt to invigorate knowledge flows at the local community level- like local libraries, development communication interventions addressing specific constituencies such as the agricultural extension system, and we must not forget, the complex, internal (or local- internal) institutions embedded in each community. However, at present, most of these institutions operate in silos : external interventions very often are unconnected to internal cultural institutions that impact knowledge flows. Even within the external efforts, the focus is more on addressing a specific aspect pertaining to community knowledge, rather than looking at the needs of the entire context, in a holistic manner. The *Samudaya Jnana Kendra* is posited as an attempt to address this unsatisfactory manner.

This report is devoted to a thorough examination of the idea of the *Samudaya Jnana Kendras* : What should be the role of the *Samudaya Jnana Kendras?* What is their nature, and what are the functions they will perform? What would be their relationship to existing information/ learning/knowledge initiatives and other governance activities of the State? How should these centres be established and managed? Part 2 of this report reponds directly to these questions. Part 1 outlines the logic guiding our responses - which draws from our primary and secondary research in the following areas:

community level assessments of information, learning and knowledge processes in two districts of the State, a review of existing State interventions in the area of information, learning and knowledge as well as a review of some new age convergent models for information and service delivery.

Our area of inquiry in this research study is limited to 'community information, learning and knowledge (ILK)' processes. We arrived at this composite terminology for ILK after careful deliberation. This is because of the conceptually fluid space across these terms in the context of an emergent knowledge society , where terms like data, information, knowledge, learning and education often get used with overlapping if not interchangeable meaning. We use the ILK term as it has the advantage of avoiding contestations that can ensue when a single term like information or knowledge is used; for instance, “can various public information related issues be included under the term 'knowledge?'' or inversely, “is 'information' an appropriate term to capture traditional knowledge or library related activities?”. Also the ILK term clearly excludes more technical aspects like data, and, formal learning and knowledge activities that get covered under 'education'. In our field inquiries we found that community members and intermediary development actors were able to understand the composite area that we designated as 'community ILK processes' as being one unified space, which has a conceptual and practical coherence. We found that this term evoked appropriate responses about the issues that this study was seeking to investigate; such as, what kind of intermediaries and institutions should be involved in this area? , what kind of gains and outcomes can be expected?, and what risks are likely and what precautions are required?

Making conceptual distinctions and establishing coherences between these slightly differing terms-information,learning and knowledge - from an academic point of view is not the purpose of this research report. However, these summary reflections on the ILK continuum along with the findings of this report may help one appreciate why a convergence among different ILK functions and activities at the community level is required, and also understand how it can be achieved. It may also be, correspondingly, useful in recognising certain boundaries between the ILK space and functions and some other social, economic and political pursuits of governments and communities, such as service delivery and local politics.

ILK processes are obviously the ones most directly influenced by these knowledge society changes. Formal processes in the area of education are undergoing very significant changes, but that is not what we are most concerned here about. Our point of departure for this report is that the knowledge

society is centrally characterised by a pervasion of new ILK possibilities outside such formal spaces and institutions of knowledge and learning.

Organisational training used to be a small part of corporate life; however, knowledge management processes are quite central to corporate practices today. Some enterprises even call themselves knowledge enterprises. Knowledge is suddenly the most precious organisational resource, even more than financial capital. Its propertisation represents the central tenet of the dominant model of the knowledge economy. However, what we are interested here is in how new changes influence the informal processes of ILK in ordinary social situations (outside large organisational systems like corporates and governments). All of us can see innumerable changes in our own lives, and of those around us. There are two generic characteristics of these changes or new opportunities. They are almost all provided by the market, which caters only to those who can pay. In any case, markets definitively cannot provide adequate opportunities in respect of 'public goods'. The second characteristic of the new opportunities in the knowledge society is that most of them are individualistic and individualising, because our identity as a consumer is individual (for there is not so much accent on the commuity aspect).

This brings us to the area of our central concern here – the development arena. Development is about the more marginalised groups and people (which could be a whole country together as a unit), and it is about planned interventions towards positive social change. Therefore, the key question is : What are the new ILK opportunities in the development arena beyond the impact ICTs have on formal education, in its various forms?

We must also look at the rather elaborate field of development communication, of which various communication efforts of the State in the area of development are an important part. Any attempt towards such fundamental redesign of important institutions, as our report asprires to, should first revisit the 'basics', examining the primary objectives and the primary constituencies that these institutions are supposed to serve. In this regard, we conducted extensive field work in two districts of Karnataka, Mandya and Koppal, in order to understand people's needs vis-a-vis, and orientations to, information, learning and knowledge. The insights from this field work forms the first section of Part 1 of the report.

The second section of Part 1 of the report visits some key government programmes in the ILK arena, with a focus on the state of Karnataka. Agriculture outreach efforts, Continuing Education programmes and rural libraries are specifically discussed. While the State's development communication efforts cannot be declared entirely as a failure, it can safely be said that they have run into an impasse for some decades now. This can be seen in the various reformulations under-way, including attempts at incorporating ICTs. However, ICTs are mentioned in policy documents as an add-on without any vision of employing them for the required structural innovations that can address the key limitations of existing efforts in this area.

The third section of Part 1 looks at some new-age initiatives that use ICT-enabled possibilities as a point of departure to design new institutional forms, mostly in the shape of an information and services centre that provides a convergence platform for a number of different development information and services needs. The following initiatives will specifically be examined: Common Service Centres of Department of IT, Government of India, *Akshaya* of Government of Kerala, MSSRF's Village Knowledge Centres, and Mission Convergence of the Government of Delhi.

However, to a large extent, these initiatives still appear to be experimental. Each of these initiatives stresses and validates (or proves non-viable) different kinds of new possibilities. This is to be expected, since they all are bold experiments designed at a time when there were few precedents, if any. However, the present moment may be the right time to pause and look at the lessons learnt in these new initiatives, and examine them against the problems with the mainstream 'traditional' ILK initiatives. This can help us devise new strategies, which could hopefully transform the practice of development. (Such has been the disruptive and re-constitutive impact of ICTs on our social institutions that placing these expectations from new ICT based initiatives seems appropriate.) The evidence from other areas, where the impact of ICTs has relatively matured, is that it is still the deliberate human or social choice element that determines whether the undeniable potential of knowledge society possibilities is indeed harnessed for positive social change or not. In this regard, this report will merely point to some attractive new possibilities in the area of community knowledge, and the conditions for making them come true. The required larger socio-political actions are beyond the scope of this report, or perhaps even ability, to forecast.

The report will, however, attempt to cast these new opportunities in contextual terms, providing viable institutional designs. Part 2 of the report lays out the proposed model of setting up *Samudaya*

Jnana Kendras in the villages of Karnataka in considerable detail. It includes the possible functions of the *Kendras*, described in some detail in the first section of Part 2 of the report. The second section of Part 2 of the report deals with community level governance issues for these *Kendras* and the larger macro institutional system required to support them, including the relationship of the *Kendras* with various government agencies.

Presented with the task of writing this report, we had the more obvious option of simply describing what an information or knowledge centre in a community should look like, what it should do and who should run it. In fact, when we started, we thought that we would largely be doing so, while also mentioning the required policy and programmatic support for such centres. However, as we investigated the phenomenon, we saw that both the need and opportunity for change was at a larger structural level of the government-community system. It was required to address the larger system of ILK processes and functions at the community level and those of the governments (and other development agencies), and situate a proposed new community institution of *Samudaya Jnana Kendra* in such a larger canvas of social & institutional change. It is not only because our examination of the present ILK scene showed that paradigmatic change was urgently needed, and that simply setting up a new institution in the existing setting was not going to really work. It was as much because all around us we could indeed see structural changes taking place, including in the governance realm. There is an opportunity for thinking in terms of significant institutional redesigning. Also, very likely, as knowledge society developments in our institutions go through the early period of ferment and rapid change, they will soon petrify in their new mutated forms, making changes once again more difficult.

Often, being in the middle of rapid changes, it is difficult to judge them. This may be true of the present times, in terms of the institutional shifts that are happening around us, including in the governance realm. We need to first understand these shifts in order to leverage them appropriately. The State's informational policies are still industrial age – with publicity as its main purpose and broadcasting (in the larger sense, which includes print based strategies of a mass-production kind) as its principal method. (Interestingly, the key nodal agencies at the state and central government levels are Department of Information and Publicity and Ministry of Information and *Broadcasting.* As interestingly, today, these departments are not close to being as powerful as they used to be.) In the information age, both these terms (publicity and broadcasting) have limited realms and relevance. The government however is yet to figure out the informational policies relevant to a knowledge

society. At the same time, as we can see in numerous initiatives, different agencies of the governments are juggling new possibilities, but largely in an uninformed way. A focussed and informed approach to these possibilities is a task that, in our view, the *Karnataka Jnana Aayoga* should centrally address itself to. Our report would hopefully make a humble contribution in this regard. The idea of *Samudaya Jnana Kendras* should, therefore, become a locus of new informational thinking in the governments, heralding a new community-centric approach to ILK needs of the communities, and to the ILK functions of governments. We have therefore been bold in our recommendations to propose a new initiative, *Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan*, which will represent such a new thinking and approach.

Our proposal is far-reaching and descriptive to a good level of detail of a new institutional model in the Community ILK space, of which *Samudaya Jnana Kendras* will be the centrepiece. This hopefully, will help trigger new thinking in this important area. Such was also the intention of the *Karnataka Jnana Ayoga* in commissioning this work. On the other hand, we also recommend some immediate practical steps forward for ongoing learning on how the conception of *Samudaya Jnana Kendra* can actually unfold at the community levels. We describe the kind of pilot project that can be taken up in this regard, and the conditions for successfully doing do. It is also important that thinking and deliberations on larger structural changes should begin at the same time as the pilots are initiated.

We end this introduction to our report by quoting how the new thinking (and changes) are showing up not only at the larger institutional level but also at the community level. A generation ago, being educated was the thing that separated average rural folk from the knowledgeable gentry. This was the general way in which grassroots communities looked at the world. Things may be changing now. One of the participants in a focus group discussion at Mandya said rather emphatically; *vidyavantaragi ira beku antha illa, buddhivantaragi iddarae saaku* (it is not necessary to be educated, it is enough to be wise). This can be taken as a negative comment on the way education is looked at now, compared to a generation or two ago, in its often limited relevance to practical issues. However, it is at least as significantly also a positive comment on how, in the current information and knowledge paradigm, where there are already multiple informal sources and processes of ILK, from TV to development communication to one's mobile networks, wisdom or knowledge is spoken of in a more holistic way. It is as likely to be developed through informal community processes as through the formal ones of education.

When we discussed the concept of *Samudaya Jnana Kendra* with communities and development workers, we were ourselves surprised how, in a context otherwise quite cynical of experiences with governments and other development agencies, everyone immediately connected with the idea. Most could understand and relate to it it rather well, and we felt an immediate agreement among those present that such a thing is very much needed. When we talked with people associated with governance and development at other places/levels as well, including those in senior positions, there never seemed to be any basic disagreement with the idea of some kind of community knowledge centres. The idea appeals to everyone, from the idealists to the more practically oriented. This makes us feel strongly that there is something very powerful in this conception. How to make it work of course remains the key question.

With so much changing at deep structural levels in our societies, it is perhaps time to think big! We need to explore how the evident institutional and social shifts that are taking place around us can be guided in the right directions (w.r.t strengthening community knowledge), and what is the role of the governments and other development agencies in this regard .

IT for Change

Bengaluru.

Part 1. Exploring an institutional model for *Samudaya Jnana Kendras*: Background document with field studies

Introduction

Part one of the report consists of our field research in three sections. The first reports the findings of our direct interactions with rural communities and development workers in the two districts of Mandya and Koppal. The second section then moves on to examining the experience of some large scale interventions of governments in the ILK space. The agricultural extension system, continuing education programmes and rural libraries initiative are discussed, with a focus on Karnataka. This is based on secondary research as well as field visits and interactions with key government officials in Bengaluru. The third section looks at some new initiatives that use the ICT opportunity for convergent information and service delivery. Four case studies are discussed in this section – Common Service Centres of the Government of India, the *Akshaya* initiative of the Government of Kerala, MSSR Foundation's Village Knowledge Centres in Tamil Nadu, and Mission Convergence initiative of the Government of Delhi.

The analysis in each section focusses on ILK needs and processes of communities, the existing institutional responses to these needs, the gaps and lessons as well as new opportunities that can be helpful in building an appropriate institutional model for *Samudaya Jnana Kendras* in Karnataka.

Section 1.A. Assessing information, learning and knowledge processes at the community level: An experiential account

People's knowledge needs are spread over a spectrum of information and learning requirements. We therefore use the composite term, information, learning and knowledge (ILK). An effective mapping of ILK processes on the ground has to be as much informed by collective needs and social values and norms, as by immediate individual interests. Recognizing this, we developed a community level ILK assessment framework, with the following components: articulation of ILK needs, the state of existing ILK infrastructure in the community, individual and institutional ILK skills in the community and the impact of mass media on community level ILK processes. Using this framework, we conducted a participatory ILK assessment study in the districts of Mandya and Koppal. As part of the study, we also elicited ideas from the participants around various aspects of designing a model for the Samudaya Jnana Kendras (SJKs): their location, nature of activities, ownership and operations. In addition to the community level ILK assessment study, we held two consultations with development workers and community leaders in Mysore and Koppal to obtain their insights regarding the SJKs. This section of the report discusses the main findings from our community level ILK assessment study and the insights emerging from the public consultations.

1. Introduction

Developing an understanding of ILK processes on the ground was the starting point for our attempt to develop an institutional model for *Samudaya Jnana Kendras* (SJKs).

In order to effectively understand ILK processes on the ground, we found it important to keep the following issues in mind:

1. ILK processes are mutually re-enforcing and closely interlinked. It is difficult to develop a taxonomy or an analytical framework that can clearly indicate where, for instance, an information process ends and a learning process begins. This means that ILK processes need to be mapped together for effective understanding.

2. ILK processes cannot be captured using a conception of information, learning, and knowledge that is built upon a simplistic foundation of disparate individual articulations. Individual articulations of ILK processes alone are unlikely to be able to give us a complete

understanding because some elements of these processes are always obscure to the individual subjects whose perceptions are likely to be partly clouded because of their contextual embedding. Two important limiting elements in this regard are; a lack of appreciation and understanding of the full range of ILK possibilities owing to lack of exposure, and to the fact that one's experience by and large determines one's expectations. Also, many ILK processes have a collective societal orientation that may escape simplistic, individual interests based, appreciation and articulation. Hence, ILK processes have to be mapped at the level of the social, and not just at the level of the individual. Such mapping also requires a strong element of a 'what-if', forward-looking exploration. It has to be as much informed by collective needs and social values and norms, as by immediate individual interests.

Keeping these aspects in mind, we tried to develop a research framework that could effectively assess information, learning and knowledge needs and processes on the ground.

2. Developing a research framework for assessing ILK processes: Broadening our understanding of the 'informational'

As pointed out in the introductory section, there has not been much work on explicitly mapping the information, learning and knowledge continuum. Therefore, we tried to examine literature about mapping ground level informational processes that could help us in designing an appropriate research framework for our study. It must be noted here that the term 'information' or informational' does in practice cover a good part of what we may include under ILK processes. We found the community information ecosystem framework developed by the Knights Commission, in the USA, especially useful (Knight Foundation 2009). The elements of the community information ecosystem framework are briefly described in the box below.

Box 1. The three elements of the community information ecosystem framework

Supply: Availability of information in a community

The three components of supply related to the availability of:

1. Government services and information,
2. Community news
3. Self-improvement and quality-of-life information

Skills: Individual and institutional skills for accessing and exchanging information

The community skills that enable a healthy flow of information include:

1. Individuals' ability to access information,
2. Individuals' ability to exchange information, and
3. Governments' ability to exchange information.

Infrastructure: Existing channels to deliver and exchange information

The six components of a healthy information infrastructure relate to the existence, strength and relevance of:

1. Media
2. Broadband Internet
3. Libraries
4. Schools
5. Civic intermediaries
6. Government

Source: Knight Foundation 2011:Community Information Toolkit: Building Stronger Communities through Information Exchange

While the Knight Foundation's framework uses the term "information" (rather than 'information, learning and knowledge' that we prefer to use), it still provides a good understanding of the key issues and processes involved, and has helped us develop our framework to map ILK processes on the ground. After some deliberation based on the leads provided by the Knight Foundation's framework, we designed a community level ILK assessment framework with the following components :

1. Articulation of ILK needs
2. State of existing ILK infrastructure[1] in the community
3. Individual and institutional ILK capacities in the community
4. Impact of mass media on community level ILK processes

Once the elements of the ILK assessment framework were in place, we had to identify an appropriate methodology for conducting this assessment. As we recognise that ILK processes are context-specific and have to be understood at the level of the social, we naturally turned to the rich

1 ILK infrastructure is understood as existing means for facilitating information, learning and knowledge processes in the community.

qualitative research tradition for identification of an appropriate methodology. We finally decided to adopt a participatory research methodology for two reasons:

a. ILK processes can be fully understood only by exploring the viewpoints of individuals embedded in a social context at an aggregate level, to glean insights about the overall scenario. We wanted an insider understanding that we could build together with community members.
b. We were primarily interested in conducting an ILK assessment on the ground, in order to develop a knowledge intervention (the SJK). For a research study whose principal aim was to develop an effective knowledge intervention, we thought it was ethical to use a participatory methodology that would also give us the space to discuss the proposed intervention (SJK) with members of the community, without raising expectations but seeking their reflections on such an intervention.

Within the participatory research paradigm, the method that we opted for was Focus Group Discussion. The following reasons guided our choice:

a. A wide range of views around ILK processes had to be collected, to map divergence effectively.
b. The research was mostly exploratory, and sought to uncover new issues around community level ILK processes.
c. We wanted to understand debates at the community level regarding the issues pertaining to ILK processes.
d. Carefully formed Focus Groups help in effectively managing power hierarchies at the community level from disrupting a participatory research process.

Guided by this research framework, we decided to conduct an ILK assessment study in the two districts of Mandya and Koppal. We acknowledge that the two districts certainly cannot be representative of the entire State, but within the available time frame and resources, this was the best course of action that could be undertaken.

The choice of districts was guided by the following reasons :

1. It was considered best to select one district each from the northern and southern parts of the State, to ensure representativeness of the sample.
2. Availability of appropriate partner NGOs to facilitate on-the-ground needs assessment studies

We defined ten groups, keeping in mind the need for homogeneous group composition to ensure effective participation, and avoiding the formation of mixed groups because of the "peacock effect" (the tendency of men to dominate women in discussions in highly patriarchal communities).

The ten Focus Groups that were covered in both districts were, broadly:

1. Young men in the age group of 16-20 years who are continuing their education
2. Young men in the age group of 16-20 years who have discontinued their education
3. Young unmarried women in the age group of 15-20 years who have discontinued their education
4. Young women in the age group of 15-20 years who are continuing their formal education
5. Male farmers with medium and large landholdings
6. Male farmers with marginal and small landholdings
7. Women who are heading their households
8. Married women who are not the main earning members in their households
9. Self employed men
10. Elderly men and women who are living alone or heading their households

The ten groups were formed keeping in mind the need to interact with community members from diverse socio-economic backgrounds in order to effectively map the range of ILK needs in the community, and to ensure that the voices of marginalised groups were given adequate attention.

The selection of group members was made by our partner organisations in the districts – *Vikasana* in Mandya and *Samuha* in Koppal , on the basis of a document prepared by us, specifying guidelines for group formation. This document is attached as **Annexure 1.** Since we relied on purposive selection of FGD participants by our NGO partners in the two districts studied, there may have been some bias in participant selection which we acknowledge. Also, in Mandya district, where we conducted the FGDs in the villages of the participants, it was difficult to prevent on-lookers from disrupting the

FGDs and sometimes it was not possible even to strictly maintain the homogeneity of the group. These concerns were addressed in Koppal by holding the FGDs in a room on the *Samuha* campus, instead of the villages of the participants.

The Focus Group Discussions were conducted on the basis of a discussion guide (common to all groups), which aimed at sparking off a discussion on the group members' perception of their ILK needs , their understanding of ILK processes in the community as well as their ideas on the SJK proposal. Recognising that articulations of ILK needs and processes in response to direct questioning is difficult for many groups in the community, the discussion guide adopted an activity based approach. The discussion guide is attached as **Annexure 2**. Participant details are enclosed as **Annexure 3**.

Focus Group Discussions constituted an important part of the methodology for the community level ILK assessments

3. Our findings from the ILK assessment study in Mandya and Koppal

The table below offers a glimpse into the developmental profile of the two districts, based on data from the Karnataka Human Development Report 2005, which helps in contextualising the findings from the Focus Group Discussions.

Nature of indicator	*Mandya*	*Koppal*
Human Development Index Rank (2001)	19	26
Percentage of population living below the poverty line based on NSSO survey of 1999-2000	16.60%	N.A
Work participation rate (Census of India 2001)	47.70%	46.40%
Literacy Rate (Census of India 2001)	61.50%	54.10%
Literacy Rate (SC) (Census of India 2001)	54.63%	42.11%
Literacy Rate (ST) (Census of India 2001)	39.10%	47.50%
Female Literacy Rate (Census of India 2001)	51.53%	39.61%

% of habitations which have primary school within 1 km Radius (2002)	96.39%	99.42
Life Expectancy at Birth	62.9	63.5
Sex Ratio (Census of India 2001)	985 to 1000	982 to 1000
Infant Mortality Rate	62 per 1000	65 per 1000
% of rural households having safe access to all three: drinking water, toilet and electricity (Census of India 2001)	14.74%	7.00%

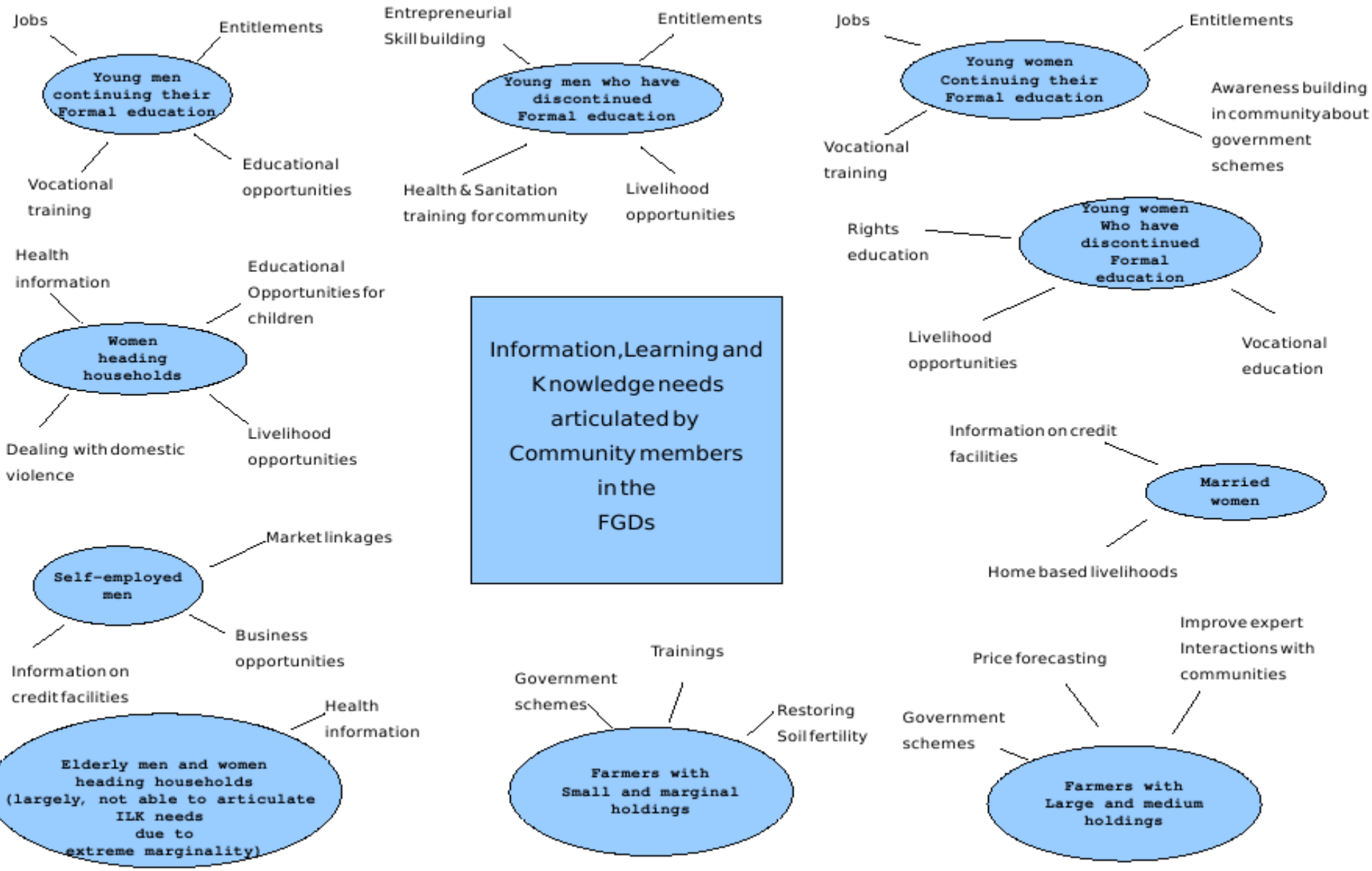
The group-wise findings are summarised in Table 1 below, followed by a discussion of the main issues that emerge under each aspect of our four-point framework .

Table 1 - Main findings about community level ILK processes, from ILK assessments in Mandya and Koppal Districts

Details of Focus Group		Young men in the age group of 16-20 years who are continuing their formal education	Young men in the age group of 16-20 years who have discontinued their formal education	Young women in the age group of 15-20 years continuing their formal education	Young unmarried women in the age group of 15-20 years who have discontinued their formal education	Married women who are not the primary earning members in their households	Male farmers with large and medium farm holdings	Male farmers with small and marginal landholdings	Self employed men (primarily running small non-farm enterprises)	Elderly men and women living alone or heading households	Women who are heading their households
	Number of Participants	11	9	9	13	9	5	12	9	17	7
	Age of Participants	20-21 years	18-23 years	19-20 years	19-25 years	25-50 years	NA	30 years and above	NA	65-80 years	28-45 years
Mandya District (July 18-22 2011)	**ILK needs articulated**	Information on obtaining entitlements is neccessary. Information on educational opportunities other than graduate degrees is important. Information on vocational training is important.	Need information on livelihood options beyond street vending, agriculture, driving, brick factory work and automobile servicing.	Need information about entitlements and availing schemes for students. Need information about English courses Need information about skill building courses after Class X	Need information about employment opportunities that are available in spite of their lack of formal education. Need information on how to take actions to negotitate with government about inflation Need information that can empower them while making marriage choices – laws on legal age for marriage, anti-dowry laws,etc.	Information about home-based livelihood opportunities to supplement family income is important. Information about Bank loan facilities for starting home based enterprises would be very useful.	Price forecasting services will be helpful Information about setting up Non-farm enterprises is required. Education counseling about Higher Education options that can enhance employability is important.	Expert advice on restoring soil fertility is very important. Expert advice throughout the crop production process is required. Information about education opportunities that enhance employment opportunities are essential.	Information about market linkages is required. Information about business opportunities is important.	Their experience of marginalisation was so intense that they were able to articulate only material benefits they require to alleviate their situation, and were not able to see information availability as an empowering condition.	Information about livelihood opportunities will be very useful. Information about educational opportunities for children will be very useful.
	State of existing ILK infrastructure in the community	There is a lot of corruption in the local governance structures. Libraries are closed most of the time.	Deeply distrust panchayat as many feel members take advantage of their lack of income generating opportunities, to pull them into political mobilization drives. Feel that schools are not sensitive to work that children have to perform in agricultural households and the consequent pressures.	Hobli Level Libraries are very useful for students. Aware of Raita Samparka Kendras and Self Help Group income generation trainings. Feelthat the Gram Panchayat could function as an effective centre for information about entitlements if it is more citizen centric and accountable. Feel that village level schools need to improve so that at college level, village students can be at par with city students	Not aware of the government infrastructure in the community apart from anganwadi and PHC. Consider NGO working in the local area as source to be tapped for information.	Aware of the role of panchayat and government departments and the information about entitlements they can provide, but consider that a male domain.	Quality of agricultural extension needs to be improved. Raita Samparka Kendras need to function better.	Raita Samparka Kendras need to function more effectively. Department of Agriculture needs to plan trainings keeping in mind the cropping season	The lack of a facilitative infrastructure was identified as a problem.	IIK infrastructure was not a point of reflection.	Friends and neighbors in the community, the school teacher and NGOs were considered as important reliable sources of information that was available in the community.

Mandya district(contd.)	**Individual and Institutional ILK skills in the community**	Governmental department officials exhibit arrogance in their dealings with the public. Community members, including students, need awareness on tackling corruption and demanding entitlements.	Very critical of the panchayat's lack of accountability to the community. Find that there is no facilitative service available for helping them access schemes and loans for livelihoods.	Feel that community members if provided a little more awareness about their rights, will be able to effective source entitlement information from government institutions.	Feel a lack of facilitatory mechanisms in the community to help them get information and entitlements	Feels that information skills are posessed by the male members of the community.	Very critical about lack of panchayat's accountability to the community. Concerned about lack of institutional information about supplementary livelihoods.	Panchayats need to be more accountable to the community	Critical of corruption in implementation and delivery of schemes.	Very critical of the panchayat's lack of accountability.	There was no perspective on information availability as a possible consdition for improving their present situation, probably because of their extreme marginalisation.
	Impact of mass media on community level ILK processes	T.V is a main ILK node as radio is full of music and cooking show.	Find TV very useful to learn about current affairs and also read newspapers.	Books, newspapers and T.V help one keep abreast of what's happening in the world.	Did not mention any mass media ILK nodes which they regularly tapped in to, and were not aware.	Consider T.V an important source of entertainment and information, village does not library and the women do not have access to newspapers.	This group considered the reluctance of community members to take action by tapping into ILK nodes the major problem. Hence, they were not keen to reflect on external influence on ILK nodes, including the impact of mass media.	This group considered the reluctance of community members to take action by tapping into ILK nodes the major problem. Hence, they were not keen to reflect on external influence on ILK nodes, including the impact of mass media.	This was not a point of reflection.	This was not a point of reflection.	This was not a point of reflection.

Details of Focus Group		Young men in the age group of 16-20 years who are continuing their formal education	Young men in the age group of 16-20 years who have discontinued their formal education	Young women in the age group of 15-20 years continuing their formal education	Young unmarried women in the age group of 15-20 years who have discontinued their formal education	Married women who are not the primary earning members in their households	Male farmers with large and medium farm holdings	Male farmers with small and marginal landholdings	Self employed men (primarily running small non-farm enterprises)	Elderly men and women living alone or heading households	Women who are heading their households
Details of Focus Group	Number of Participants	11	15	13	12	11	11	10	15	This FGD was not conducted in Koppal District.	13
	Age of Participants	15-20 years	18-22 years	15-22 years	14-20 years	NA	NA	25-65 years	NA		30-65 years
Koppal District (July 26-28 2011)	ILK needs articulated	Need information about preparing for competitive examinations. Need information about job opportunities and job advertisements. Need information about learning to use internet effectively. Need information about administrative service selection.	Need information and expert advice at various stages of crop production, and about agriculture in general. Need information about dairying. Need information about departmental and *panchayat* welfare schemes. Need information and training that will build business acumen. Community level hygiene and sanitation training is important.	Need information about scholarships/education loans. Need information about higher education opportunities that will enhance employability Need information about welfare schemes and eligibility criterion which needs to be disseminated to the entire community.	Information about livelihood options is required. Information about vocational educational courses is very important.	Information about non-agricultural livelihoods must be available. This group did not perceive information availability as empowering, as they felt their mobility and reproductive rights severely crippled by patriarchal structures of the household.	Information about government schemes for farmers is required. This group did not trust expert agricultural advice as their experience had shown that such advice was not grounded. This group problematised their situation of agricultural distress as a "lack of inputs and services"- hence they did not respond much to a probe about their information demands.	Information about the various schemes of the Department of Agriculture is required. Trainings related to agriculture, horticulture and animal husbandry are necessary	Information about how to avail credit for small businesses and developing business plans for dealing with competition from big businesses was considered the most important issue. This group was able to identify this gap, but did not articulate it as an information gap. The group problematised it as a services and support infrastructure.		Information on starting petty business enterprises is important. Information on dealing with alcoholism in the family is required. Information on dealing with violence against women in households, is important. Information about gynecological health is required.
	State of existing ILK infrastructure in the community	Need a library with good books. Schools and colleges need adequate staffing.	Library is not very useful. CEC used to be a meeting place and recreation centre for youth, but has been shut down There is information hoarding by *panchayat* members and officers	Need a library that functions well. Village needs internet access Aware of government departmental information outreach	Panchayat is a crucial source of information about welfare schemes and entitlements and vocational training, but it is easier to get such information and benefits if one has personal influence. High school in the village may be a boost for girls' education. Library is a male space, and girls do not visit it.	*Panchayat* and government departments are the key component of the community's information infrastructure but they are the domain of men.	*Panchayat* and gram sabhe are the key sources of information but they are riddled with corruption.	*Panchayat* and *gram sabhe* are the key components in the information infrastructure of the community but are riddled with corruption. Library is not used by most people in the community.	The group did not consider information infrastructure important in influencing their life chances positively.		*Panchayat* and *gram sabhe* are important components in the community's information infrastructure but they are male dominated and corruption ridden.
	Individual and Institutional ILK skills in the community	Need to collectivise to improve panchayat accountability	Need to improve *panchayat* accountability Need to build self-confidence so that they are also able to find the information they require, like youth from the city.	Need to collectivise to take effective action to improve *panchayat* accountability Community members need awareness about the importance of girls' education	Increased support from family and community can increase the information skills of young women.	Need to raise awareness among family and community members to improve the life chances of young girls.	Need to improve *panchayat* and government accountability.	Scheme implementation is very flawed, and there needs to be greater accountability mechanisms built in at grass roots level.	The group identified a lack in their skill sets on dealing with financial planning and business planning.		*Sangha* membership is seen as a way of enhancing information skills, and enabling one to gain entry into male dominated spaces.
	Impact of mass media on community level ILK processes	Need access to newspapers. Need more information on career opportunities. Some TV programmes are a good source of information such as history programmes.	T.V is a good source of information. Films are not such a reliable source.	Newspapers and T.V help in keeping oneself informed, at present.	T.V is the most common source of information as newspapers are not available in all villages.	T.V is a good source of information. However, A lot of women said that they watched T.V for entertainment mainly.	The ETV programme for farmers is a good source of information. Radio phone-in programmes often are irrelevant.	T.V. is the only source of some useful information. Newspapers are not available.	T.V. By the few who owned it was considered a relevant source of information.		T.V news is a good source of information


Jobs
Entitlements
Young men continuing their Formal education
Vocational training
Educational opportunities
Entrepreneurial Skill building
Entitlements
Young men who have discontinued Formal education
Health & Sanitation training for community
Livelihood opportunities
Jobs
Entitlements
Young women Continuing their Formal education
Vocational training
Awareness building in community about government schemes
Health information
Educational Opportunities for children
Women heading households
Dealing with domestic violence
Livelihood opportunities
Information, Learning and Knowledge needs articulated by Community members in the FGDs
Rights education
Young women Who have discontinued Formal education
Livelihood opportunities
Vocational education
Information on credit facilities
Married women
Home based livelihoods
Market linkages
Self-employed men
Business opportunities
Information on credit facilities
Health information
Elderly men and women heading households (largely, not able to articulate ILK needs due to extreme marginality)
Trainings
Government schemes
Restoring Soil fertility
Farmers with Small and marginal holdings
Price forecasting
Improve expert Interactions with communities
Government schemes
Farmers with Large and medium holdings

a. Articulation of ILK needs

Quite predictably, in almost all the groups, the articulation of ILK needs was at the level of 'information seeking'. The dominant information needs articulated across groups were : information about welfare schemes and eligibility criteria, information about vocational education, information about credit facilities, information about improving income from agricultural livelihoods and information about livelihood opportunities: which are mainly instrumental information. Some groups that were extremely marginalised, could not even perceive the relevance of talking about 'information'. For instance, the group of elderly men and women living alone or heading their households in Mandya, could only articulate their feeling of extreme dis-empowerment because of marginalisation by the macro social structures as well as by their own family members. They could express their problems, but not information needs. They considered the FGD a futile exercise to participate in, if it were not going to directly alleviate their situation. Holding this FGD was a difficult and traumatic experience for the researchers as well as the participants. In fact, we decided against conducting a FGD with this group, in Koppal district.

Some other groups who perceived their situation as dis-empowering, however, did articulate their desire for improving their life chances, in the language of information needs. For instance, in Mandya, the group of young women in the age group of 16-20 years who had discontinued their education we spoke to , said that they needed information that would help them get married without dowry. The group of women heading their households that we spoke to in Koppal said that they wanted information that would help in curing the alcoholism of their husbands as well as information that would help them protect themselves from domestic violence. These groups expressed a strong desire to transform their life context, but were often not able to clearly recognise what would help them make the movement forward, from their present dis-empowered situation.

Young men, both those continuing their education and those who have not, and young women continuing their education, were able to think of ILK processes stepping outside their immediate life context : This could probably be because of their relatively empowered situation when compared to other groups in the rural context. For instance, young women continuing their education who we interviewed in Koppal were able to identify a community need for trainings in hygiene and sanitation. Young men who have discontinued their education in Koppal, though disadvantaged when compared to educated youth from their communities, were still able to recognize the importance of information that could help community members in entitlement seeking and ensuring accountability of *panchayat* members.

Young women continuing their education were able to think of ILK processes stepping outside their immediate life context.

Married women who were not the primary earning members in the family seemed to be in a patriarchal double bind where they accepted the devaluation of their labour for the household, and also found it more difficult to comprehend and articulate the empowering possibilities offered by ILK processes, especially greater mobility.

b. State of existing ILK infrastructure in the community

In Mandya as well as in Koppal, a deep distrust of local governance structures permeated across various groups. *Panchayats* were spoken of as being corrupt, male dominated and oppressive to the extremely marginalised as well as largely, non-accountable to the community. ILK interventions of the government, such as libraries, Continuing Education Centres and *Raita Samparka Kendras* were considered inefficient and not very useful. In the case of agriculture, there was general distrust of expert advice among farmers who considered it very context-irrelevant. As one of the participants in the FGD with large

and medium farmers in Koppal observed, "*I listened to this FM radio programme where an official from the horticulture department asked us to call in with questions if we have any. The joint director answered the call. I asked him where I can get seeds for so and so crop. And he answered vaguely – you might most probably get them in this town ...um... why don't you try at the nearest hobli. So I told him, I can get this information from any chap sitting at the bus stop, I didn't need to ask you! All these degree holders are a burden to the world*". This alienation of formal knowledge spaces in society from the local context came across in another FGD, in a slightly different context. Young men who had discontinued their education, in the course of a FGD in Mandya, shared that they stopped going to school as they felt the teacher had no understanding of the context and the everyday problems of boys from agricultural families. It is interesting to note that for some of the marginalised groups, informal spaces outside the formal, government created ones were seen as important for the fulfillment of ILK processes. For instance, the group of women heading households in Mandya listed NGOs , and their social networks consisting of other women in the community, and sometimes even their children's teachers, as crucial in helping them meet their ILK needs.

c. Individual and institutional ILK capacities in the community

Panchayats and local governance structures were considered to have a non transparent mode of functioning, which hampered any effective ILK processes emerging around them. At the individual level, ILK skills were considered a prerogative of individuals who occupied higher positions in the local power hierarchy and individuals disempowered by their structural location could not imagine how they could acquire similar skills. For instance, married women who were not the primary earning members, as well as women heading their households, seemed to accept it as inevitable that men possessed greater skills in information and entitlement seeking.

d. Impact of Mass Media on community level ILK processes

TV was identified as an important node in ILK processes in the community, by many of the groups in the study, though some groups in Mandya commented on the fact that T.V content was not impartial, because of the channels' race for TRPs (Television Rating Points). Youth also identified newspapers as a key ILK node, but their lack of availability at the village level was repeatedly mentioned. Radio was not considered important, and some groups mentioned that radio content was usually irrelevant.

4. Ideas on the SJK model that emerged from the FGDs

In each of the FGDs conducted, we also elicited ideas from the participants on their thoughts around the following aspects of designing a model for the SJKs.

1. Location
2. Nature of activities
3. Ownership
4. Operator

Table 2 on the next page highlights the main issues surrounding the design of the SJK model that were highlighted by the participants of the FGDs, followed by a detailed discussion.

Table 2 - SJK design issues emerging from ILK assessments (FGDs) in Mandya and Koppal Districts

Groups	Mandya District (July 18-22 2011)				Koppal District (July 26-28 2011)			
	Location	Nature of activities	Ownership	Operator	Location	Nature of activities	Ownership	Operator
Young men in the age group of 16-20 years who are continuing their formal education	Anywhere in the village.	Information about gram panchayat schemes for youth, and information about other welfare schemes must be available. It must also provide information outside of our textbooks. It must have non-text based resources for the illiterate.	Does not matter as long as there is an information culture devoid of arrogance.	Does not matter as long as there is an information culture devoid of arrogance.	Should be located in a space accessible to all: market, bus stand, school or panchayat.	Information about government services, education, agriculture, markets must be available.	Government owned as private companies will not be public spirited.	Either man or woman can be the operator but they should be people friendly and build rapport.
Young men in the age group of 16-20 years who have discontinued their formal education	Outside the village as panchayat is not accountable	All kinds of information and benefits must be available.	***	Young man who understands the difficulties of unemployed youth.	Should be near bus stand, school, temple or any central location in the village.	Information about livelihood trainings, agriculture, maternal & children's health care should be available. There should be library facilities at the centre and some recreational activities.	***	Man aged 20-25 years selected by village communitiy from a neighboring village community as this will fetch him greater respect and also ensure better relationships between the centre and the community.
Young women in the age group of 15-20 years continuing their formal education	Situated near the School/ bus stand/ gram panchayat/ temple/ near the entrance of the village.	It should give us information in response to our queries. There must be various trainings. We must be able to come here and share information with each other.	It must be owned by government as private sector is profit oriented, and will not run the centre in public interest.	There must at least be one woman among the operators. The operators must understand the village context, and respond appropriately to queries.	Situated near the village panchayat, school, temple or police station.	Information about agriculture, training programmes such as tailoring must be made available. There must be a library and a science lab at the centre. Adult education classes could be conducted here. Youth could guide school children with their studies here.	***	Both men and women operators with good people skills should be present.

Groups	Mandya District (July 18-22 2011)				Koppal District (July 26-28 2011)			
	Location	Nature of activities	Ownership	Operator	Location	Nature of activities	Ownership	Operator
Young unmarried women in the age group of 15-20 years who have discontinued their formal education	must be next to the bus stand if at the city or at the entrance of the village.	It should have information about job opportunities, how we can complete formal education and also have space for recreation. It should have a space where women like us can run small businesses. It must give us confidence and courage.	***	A woman who is sensitive to our problems, and can give good suggestions must operate the centre.	should be in a NGO campus or school or in a sangha owned space	The centre should provide computer training and tailoring courses. There must be a library with books about local history,biographies of leaders and light reading material.		There must be men and women aged 25-30 years who are helpful.
Married women who are not the primary earning members in their households	situated near anganwadi/school to facilitate easy access	information about home based livelihoods information about creating sanghas		woman who will interact with us freely and make us comfortable.	situated inside school, for easy access.	The centre should provide information about livelihoods for educated and uneducated people in the community. It should act as a space where we can discuss our problems and seek guidance. It should have a notice board and a public address system for information dissemination.	It should be NGO run as nowadays government interventions are not trustworthy.	The operator should be a woman from the village as it will increase our accessibility to the centre.
Male farmers with large and medium farmholdings	Located anywhere in the village	should give us agricultural information, and any other information we require.	The centre should not be set up like the Nemmadi Kendra.	He should be like a 'Gram Sevaka' – patiently and freindly while interacting with us.	Should be located in the school, and definitely not in the panchayat.	Information about agriculture must be available at the centre. Some art/cultural activities can also be encouraged.	Should not be run like the Nemmadi kendras	Women should operate the centre as they are more responsible. The operators must be recruited from outside the village as otherwise they would not respect us.
Male farmers with small and marginal landholdings	Located anywhere in the village	should give us agricultural information about inputs and schemes, and allied activities such as cattle rearing.		Officer knowleadgable about agriculture should operate the centre.	Should be located in a building in the middle of the village.	Information about crop production must be provided and there must be space for discussions on agriculture.		Community selection of the operator in a public meeting. The operator can be a man or a woman. They should receive training from the government.

Groups	Mandya District (July 18-22 2011)				Koppal District (July 26-28 2011)			
	Location	Nature of activities	Ownership	Operator	Location	Nature of activities	Ownership	Operator
Self employed men (primarily running small non-farm enterprises)	Located anywhere in the village.	Information about livelihoods and business opportunities.	There need not be a centre set up. Appointing facilitators is what is important.	Facilitator should visit us with relevant information.	The centre must be located in the community hall or next to the school	Business advisory services and information about livelihoods must be provided.	The group was divided between a government owned and a private owned model.	
Elderly men and women living alone or heading households	This FGD, due to difficulties in the rapport building process, could not raise issues pertaining to the design of the centre.				This FGD was not conducted in Koppal.			
Women who are heading their households	***	It must be a space where women can seek a way out if they are subjected to harrasment and violence.	***	***	The centre must be located in the community hall or any government owned space in the village, which is accessible to women.	Information about all aspects relevant to rural living must be available here. There must be space for small business also.	The centre must be sangha owned and sangha managed.	The centre must have men and women operators. But some members of the group felt women would be more responsible.

1. Location : There were many suggestions for the location of the SJK ranging from the village school to an independent community building, but all groups insisted that the SJK should be accessible to everyone in the village.

2. Nature of activities: The SJK must provide information about agriculture, educational opportunities for youth, livelihood opportunities, and all government schemes as well as conduct vocational trainings. The group of young women continuing their formal education (from Koppal) felt that there could be a library and a science lab at the SJK. Some groups felt that there could be art and cultural activities at the SJK. It is significant that all groups visualised the scope of the SJK's activities as falling within the ILK continuum.

3. Ownership: Most groups felt that the SJK should be government owned. One group of women felt that it should be owned by the *sangha* in the village. Some preferred NGO run centres. Some groups gave negative feedback that "*the centre should not be set up like a Nemmadi Kendra*".

4. Operator: Most of the groups felt that there should be at least one woman operator to ensure that women visiting the SJK find it more accessible. Many also spoke about the qualities that the operator should possess : s/he should not behave like an arrogant official, s/he should be patient and friendly with our queries, etc. Many groups said that the operator should be recruited from a neighbouring village as a person from the same village would not treat all people with equal respect.

5. Public consultations with development workers and community leaders on SJKs

Following the needs assessment study, we also held two public consultations with development workers and community leaders: in Mysore on July 23rd 2011 and Koppal on July 29th 2011. The public consultations were held to tap into the rich experiential knowledge of community leaders and grassroots development workers who have a deep understanding of community information needs, and the systemic challenges in meeting these needs. From their extensive engagement with members of the communities they are engaged with, they were also expected to offer a good understanding of local cultural influences on informational and knowledge seeking behaviour in rural

communities. The Concept Note that was circulated to the participants of the public consultation is enclosed as **Annexure 4.**

Both consultations sought insights from grassroots workers and leaders about community information needs as well as their insights on the design aspects of the SJK. The table below summarises the major insights from both consultations:

Points of Discussion	Mysore District consultation (July 23 2011)	Koppal District consultation (July 29 2011)
Information needs that the *Samudaya Jnana Kendra* must address	1. The SJK should meet the information needs expressed in the Focus Group Discussions.[2] - especially those related to educational, livelihood and entitlements. 2. The SJK should have information pertaining to issues of maternal and child health 3. .The SJK should have village level maps, and demographic information.	1. The SJK should meet the information needs expressed in the Focus Group Discussions.[3] 2. The SJK should have entitlement related information. 3. The SJK should have information about G*ram Panchayat* entitlements and P*anchayat* committees. 4. The SJK should have livelihood information. 5. The SJK should have information about education and vocational training. 6. The SJK should have community health related information.

2 The preliminary findings from the ILK assessment in Mandya was shared at the Mysore consultation.
3 The preliminary findings from the ILK assessment in Koppal were shared at the Koppal consultation.

Knowledge processes that the *Samudaya Jnana Kendra* can engage with	1. .Engage in gender sensitisation and recognise traditional practices that challenge patriarchy 2. Provide information about bio-diversity conservation. 3. Build a respect for local knowledge among communities. 4. Provide counselling on alcoholism and other addictions. 5. Provide counselling services on geriatric care. 6. Provide information about organic agriculture and indigenous medicinal systems.	1. Revitalisation of folk art and cultural forms, and sports. 2. Awareness creation about Local history and geography. 3. Revive traditional agricultural practices in irrigation and storage. 4. Promote information about laws, policies and government schemes. 5. Provide information that can help understand the local impact of foreign market policies. 6. Provide awareness that will deter people from engaging in socially harmful practices such as taking dowry and child marriage.
Envisioning the *Samudaya Jnana Kendra*	1. The SJK must provide developmental information to the community. 2. The SJK should facilitate in the development of a critical thinking perspective among members of the community. 3. The SJK must be accessible to all sections of the community. 4. The SJK requires a gendered design. 5. Service and information delivery should not be mixed.	1.The SJK must act as an effective information exchange centre. 2.It should act as the bridge between government and the people. 3.It should be accessible at all times and to all people. 4.It should by a dynamic and responsive space.

Ownership and Management structure of the *Samudaya Jnana Kendras*	1. Some participants felt that the SJK should operate out of a government building while others felt it should operate out of a community owned building for greater independence in functioning. 2. The SJK must be owned and managed by the community but the constitution of the Managing Committee must go beyond formulaic development design, with serious consideration of the complex implementation issues involved. 3. Various models of ownership – Government owned, Private owned, Community owned, Joint Ownership models- need to be carefully studied before designing the ownership model of the SJKs.	1.Government and community should run the SJK jointly. 2. NGO-community joint committee should manage the SJK and finances from the district administration for the SJK should be routed through the community. Selection criteria for community representatives in the Managing Committee must be clearly specified. 3. In case the SJK is not working properly and in case the NGO is not accountable, there must be a provision for lodging complaints with the *Lokayukta* or any other investigative body of the government.
Operation arrangements	The SJK needs to be staffed by both professional experts and local people. All staff appointments must be made with the involvement of the community. The staff must be monitored by the *gram sabha.* There must be at least 50% reservation for women staff.	1.The SJK must be operated by a man/ woman selected by the local community. 2.The man/woman must be monitored by the community. 3.S/he must be transparent, patient and responsive in her/his interactions with community members. 4.The person operating the SJK must possess computer

		skills and should have demonstrated a voluntary spirit on earlier occasions.

The summary findings reveal a need for developing centres that are people-sensitive and accountable to the community, which can rise beyond petty politics, and initiate processes that can help transform rigid , discriminatory social structures in a positive manner. Clearly, thoughts on institutionalisation of SJKs are sketchy, but they reflect the urgency of this felt need among development workers and local leaders, and their subscription to the power of the concept of *Samudaya Jnana Kendras*. There was an instinctive acceptance among all present that *Samudaya Jnana Kendras* are very much required, but also that they should be carefully planned, keeping in mind the experience with other similar initiatives and the current context and opportunities.

6. Insights from the needs assessment study and the public consultations related to the SJKs

1. Articulations of ILK processes in communities are usually at the level of instrumental information seeking. For example, information about livelihoods, educational information that can improve life chances and information about entitlements emerge repeatedly in the discussions. This cannot be construed as the lack of need for higher level, non-instrumental knowledge nor as the absence of local knowledge practices. In fact, it needs to be seen as coming from the dearth of progressive, eclectic and locally relevant knowledge processes, a lack of validation of the knowledge of all individuals, and of local 'traditional' knowledge. In the absence of larger 'community knowledge' thinking and orientation, people respond only from the intrinsic connections that they perceive between information and opportunity for betterment of life.

2. Groups that are extremely marginalised (such as the group of women heading households and the group of elderly men and women living alone or heading households, and young women who have discontinued their formal education) do not problematise their life context using ILK articulations, as their need for entitlements, welfare benefits and supportive infrastructure is very urgent, and immediate. Their preoccupations with survival in conditions where effective and accountable governance is distanced from their life context and where formal education has failed to open up chances for a better life, tends to render the place of learning and knowledge in their immediate life abstruse.

3. An individual subject's level of engagement with ILK processes is deeply influenced by the subject's location in the social structure. Discourses around equality and social justice may not find quick acceptance because of the deep influence of caste-centric and patriarchal structures, values and norms on communities, as some discussions indicated. There was an articulation of the notion of 'equal access' and 'central place' when the SJK structure was mentioned. But this view was not fully congruent with people's perceptions about the functional role of information in improving life chances; there was a view that only some benefit in the current ILK regime.

4. There is very little faith in institutional ILK capacities at the community level. Official arrogance and unresponsiveness, the lack of explanation to communities about closure of schemes, etc. and lack of accountability of local governance bodies emerge as major concerns.

5. Existing ILK processes, in the eyes of the communities, are mostly top-down. Most groups could not articulate a strong faith in local knowledge processes, either.

6. Television seems to be a key ILK node for many groups, though some groups distrust the veracity of television programmes that play to the exigencies of TRP ratings. Books and newspapers are considered to be key nodes by many youth, but they are scarce at the village level. For the most marginalised, like women in vulnerable situations / single women, their limited resources and

time make information access a direct function of their social networks – either neighbours or colleagues at the work place – that they rely on.

7. Some sections of the community, especially young men and women, realize the importance of rights education and citizenship articulation for successfully claiming welfare entitlements. Young women for instance see learning and knowledge as associated with progressive practices (like rejection of dowry).

8. There is considerable distrust of local governance structures, but communities still prefer a government owned model over other models if a new ILK intervention (like the SJK) is to be introduced.

9. Community members, especially women, consider NGOs and *sanghas* as key nodes in the ILK infrastructure of the community.

10. There is a great accent on the qualities of the Centre operator, as being 'the' key factor for the Centre's success. Some favoured someone from a neighbouring community. This seems to be because of rigid social structures within a community which may pose barriers to effective role performance or the lack of faith in the fairness / neutrality of an insider.

Our needs assessment study makes it clear that the SJKs can become a short-lived bubble, just like many new government schemes that are very ambitious on paper, unless its design is responsive to the local information ecosystem ecology. This means being able to respond to what people perceive as their needs, yet being able to claim a dynamic and vibrant framework for the SJK's scope and functions that expands the meaning of ILK in people's lives, linking it to other existing institutions at the community level.

Take-aways for the *Samudaya Jnana Kendras* initiative

From the community ILK assessments, the first thing that comes across is that community members find it difficult to express their information needs without a clear context being presented to them. This most of all points to there being no credible, or even at all functioning, institutionalised system addressing people's informal day-to-day information needs. This has led to what is largely an absence of any immediate expectation in this regard, which can be expressed. This insight is further supported by the fact that, even on coaxing with specific question probes, and providing contexts and possibilities, the more marginalised a section, the lesser its articulation of information needs. Of course, it is not that these sections do not have information needs. In their immediate life context, they have no experience or even a reference point of any institutional system that is supposed to address community information needs, and thus have developed no expectationsin this regard.

However, groups that were relatively less marginalised were able to articulate their information needs when probed a little. For instance, young men and women continuing their education wanted information about jobs, government entitlements and higher education opportunities. Young men who had discontinued their formal education wanted information about entitlements and livelihood opportunities. Married women wanted information about home based livelihood opportunities and credit facilities. Both large and small farmers wanted information about government schemes. Some of the groups also expressed learning & knowledge needs : Small farmers wanted trainings and expert advice on restoring soil fertility; large farmers wanted price forecasting services; women heading households wanted counselling services for domestic violence and young men and women who have discontinued their formal education wanted some kind of community building activities to be initiated. One sees that it is difficult to list ILK needs as any kind of a stable category. Every life situation has its corresponding ILK needs. And thus ILK needs are as varied as life situations experienced by each member of a community; they cannot be captured in clear verticals, corresponding to the way development delivery including ILK delivery, works at present.

It may therefore be concluded that in the knowledge society context (1) there is a need for devising a new holistic ILK intervention, using new ways of accessing, storing, processing and co-creating information, and (2) the intervention should be a general informational, or ILK, intervention and not devoted to one or more specific vertical.

It was also clear from the field observations that community members saw ILK activities in a purely public goods or public service mode. A business model based information delivery was not considered worthwhile by almost everyone we spoke to.

When probed about a specific model of SJKs that will be ideal, our respondents wanted it to be a government responsibility, even though there was a high degree of dissatisfaction with governance at the local level. This paradox seems to stem from the feeling of ultimate accountability that they still associate with government. However, many also opined that NGOs were better at an actual facilitation role in the community. There was great stress on context specific ILK activities, and a central role for the community to lead and manage these activities.

Especially during the workshop based consultations with development workers and community members, one of the points that was strongly expressed was that, for effectiveness, ILK functions should be separated from service delivery functions, as well as from the local politics. To ensure this, adequate institutional measures need to be put in place. This alone will ensure effective functioning of SJKs.

Section 1.B. An overview of large-scale State information, learning and knowledge interventions

Governments have made many large scale interventions in the area of facilitating ILK processes at the grassroots level. In this section, we will review three such interventions in Karnataka: agricultural extension systems, adult educational programmes and the rural libraries initiative. These are very large and complex interventions, and our brief assessment of them is limited to the purpose of taking lessons and helping us in identifying guiding principles for a possible new ILK initiative in the state. While much impact may have been made by these interventions, our study also has a conscious bias of looking at gaps and problem areas, because what is sought is a paradigmatic improvement in addressing the ILK needs of communities, in the context of an emerging knowledge society.

1. Introduction

The Indian State has made many interventions in the information sector as well as in the area of facilitating learning & knowledge processes at the grassroots level. It is important to examine these in some detail, to capture learnings from these experiences before exploring an institutional model for the *Samudaya Jnana Kendras*. To effectively understand such interventions for the present purpose, it will be useful to examine not only the more recent ICTs-based initiatives but also pre-ICT interventions largely operating outside the new ICT paradigm, which were clubbed together under the broad umbrella of development communication.

In this section, we will briefly visit three large-scale governmental interventions in Karnataka aimed at addressing the areas of development related information, learning and knowledge (ILK) needs of communities, which were initiated before the dawn of the ICT era: agricultural extension systems, educational programmes for adults and rural libraries. Our review of these interventions is by no means exhaustive, and is only meant to draw lessons for exploring how community ILK needs can be best met in the present circumstances of an emerging knowledge society, and what new institutional responses would be appropriate in the changing conditions we inhabit. Hence, the accent of our review exercise is obviously on the shortcomings and the gaps in the current strategies. This is not to be dismissive of the the considerable achievements that have been made over the decades

through our existing development strategies, including those in the area of ILK. In any case, the new proposed institutional responses will only seek to build on the the existing work and initiatives, and do not intend to seek a complete break with the past.

2. Agricultural extension : Lessons on the importance of the last mile

The importance of agricultural extension services for agricultural growth in a country like India, where more than 81% of farmers cultivate a land area of 2 hectares or less (India, Directorate of Economics and Statistics 2009 ; NSSO 2006) is widely recognised, as evidenced by the emphasis in the 10th and 11th Five year Plans on increasing agricultural extension for improving farm yield (Planning Commission 2001, 2005, 2006). However, in spite of many government extension programmes, extension services of the national agricultural research system, and farmer cooperatives, coverage continues to be poor. A 2003 National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) survey showed that 60 percent of farmers had not accessed any source of information on modern technology to assist in their farming practices in the past year. The survey also revealed that the main information sources were other farmers (16.7 percent), followed by input dealers (13.1 percent), radio (13 percent), TV (9.3 percent), and newspapers (7 percent). Public-sector extension was used for information by only 5.7 percent of survey respondents. It has also been pointed out that the NSSO survey results demonstrate that contact with extension workers for medium-size and large-scale farmers was almost double that of smallholder farmers (Adhiguru,P, Birthal, P.S and Kumar, G 2009).

The NSSO survey begs further enquiry into the reasons why agricultural extension does not seem to work for those who most require it – smallholder farmers. The reasons for such a lack of appeal of government extension services among smallholder farmers, and their dependence on input dealers for information, need to be analysed and understood.

The IFPRI Review of Agricultural Extension in India points to some of the reasons for the failure of agricultural extension programmes. As the IFPRI review points out , *" information that is provided to farmers through the public-sector extension system relates to the transfer of technologies through a linear pathway. Although farmers require information for the whole food and agriculture value chain, the public extension system largely concentrates on on-farm activities"* (IFPRI 2010). An examination

of the experience of the Karnataka State Agricultural Extension programme seems to justify this observation.

Box 2. *Raita Samparka Kendras:* A brief introduction

The *Raita Samparka Kendras* were originally conceptualised as Agricultural Extension Centres that would replace the old T& V extension (Training & Visits extension) programmes in the State. The mandate of the RSK was to work towards the following objectives:

1. To provide updated information on crop production options, practices markets etc.,
2. To facilitate on site provision of critical inputs like seeds, bio-fertilizers, micro-nutrients etc.,
3. To provide primary seed and soil testing facilities,
4. To provide a forum for on-farm demonstration about new technologies developed by both public and private sector agencies.

The *Raita Samparka Kendras* are supposed to address the requirements of all categories of farmers. Public and private sector companies engaged in agricultural activities are allowed to use them for promotional activities and sale of their inputs, in return for payment of service charges fixed by the Department.

Source: http://raitamitra.kar.nic.in/phoneRSK.htm#RAITHA%20MITRA%20YOJANE, last accessed on August 2' 2011.

a. *Raita Samparka Kendras*: Subsidised shopping centres

Since 2000-01, following the implementation of the *Raita Mitra Yojane*, *Raita Samparka Kendras* have been set up throughout the State – approximately one for each sub-block. At present, it is widely acknowledged that the *Raita Samparka Kendras* (RSKs) mostly act only as outlets for the sale of farm inputs at subsidised rates to farmers. As one of the officials from the Agriculture Department in Koppal district acknowledged in an interview[4]; " *The Raita Kendras were originally set up to improve the outreach activities of the department at the hobli level. Earlier the department staff were finding it difficult to travel from the taluk level to all the villages. So the department felt that it was better to have an outreach point closer to the communities where farmers could come with specific problems that*

RSKs focus more on input distribution than information processes.

4 Field research in Koppal district, July 2011

they needed solutions for, as well as obtain inputs. But when you go to a Raita Kendra today, it is just the shop logic that is predominant". This critique of RSKs emerged again in interviews with the staff of the University of Agricultural Sciences, Bengaluru as well as in interactions at the *Krishi Vigyan Kendra* (KVK), Gangavati taluk, Koppal district[5]. One of the senior UAS faculty explained the problem thus : " *The idea behind the Raita Kendras was a good one – it started from the recognition that marginal farmers not only need information, but also inputs. But the Raita Samparka Kendra with its almost exclusive focus on distribution and sale of subsidised inputs falls really short of the original expectations from an extension programme. Sometimes, I think that information outreach under the old Training & Visit extension intervention was much more effective as the extension worker was more in touch with farmers".* Our field visits to *Raita Samparka Kendras* justified these observations on the problem of an almost exclusive focus on service delivery, which has resulted in complete neglect of the equally important ILK functions. As for farmers' reliance on input dealers for their information requirements, it was also fairly evident to us that business promotion and impartial information provision are not always compatible.

b. The difficulties of the information mandate for overburdened extension staff

The efficacy of clubbing together service delivery with information provision at the last mile information outreach points seems questionable, especially when there is no well considered staffing policy to ensure that this dual mandate is met. Each RSK is supposed to be headed by an Agricultural Officer, who is assisted by Assistant Agricultural Officers and Agricultural Assistants whose number will depend on the cropping potential of each *hobli*. However, our primary field work revealed that there was a severe staff shortage in the RSKs[6]. In one of the centres we visited in Koppal district, we were told that the RSK initially had seven staff but now there were only two – one Agricultural Officer and one Agricultural Assistant – as the vacancies created due to retirement had not been filled. Other centres and interviews with departmental officials confirmed that there had been no fresh recruitment of grassroots staff since the early 1990s. As one of the officials in the *Krishi Vigyan Kendra* (KVK), Gangavati *taluk* pointed out[7], " *The departmental trend has been to increase recruitment in officer posts while phasing out grassroots workers gradually. This is because there are*

5 Field research in Koppal and Bengaluru districts, July 2011

6 This included interviews with Department of Agriculture officials in Bengaluru as well as interviews with departmental officials at ZP level in Koppal and field visits to Raita Kendras in Koppal, Chikkaballapura and Mysore.

7 Field research in Koppal, July 2011

more and more input subsidy schemes being announced, even as the focus on training and farmer capacity building is dwindling. So more officers are being recruited at the cost of neglecting grassroots extension. RSKs are forced to turn to local facilitators employed on a contract basis, instead of permanent extension staff. Their (contract workers) levels of commitment are lower, possibly due to employment insecurity."

c. The turn towards contract workers for facilitation

This tendency to rely on grassroots facilitators employed on a contract basis was evidenced by the popularity of the *Bhoo Chethana* scheme (under which facilitators can be recruited on a contract basis for a payment of Rs. 150/ a day for soil and water testing and input distribution in villages). Some departmental officials felt that permanent grassroots workers were more likely to win the respect of communities, as the facilitators recruited on a contract basis were usually unemployed youth who did not have much community standing. However in our interactions with the users of RSKs, we found that they were often as distrustful about the advice given by Agricultural Assistants. Many felt that the information given by input dealers was far more relevant than what was given by the Agricultural Assistants – an issue that has been pointed out even in the NSSO survey of 2003, as mentioned earlier. This certainly calls for further study on the impact of converging service delivery and information outreach, and on the quality of information outreach.

It would be pertinent to point out that these problems are shared by extension programmes in other states as well. Research studies have pointed out the difficulties faced by State extension programmes due to low staff numbers (IFPRI 2010) and low operational budgets (Sulaiman and van den Ban 2003; Swanson 2008). Studies also point out the difficulties faced by extension staff due to pressures from the large number of schemes and programmes announced by governments at the central and state levels, as well as the non-extension related public duties thrust on extension staff such as election or census duties (Anderson,J.R, Feder,G and Ganguly,S 2006). Another problem that has been pointed out repeatedly is the lack of farmer role in evaluation of extension staff and the lack of a well developed evaluation-incentive mechanism (ibid 2006).

d. The nature of information exchange at RSKs: Lack of informed and participatory agenda setting

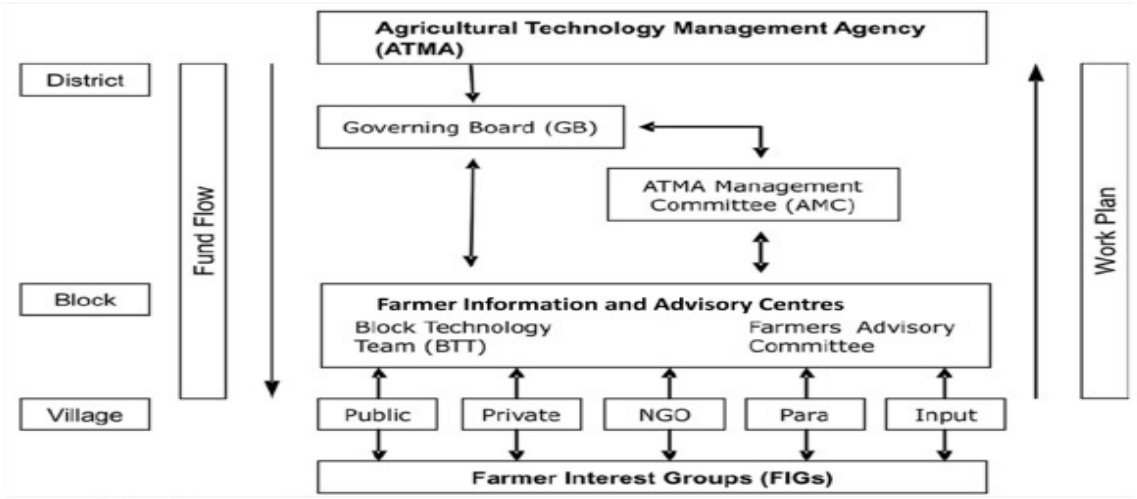
A RSK visited in Koppal district.

The nature of information being provided at RSKs does not adequately address their original mandate. Field research reveals that the information provided through the RSKs mostly pertains to the use of inputs being supplied through them, though sometimes covering a few other aspects of crop production. It was agreed by higher officials and departmental grassroots workers that the RSKs were not serving as points of convergence for information outreach from other allied departments such as horticulture, seri culture and animal husbandry[8]. During our field work, we observed that there appeared to be a weak linkage between the trainings of the KVKs and the RSKs. Some referred to the trainings at the KVKs as places where farmers could get information about activities allied to farming. As one interviewee in a RSK in Koppal district explained[9], *" Farmers when they come here know that we give only information about crop production. They know that for queries related to poultry farming, cattle raising and other agri-business, they must go to the KVK trainings"* None of the RSK provide information about post-production aspects or market linkages, even though researchers have pointed to the importance of such information for farmers (IFPRI 2010). The RSK staff attend trainings by experts from the KVK and line departments, but there does not seem to be a structural mechanism whereby the feedback from the field influences agricultural research agenda setting. At a first glance, one could say that the Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA) programme corrects some of the informational imbalances and helps to systematically establish bottom-up planning and departmental convergence between departments of agricultural allied activities. However, studies have shown that there have been numerous challenges ATMA faces, such as lack of government resources to train and support extension workers, inadequate local ownership of the scheme, and capacity and institutional constraints (Sulaiman and Hall 2008).

8 Field research in Mysore and interviews with department official and UAS staff in Bengaluru,July 2011
9 Field research in Koppal, July 2011

e. ATMA: The difficulties of effective convergence

ATMA may be understood as a semi-autonomous decentralized participatory and market-driven extension model (Swanson,B, Singh,K.M and Reddy,M.N 2008), that tries to shift agricultural extension from a technology transfer approach to an approach that emphasizes bottom-up planning and departmental convergence for diversifying output. ATMA provides a platform for integrating extension programmes across line departments, such as animal husbandry, fisheries, and forestry; linking research and extension units in a district; and inviting farmer participation in decision making processes (Swanson,B 2008) (Figure 6). ATMA requires the preparation of a Strategic Research and Extension Plan (SREP) developed after a Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) in each district. The organization structure of ATMA, reproduced below, seeks to emphasise its difference from earlier extension approaches.



Source: Singh and Swanson 2006.

Source: Review of Agricultural Extension in India: Are Farmers' Needs Being Met? IFPRI 2005

Lack of effective linkages between ATMA bodies and the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) extension unit, and the district-level *Krishi Vigyan Kendra* (KVK) , and increased bureaucratic interference as the ATMA district level committee is headed by the district magistrate/ administrative head of the district are other problems that hamper the scheme (IFPRI 2010). The institutional logic of ATMA does not seem to have been been designed well, as it places a direct accent on the planned activities rather than first getting the structure of the converged system and its protocols right. Our field research revealed the problems of implementing ATMA through mainstream departmental staff. *"The problem in ATMA scheme has been that Assistant Directors of line departments are not*

*able to give dedicated time to ATMA, during the planning process based on inputs from the taluk level. But now this year, dedicated ATMA officials have been posted, so we may be able to see some changes" (*excerpt from an interview with an official from the Department of Agriculture, Koppal district).[10]

f. The *Krishi Vigyan Kendra* experience : Farmer disinterest in expertise heavy trainings

The problem related to the relevance of information provided in extension programmes is further illustrated when we study the *KVKs* set up by the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, to mainly act as information sharing points between experts in agriculture and allied sciences, and grassroots level extension workers and farmers. "*Trainings in the KVK are for agriculture and allied activities. The content of the trainings vary from one KVK to another depending upon the local ecology and the income generation opportunities it can support. ICAR gives us an annual budget for trainings – a daily budget for Rs. 40 per head for non residential programmes and Rs. 75 per head per day for residential trainings. There are more than 40-50 trainings a year. Trainings take place throughout the year, but naturally they are more in the off-season. We like to do residential trainings because we can use ICTs here – and it helps in demonstrations. But when farmers do not want to come here, we go to the villages and do live trainings on-field. However, it is very difficult to interest farmers in the trainings and encourage them to learn from the trainings. People come for trainings, but later nothing changes in their field practice. We have taken them for visits to progressive farmers in other states, some have even been sponsored for visits abroad, but they do nothing about it … I must say of course that there are a handful of farmers who are really interested, who take the expert phone numbers, and regularly stay in touch and even give feedback about our training. But the majority do not do this" (*excerpt from an interview with an official of the *KVK*, Gangavati taluk who was recounting KVK experiences in Koppal district). The disinterest of farmers cannot be explained away simplistically as their inappropriate attitude to new learning, as is often done by those in charge of such ILK initiatives. Earlier experiences with training methods, the impact of post Green Revolution[11] experience of farmers on their attitudes towards information inputs from extension

10 Field research in Koppal, July 2011

11 The Green revolution was a period when expert inputs offered the promise of revolutionising Indian farm productivity. However complications and problems associated with fertilizer intensive farming followed quickly,leading to a fall in farm productivity, and also contributing to farmer skepticism about expert solutions.

programmes, and other gaps between expert advice and farmer experience are areas that may have to be explored in detail. There is a huge paucity of research studies explaining the reasons why farmers do not turn to extension programmes for advice (IFPRI 2010).

Box 3. KVK: A brief note

The *Krishi Vigyan Kendra* (KVK), or farm science centre, is a multidisciplinary educational institution situated at the district level, with funding and technical supervision from ICAR. There are currently centres in 569 districts, almost one for each district in India. Each centre is under the administrative control of a state agricultural university, NGO, or central research institute. Karnataka has 28 KVKs, most of which are under the administrative control of the State Agricultural University. KVKs have a four point mandate from the ICAR. This includes :

1. On-farm testing
2. Front line demonstrations
3. Vocational training in agriculture and allied activities (This is district specific keeping the local ecology and agricultural opportunities in mind)
4. Training to extension personnel from Agriculture, Animal Husbandry and Forestry

Source: Review of Agricultural Extension in India (IFPRI 2010) and field research, July 2011.

g. Gender marginalisation at the last mile

The agricultural extension experience also highlights the importance of targeted outreach in information interventions. RSKs and KVKs, as our field research revealed, have turned into almost exclusively male spaces. Residential trainings do not find many takers among women farmers. Similarly, facilitators at the grassroots level recruited under *Bhoo Chethana* and other short term schemes are predominantly male. As one of the officials of the Department of Agriculture in Koppal observed, *"The Department has a policy of recruiting contract facilitators. Koppal district has 19,500 hectares of cultivated land, and there are 39 facilitators. None of the facilitators are women"*[12]. Given these conditions, there does not seem to be a good rationale for phasing out well proven targeted programmes such as Women & Youth Training Programme, and adopting instead a common extension strategy that does not seem to cater to the needs of women and marginal groups (NSSO 2005). To sum up, the agricultural extension experience highlights the difficulties of mixing service

12 Field research in Koppal, July 2011

delivery with ILK functions, and the importance of context based ILK delivery done in a participatory manner and the need for making specialised efforts to reach the most marginalised.

3. Adult education interventions: Going beyond literacy

Adult educational outreach have usually been cast in the mould of literacy programmes, as our long experience with the National Literacy Mission clearly demonstrates. In its programmatic design, the National Literacy Mission[13] (NLM) however has sometimes gone beyond mere literacy, the Continuing Education Scheme being a case in point. The Continuing Education Scheme was envisaged by the NLM as a response to the challenge of creating economic, vocational and socially useful activities for the millions who had by now acquired basic literacy, thanks to the Total Literacy Campaign and Post Literacy Programme. Through these programmes, the NLM strove to create a *"a continuing education system where the effervescence of the mass upsurge of the literacy campaigns can be channelised into structuring a continuous and life-long learning process".* (Tenth Five Year Plan 2002-2007, Vol. II. p.180)

The Continuing Education Scheme came to an end in 2009, with the conclusion of all activities under the National Literacy Mission, after the launch of the *Saakshar Bharat*. However, it continues in a different form as the Continuing Education Programme of *Saakshar Bharat.*

Let us now examine the implications of the shift from National Literacy Mission to *Saakshar Bharat* for adult education outreach. We shall also see if there has been any substantive change in the approach to adult education between the National Literacy Mission's Continuing Education Scheme and *Saakshar Bharat's* Continuing Education Programme.

13 The National Literacy Mission was launched in 1988 and it continued through Ninth and Tenth Five Year Plans. By the end of the Tenth Five Year Plan (March 2007), NLM had covered 597 districts under Total Literacy Campaign (TLC), 485 districts under Post Literacy Programme (PLP) and 328 districts under Continuing Education Programme (CEP). Considering the extent of illiteracy, the NLM was given an extension during the Eleventh Plan Period. However, with the launch of *Saakshar Bharat*, the National Literacy Mission and its entire programmes and activities stand concluded on 30.09.2009. (*www.education.nic.in/elementary/SaaksharBharat.pdf, last accessed August 2 2011)*

Box 4. Continuing Education Scheme: A brief note

The Continuing Education Scheme was launched in 1995 by the National Literacy Mission, with the objectives of 'providing life-long learning opportunity to all beyond basic literacy and primary education, linking learning to target-specific functional programmes covering economic, vocational and socially useful activities and providing opportunities to learners for attaining higher levels of competency' in addition to the objective of 'imparting literacy skills to residual non-literates'. Districts which had completed TLC/PLP were eligible for the programme, as long as their State Governments made a commitment to fund the programme after the Central funding ceased.

It was agreed that there would be hundred percent funding by the Centre for the first three years. Centre and State were to share the project cost in the ratio 50:50 in the fourth and fifth year. The State Governments were to take total responsibility for implementing the scheme thereafter.

Under the Continuing Education Scheme, one Continuing Education Centre (CEC) was to be set up for 2000 to 2500 population and one Nodal CEC was to be set up for a cluster of 8 to 10 CECs for facilitation and support. Each CEC was to have a *prerak* and a *sahaprerak*, whose responsibilities in addition to literacy classes; included establishing a library and reading room; organising lecture/demonstration sessions on developmental activities, government schemes and programmes; organising sports and games; and organising cultural activities and even setting up an information centre.

The overall management of the Continuing Education Scheme at the district level, was given to the *Zilla Saksharta Samit*i (ZSS) or the District Literacy Committee. Funds for the programme were provided to the ZSS who in turn were to pass it on to the local implementers, i.e. the *Panchayati Raj* bodies, *Preraks*, etc. State Resource Centres were expected to provide inputs for the development of learning material and also provide training to implementation staff. The selection of the *Preraks* (community level facilitators) was to be done with the approval of the community.

The current status of the scheme is as follows. The scheme, the programmes and the centres were made part of the revamped NLM in 1999. Support was continued during the 10th Plan Period. This scheme officially came to an end in 2009. Presently, part of the nodal CECs have been taken up asAdult Education Centres under the Continuing Education Programme of the *Saakshar Bharat* scheme. The CECs not covered under this new scheme have been closed down.

Source: GoI websites (www.education.nic.in/elementary/SaaksharBharat.pdf, last accessed August 2 2011), and http://www.nlm.nic.in/sch_nlm.htm,last accessed August 2 2011 supported by interview with Adult Education department official in Koppal district

a. From NLM to *Saakshar Bharat* : Attempt at consolidation to show impact

The *Saakshar Bharat* Mission was launched on 1.10.2009, replacing the National Literacy Mission, with the stated goal of addressing some of the inadequacies in the design and implementation of the

NLM, particularly, *" non-viability of a single pan Indian solution, limitations of voluntary approach, limited involvement of the State Governments in the programme, lack of convergence, weak management and supervisory structures, lack of community participation, poor monitoring and inadequate funding"(*MoHD, 2011) The Mission attempted to move towards a targeted approach to dealing with illiteracy: it seeks to concentrate on rural areas, especially in the districts that have low (50% and below) female literacy rate as well as 33 left wing extremism affected districts. Nearly 1, 70, 000 p*anchayat grams* in 370 odd districts will be covered. Residual illiteracy in urban areas will be addressed through innovative partnership with NGOs, private sectors, convergence, etc (*Saakshar Bharat* Guidelines 2011).

Saakshar Bharat seeks to work towards the following objectives

- Impart functional literacy to illiterate adults in the age group of 15+
- Enable the neo-literates to continue their learning beyond basic literacy and acquire equivalency to formal educational system
- Equip the neo-literates with skills to improve their living and earning conditions
- Establish a learning society by providing opportunities to neo literates for lifelong learning

Most importantly, *Saakshar Bharat* seeks to bring together programmes for basic literacy, post literacy and continuing education in a continuum rather than sequential segments. With this view, it has established *Jan Shiksha Kendras* -Adult Education Centres (AECs), at the *gram panchayat* levels, which will coordinate and manage all programmes, within their territorial jurisdiction.

Under the Continuing Education Programme of *Saakshar Bharat*, Adult Education Centres are envisaged as centres with library and reading room facilities, which would gradually be equipped with contemporary ICT devices. *"Short-term thematic courses like Health awareness / care, Food and nutrition, Water conservation / drinking water / sanitation, Population, development education issues – AIDS/STD, Sex education, Consumer awareness / Consumer rights, Legal literacy, RTI or any other topic of interest and relevance to the lives of the learners will also be offered under this programme".*[14]

14 Retrieved from *www.education.nic.in/elementary/**SaaksharBharat**.pdf* *August 15 2011*

Literacy initiatives have made much less impact than what was hoped for because of a variety of reasons (the literacy figures are often contested as there is a very high degree of relapse into illiteracy which is usually not admitted by people in interviews). As an article reviewing India's adult education programmes noted; *"The literacy campaign was launched and justified as a quick-fix movement for the "eradication" of illiteracy. It was never conceived as a spark that would ignite a movement for lifelong learning. The country seems to have given up strategic planning during the early seventies. What it needs are programmes with a long-term vision, whether the goal be child survival, safe motherhood, adult literacy or universal primary education. Quick-fix campaigns can at best provide the initial momentum"*(Ramachandran,V 1999). Another commentator observed, *"many literacy programmes have failed as they emphasized only academic requirements and were unconnected to the daily lives of women. Women generally start attending literacy classes with great enthusiasm, but stop after a while as they see no connection or contribution to the predicament they face in their daily lives"* (Jandhyala,K 2003).

A lack of connection of literacy with overall community and knowledge activity, which alone can sustain literacy, is one of the main reasons of failure of literacy programmes. Instead of analysing these deeper causes of the limited success of earlier initiatives, the *Saakshar Bharat avatar* of adult education seems to move in the opposite direction. What is required is to place literacy in a larger, richer ILK approach which itself has to be connected closely to the community life, for instance in areas of development and local democracy. Instead, aspects of ILK continue to be treated in the new programme, perhaps even more than earlier, as some kind of ancillary activities to the central focus on literacy.

With an even greater focus on quantitative targets, reduction of geographic coverage, withdrawal from village level to *panchayat* level, considerable reduction in the number of paid staff involved, unsubstantiated hope that volunteers will take over (when the above cited MoHD document itself acknowledges the 'limitations of a voluntary approach'), continuing with 'campaigns' as the primary strategy for imparting literacy, and with an apparently reduced focus on developmental , cultural, sports and art activities, *Saakshar Bharat* appears unlikely to be able to meet the ILK needs of the communities, as discussed below.

b. Inadequate focus on the adult learning process and holistic education

The interviews with erstwhile facilitators *(preraks)* of CECs (set up under the National Literacy Mission) revealed that it has been difficult to hold the sustained interest of community members, especially in the formal literacy courses. As one of our field interviews with a former facilitator in Mysore district revealed[15], " *It was difficult to motivate people to continue. There were many drop outs"*. One of the middle-aged community members who had dropped out of the formal literacy programme shared his reasons for discontinuing with the literacy course- " *In the classes, they are always focused on alphabet recognition. For someone my age, this is very boring and difficult to sit through"*. Interviews also revealed that the content of the adult literacy primers had not substantially changed in spite of textbook revisions with each new scheme. " *Of course, whenever there is a new scheme, they also issue new text books. But the content is almost the same – there are some alphabet recognition exercises, some counting, that is what the courses are about*", shared one of the facilitators we interviewed[16]. From field research, we observed that there are also some books for neo-literates that were issued to the CECs. However, there is no systematic process of introducing neo-literates to these books or even linking them up with the resources at the G*ram Panchayat* libraries.

Among the *preraks* we interviewed, it was observed that the functional literacy component dominated their understanding of the CEC scheme. There was hardly any mention of the information centre objective though lectures by experts, cultural activities and sports & games came up during field interviews. This makes one wonder, at least to some extent, about the efficacy of the education trainings provided by the State Resource Centre and their focus beyond literacy building activities.

c. Reducing the number, and overburdening, of grassroots workers

The *Saakshar Bharat* Mission provides for the establishment of 1.70 lakh *Lok/Jan Shiksha Kendras* (Adult Education Centres or AECs) in p*anchayat grams* of the districts covered under the programme. It will subsume the already sanctioned Continuing Education Centres (CECs) in the districts covered under *Saakshar Bharat*. Existing CECs and the nodal CECs in the districts not covered under the programme will have to be closed down, unless the State governments wish to

15 Field research in Mysore, July 2011
16 Field research in Koppal, July 2011

run them at their own cost through Public Private Partnership or otherwise. *Saakshar Bharat* permits the establishment of one AEC in a *gram panchayat* with a population of 5000. If the population of the *gram panchayat* is more than 5000, an additional AEC is permitted. The AEC will be staffed by two paid Coordinators (*preraks)* to be engaged on contractual basis. AECs will function from buildings provided by the *gram panchayat*. *Preraks* will be selected by community involvement. Preference will be given to those from marginalised sections. At least one should be a woman. They should have completed matriculation.

A nodal CEC, transformed into an AEC under Saakshar Bharat, which we visited in Koppal. The Prerak is displaying an award he recieved for exemplary performance.

It is important to note that two *preraks* are expected to fulfil the mandate of bringing together formal literacy, post literacy, vocational training and continuing education at the G*ram* P*anchayat* level by *Saakshar Bharat* without assistant facilitators and village level centres, unlike in the earlier CEC model. On the ground, interviews reveal the excessive pressure on *preraks* that this move has led to. *"Earlier, there were at least 20 of us including preraks and saha preraks to cover the villages in this panchayat. Now there are only two. All the CECs in the villages have been closed down. This is a bad move as you cannot expect people to travel from their village to the GP frequently*", opined one of the *preraks* we interviewed in Koppal district[17].

d. Decentralised implementation: A mixed bag

The erstwhile Continuing Education Centres, just as the Adult Education Centres of *Saakshar Bharat*, focused on the decentralised implementation through the involvement of *Zilla Parishad*, G*ram Panchayats* and local communities. Field interviews revealed that decentralised implementation may not resolve operational issues such as timely release of honorarium to *preraks*. In fact, the *preraks* interviewed mostly felt that decentralisation, especially the transfer of administrative control of the CECs from line departments to G*ram* P*anchayats* after the Belur

17 Field research in Koppal, July 2011

Declaration[18] of 2004 had made matters worse. *" It is very difficult now, when salaries are released from the Gram Panchayat. There are almost always six monthly arrears now in the payments due to us. Things were better when the department was handling this "*, shared one of the erstwhile facilitators in Mysore. This sentiment was shared by facilitators interviewed in Koppal district as well. One of the *panchayat* officials we interviewed pointed out that decentralisation under the Belur Declaration 2004 was not meaningful without adequate and well organised financial devolution. Merely devolving administrative control to *panchayats* without dealing with problems of delayed fund devolution and fund transfers from the State cannot lead to better implementation of programmes.

Our research findings on the involvement of the community in the selection of the *preraks were* mixed. Some interviews revealed that the *preraks* were directly selected by the *gram panchayat* and there was no *gram sabha* convened for this.[19] The decentralisation of funds without making effort to connect the communities to adult education activities, by making them more meaningful to the community life, may not serve any purpose.

Field research also revealed the insufficient support extended by the district administration to the *preraks*, in their activities. *"Earlier we preraks would jointly organize sports activities, cultural activities and other events for people from all across the district, at the district level. Sometime ago, we had organized a kabbadi competition. One contestant got injured. No official lifted a finger to help. We preraks spent money from our pockets to hospitalize him and we had to pay for his treatment. After that, we stopped. For when people don't support you, how can you work? And we don't even get paid on time.."*, shared one of the facilitators interviewed at Koppal district.

e. Marginalisation at the last mile

Field research revealed that CECs which were usually located in revenue villages, were not always sensitive to the needs of marginalised groups such as women and tribals. "CECs were located in

18 The Belur declaration of 2004 marks an important moment in the history of decentralisation in Karnataka, when the members of Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs), the members of Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and the Government of Karnataka, jointly committed to a number of initiatives "to carry forward the decentralisation movement and further empower the PRIs and ULBs to serve the people". Read more at http://rdpr.kar.nic.in/News/Belur%20dec.htm

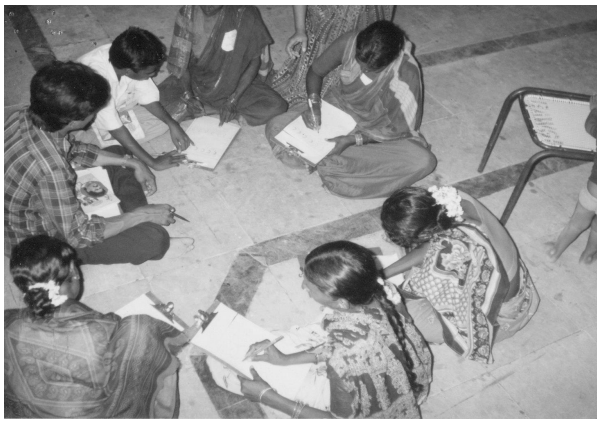
19 Field work referred to here includes visits to Adult Education Centres, interviews with former prerakas and saha prerakas , Gram panchayat members, members of Adult Education departments at the district level in the districts of Koppal and Mysore in July 2011.

revenue villages, so tribal hamlets did not have a centre of their own. Many tribals would not come to a centre located in the revenue village", shared a NGO worker from Mysore district. Similarly, some of the activities in the CECs tended to exclude women – "*We had put carom boards in the CECs, and men would come to play. This made women and young girls stay away as they felt uncomfortable with the dominant male presence",* shared a former facilitator in Mysore.

To sum up, mainstream adult education programmes have tended to focus on instrumental literacy more than a guided holistic learning process. As mentioned, rather than literacy be an instrument for, and embedded in, a larger ILK thinking and approach, some amount of continued learning seems to be seen as serving the purpose of literacy retention.

Such an approach is in sharp contrast to the *Mahila Samakhya* programme of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, which aims at addressing the educational or knowledge needs of marginalised women, in a holistic manner. *Mahila Samakhya* started as a pilot project in 10 districts in the States of UP, Gujarat and Karnataka during 1988-89 and has grown into a programme of scale. As of November 2008, MS coverage was across 89 districts in 9 states - in a total of 28480 villages.[20]

The policy commitment made by *Mahila Samakhya* is that *"education will be used as an agent of basic change in the status of women*". Education was redefined as an enabling and empowering tool, as a process that would enable women to *"think critically, to question, to analyse their own condition, to demand and acquire the information and skills they need to enable them to plan and act collectively for change"*. It is in this larger considered ILK thinking that literacy was placed. It was *"not restricted to basic literacy and numeracy alone, it includes legal*



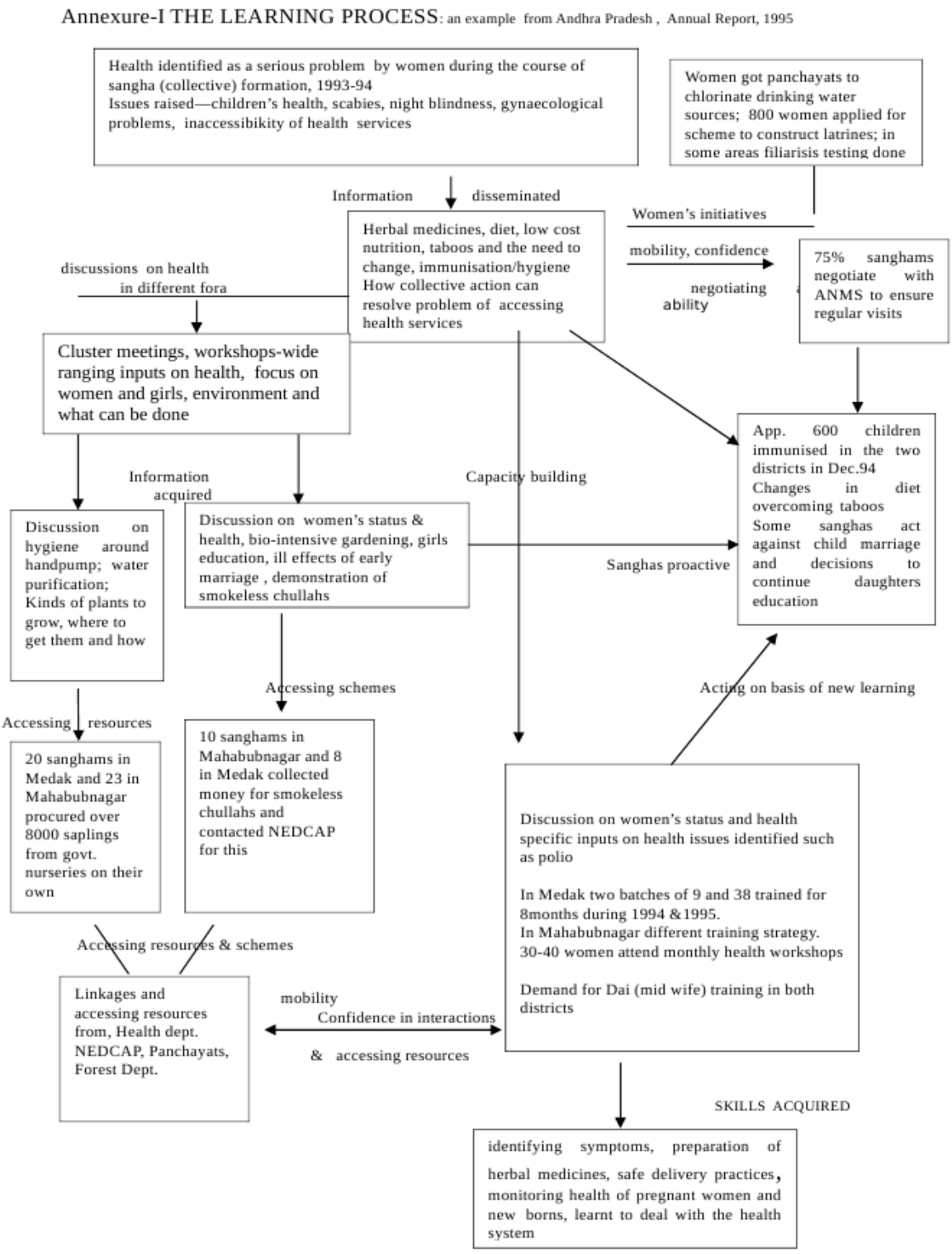
An adult literacy class in progress, under the Adult Learning Programme of Mahila Samakhya Karnataka.

20 http://www.education.nic.in/ms/ms.asp,last accessed August 16 2011

literacy, panchayat literacy, health awareness, life-skills, livelihood training, and the building of many more skills, thereby going beyond the cursory definition of literacy".

The following two excerpts from the document 'Innovations towards education for empowerment: Grassroots women's movement' describe the approach of Adult Learning Programme of *Mahila Samakhya*, and its outcomes. *"The need-based approach of the MS-run literacy programme allows flexibility to adapt the curriculum to suit the needs of women. ..... Ghosh observes that "it is not literacy rates but what people do with literacy that makes the engagement with adult learning valuable, meaningful and essential''*. It is for the users of such programmes to say what counts as meaningful in their context. Clearly, the Adult Learning Programme is designed keeping in mind both the needs of women in their daily lives as well as those of *sanghas* and other initiatives, and this is what makes it relevant for poor women. The second excerpt makes the point even more starkly. "*The result of the MS approach of holistic education instead of mere literacy can be seen in various initiatives taken by the sangha women, ranging from demand for educational opportunities for children especially their daughters, increased participation in panchayat activities, addressing violence against women through the Nari Adalat, and other social issues such as child marriage, trafficking, taking active roles in village institutions as members of Village Education Committees and School Management Committees, joining MS functionaries in running MSKs, KGBVs, and Jagjagi Kendras, health initiatives and many more. Literacy training has made their efforts that much stronger".*

It may be required to shape mainstream and universal adult education programmes in the contextually rich manner of *Mahila Samakhya's* adult literacy approach. Adult learning is not a linear process that follows literacy, but a complex multi-faceted process, and has to be supported as such. The following illustration shows the context specificity of successful learning processes, which need to be embedded in community processes. The illustration below shows how health issues were identified as an area for learning, by *sangha* women from Andhra Pradesh, when they felt it was a serious issue affecting their everyday lives. Once *sangha* women identified health as an area of learning, they quickly accessed resources to aid this process, and also pro-actively took action based on this learning. Thus, adult learning has to be embedded within and resonate with the life context of people.



Source: Jandhyala,K., 2003 : Empowering Education: The *Mahila Samakhya* Experience.

4. *Gram Panchayat* libraries: The issue of a 'knowledge culture' at the grassroots level

Box 5. UNESCO on public libraries

The public library is the local centre of information, making all kinds of knowledge and information readily available to its users. The public library, the local gateway to knowledge, provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and social groups

UNESCO Public Library Manifesto,

From http://www.unesco.org/webworld/libraries/manifestos/libraman.html

The Department of Public Libraries, Karnataka envisions public libraries along similar lines - *"Public library is an institution established by the Government in order to inculcate interest in education, communication and reading among the General Public. It is an open public service system. … (It) serves as a dynamic force giving people knowledge, continuing education and information. Public library is people's university. It is a democratic institution working on democratic principles* (Karnataka Department of Public Libraries 2011).

The network of public libraries includes State Central Library, the district central libraries, city central libraries and libraries at the *taluk*, municipality and *gram panchayat* levels. Karnataka has one of the largest network of *Gram Panchayat* (GP)libraries – there are 5766 Gram Panchayat libraries covering almost all the G*ram Panchayats* in the State.

It is important to understand the State's experience in running libraries, especially the GP libraries, in order to identify learnings for designing new knowledge outreach interventions.

a. Users: Out of sight, out of mind

It must be evident that keeping user requirements in mind is critical in making library interventions successful. At the most basic level, books and other resources in the library should cater to user requirements. At present, the purchase of books is handled through a Centralised Single Window Scheme, and the selection of books is made by a Selection Committee constituted at the State level. The books which are centrally purchased are despatched to all the GP libraries. One could argue that this arrangement does not really hamper quality of service considering the huge number and

diversity of books each library has. " *Each library has about 3000-4000 books. There are all kinds of books : novels, short fiction, scientific books, children's books, magazines, text books , newspapers – almost everything"*, said a senior official of the Department of Public Libraries[21]. Evaluation studies of GP libraries have also attested to this diversity in book availability (ISS 2008). Our field research,however, revealed a more complex picture. Though in one of the libraries visited in Koppal, there were about 2000-3000 books according to the library supervisor, we also came across libraries where there were no books at all[22]. *"In our library, there are hardly 12 books. And mostly the library remains locked"*, shared one of the youth we spoke to as part of our ILK needs assessment process in Mandya.

No user feedback process has been introduced by the Department. Individual GP libraries are required to maintain user registers but there is no compilation at the district and higher levels for identifying the socio-economic profile of the frequent users of the libraries[23]. The only feedback mechanism seems to be the forwarding of user requests for specific books, from GP libraries to higher authorities.

A recent research study into GP libraries, undertaken in 352 *gram panchayats* spread across the entire State, has commented that *" In every village panchayat, non users of the library are in plenty- and in discussions with non users, the lack of books of their interest, especially competitive examination books, the location of the library, the absence of drinking water & toilet facilities and the lack of a space for women to sit & read books were cited as reasons discouraging them from visiting libraries*"(ISS 2008). The research study also pointed to the low levels of literacy as a reason for non-use of the libraries (ISS 2008). Field research also revealed the narrowness in the imagination of libraries as resource spaces, arising from a failure to picture the needs of target users in a thorough manner. *" People nowadays are much more attracted by TV and the moving images on the screen. They even feel that pictures are a truer representation of reality than words on a page. We need to do things that will attract them and make them visit libraries - maybe have interesting educational film screenings. But we don't have anything like that here"*, shared a GP library supervisor we interviewed in Koppal district. The library supervisors spoken to also shared that users tend to prefer

21 Field research in Bengaluru,July2011
22 Field research in Koppal and Mysore July 2011 and ILK assessment in Mandya July 2011
23 Field research in Koppal district July 2011

newspapers and magazines, to books. *"People who come here are always very keen to lay their hands on the Friday film supplement of the newspapers. They of course do not show the same enthusiasm where books are concerned. Even the few youth who read are interested only in competitive examination books"*, shared a library supervisor in Koppal.

The inability of the library to attract users needs further investigation – is it the lack of relevant content? Is it because the books available are seen as irrelevant to the problems community members face in their everyday context? We need to reflect on this, especially after considering the findings of the community level ILK assessment that revealed how books were not seen as an important node for ILK.

b. Insufficient attention to knowledge facilitation processes

For the library to effectively function as a "people's university" (Department of Public Libraries 2011), there must be sufficient attention paid to the creation of a space for facilitating cultural and educational processes. However, the evaluation report of GP libraries revealed that over 75% of GP libraries were not facilitating any cultural or educational activities (ISS 2008). At this juncture, it is important to reflect on the role of the functionary operating the GP library – currently, s/he is cast in the role of the library supervisor.

In one of the GP libraries we visited in Mysore[24], we observed that men and women were actively using the library; and that children felt comfortable in the library space; and, library users also reported the use of the library as a space for discussions on topics of contemporary interest. It was evident that the supervisor of the library (incidentally, a woman graduate from the same village) had played the defining role in this transformation of the library space. Clearly, the dynamism of the library space can be brought about only by someone actively facilitating and building community processes, keenly aware of the complexities of initiating knowledge processes - someone , who to begin with, must play the role of a community animator and educator. It may be important to point out that this particular *gram panchayat* in Mysore has strong *sanghas*/collectives, and in popular opinion the officials and the members of the Panchayat are considered to be efficient. The strength of

24 Field research in Mysore, July 2011

other public and community ILK institutions, therefore, clearly influences the success of knowledge processes around a library.

c. The importance of a pedagogy centred around the library space

In the dominant model of library interventions, enough attention is not paid to the processes through which people can be encouraged to use the library and develop their interest in self-learning aided by the resources in the library. The default approach seems to be guided by the assumption that the mere creation of a physical space with books will encourage reading habits in the community. Here, we would like to briefly point to an alternate model developed by the Hippocampus Reading Foundation[25] (HRF), an organisation that partners with schools, NGOs and CBOs to set up children's libraries. HRF has set up around 400 libraries till date, working across various locations in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Libraries are set up in existing schools, and community centres run by NGOs/CBOs, and sometimes even in the homes of individuals identified by the partner NGOs/CBOs. In some cases, HRF has enabled the setting up of mobile libraries. HRF's responsibilities consist in providing the library resources and training the librarians identified by the partner organisations. The partner organisation is in charge of providing the infrastructure for the library as well as meeting the operational costs.

Hippocampus Reading Foundation has invested in building a pedagogy centred around the library space.

HRF trains the librarians in the assessment of reading levels of children, as well as conducting reading and other recreational activities in the libraries to build children's interest and comfort with accessing books. HRF also provides a computer in each of the libraries to familiarise children with new technology. What is interesting is that books supplied by HRF are also graded by reading levels, to enable the librarian to identify appropriate books for appropriate reading levels. Also, the books are supplied to the library after the librarian has identified children who would be the prospective users, and graded them according to the HRF assessments. This ensures that there is a match between the books available and the average reading level. HRF libraries cater to between 40-200 children, and each library has round 800 books.

25 Field research on Hippocampus Reading Foundation, July 2011

At one of the libraries we visited at a community centre in Bengaluru, we noticed that there were many youth from the community who continued to use the library they had begun to use as children. One of the youth interviewed shared with us , *"About 13 people in my age group come here- both boys and girls. We help in conducting activities for the younger children. We also have dedicated activities such as discussions on the problems of adolescence, the importance of education etc. Some of us who come here are studying in college, others are working. But we all like coming here. Parents also encourage us as they feel it is better than loitering in the street. I am doing my B.A now – and I like coming here to read the encyclopedias and epics they have here."*[26]

HRF's approach provides leads about the nature of activities that need to be invested in, in order to effectively build a library-culture at the community level.

d. Lack of convergence with adult education programmes

The adult education programmes do not tap into the resources of the village library. Neither is the library supervisor of the GP library expected to play any role in encouraging neo-literates to continue reading, and introduce them to the library resources in a meaningful manner. It may appear surprising, (though this is typically the way government departments work in silos) that while CECs are supposed to have libraries and promote a reading habit in the community, they seek to make no connection to the existing village libraries. The need for a more convergent approach at the community level, supported by an agency that looks at community level ILK functions in a holistic and connected manner, therefore, suggests itself.

e. Funding issues

There is no provision in the State Budget for funding buildings for the GP libraries. Most of the GP libraries are located in buildings provided by the *panchayat* (ISS 2008). However, research studies have pointed out that sometimes the location of the library within space provided by the *panchayat* is problematic as library space is sometimes taken over for the *panchayat's* requirements (ISS 2008). A few GP libraries however have managed to get funds for constructing their own buildings, from the grants of the Raja Ram Mohan Roy Library Foundation. Libraries are also supposed to be partly

26 Field research in Bengaluru July 2011

funded by the Gr*am Panchayats*, who are required to collect a 6% library cess. However, this amount is rarely collected by the *panchayats* (ISS 2008).

f. Decentralisation without vision, and provisions to ensure fiscal responsibility

The salaries of the library supervisors, who are contract employees of the Government of Karnataka, were being routed by the Department of Public Libraries through the G*ram Panchayat*, after the Belur Declaration. However, the supervisors felt that this made matters worse. "*We sometimes did not receive payments for a very long time. So we all protested and got the Department to directly credit salaries into our bank accounts from April 2010*", shared a library supervisor from Mysore.[27] This makes one reflect on the accuracy of the simplistic assumption that greater decentralisation brings greater responsiveness in governance. Merely passing on power to disburse the librarian's salary does not make for decentralisation of the library function of the government. Such decentralisation should come with a new community-level convergent vision about how different ILK institutions and resources can and will be used to address the contextual ILK needs of the community. Specific measures will then have to be taken to operationalise such a vision through employing participatory means in the community, involving its *panchayat* bodies.

The experience of the GP library interventions demonstrates the importance of attention to context specific ILK resources, the key role of the facilitators in ILK interventions and seeking ILK convergences at the community level with the full involvement of the community, and the community leaders through ILK interventions.

27 Field research in Mysore district, July 2011

Take-aways for the *Samudaya Jnana Kendras* initiative

Our review of State ILK interventions reveals that overall we have reached a block; and there is a lack of a new vision that can overcome entrenched problems and system design flaws in these ILK interventions. It appears that the community end requirements for successful ILK initiatives are too context-rich and hence, too complex to be managed within existing public system paradigms. This context calls for a bold new approach that uses as its points of departure, the new system-building possibilities that may have been opened up in the knowledge society through the use of ICTs.

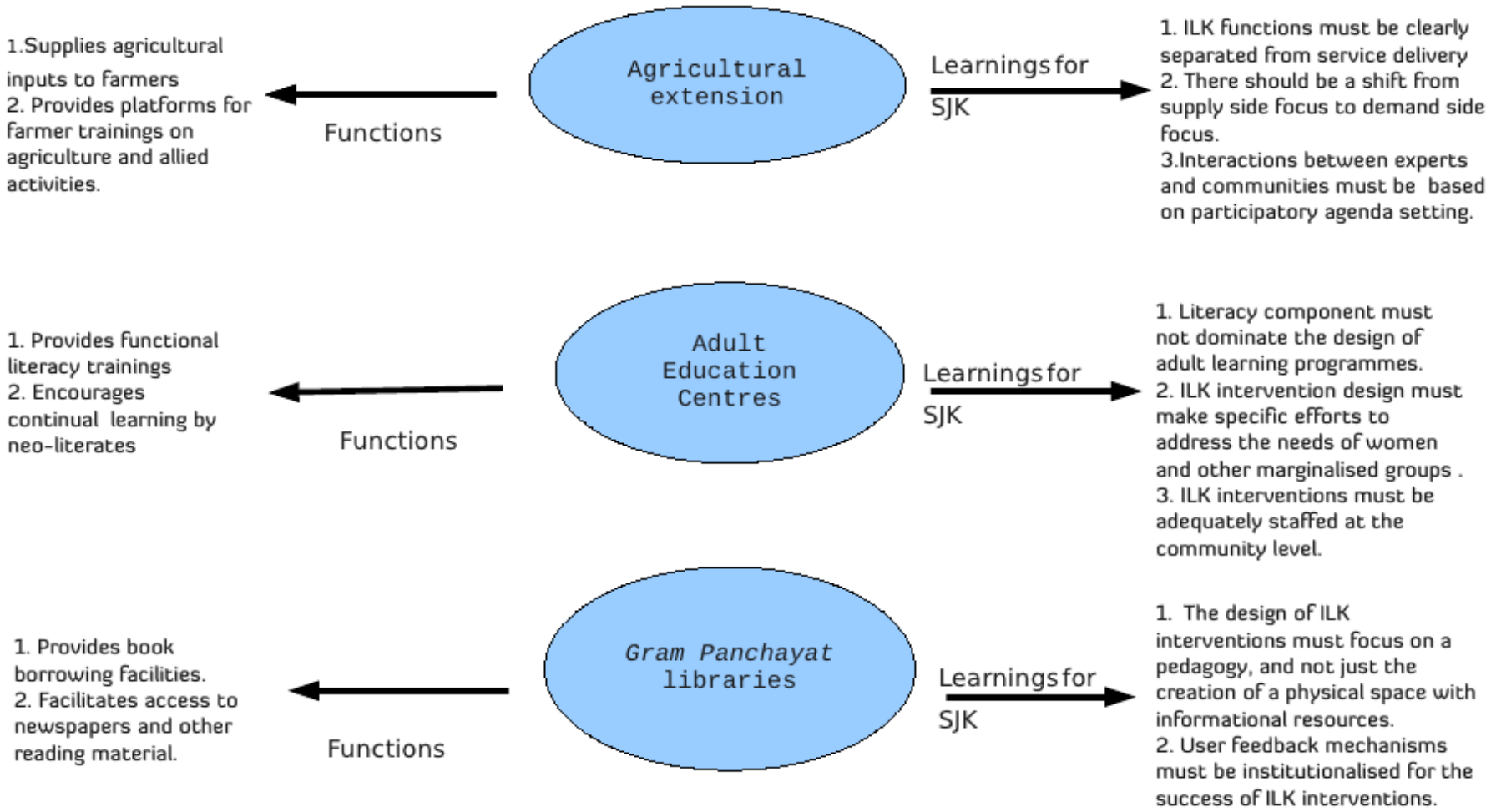
The limited success of the agricultural extension system in terms of meeting communities' ILK needs, suggests that the supply side is not the real 'problem area', because the extension system is certainly very well provided for, on the supply side. The demand side or the community-end is the real area to work on. The top-down context-independent ILK delivery is of little relevance. Instead, what is needed is a context-rich and interactive ILK activity, promoting a shared knowledge culture. Also, it came out strongly that in mixing ILK functions with service delivery functions, mostly, the result is that ILK functions are completely neglected. ILK delivery is a specialised activity, and should be separated from service delivery functions.

Similar insights are provided by a study of adult education programmes. Adult education should not be just focused on functional literacy, which without a connection to other ILK activities, carried out in a context-rich manner, is difficult to sustain. This provides the logic of a convergent ILK approach. Adult education is a self-motivated learning process, which must be supported in a sustained manner. Special efforts at collectivization and conscientisation are needed for this purpose, especially for the more marginalised groups, which requires making connections to the overall social and political context of the community.

The rural library initiative shows the relevance of the qualities of the community level facilitator for the success of any ILK activity. It underlines the need for systematically ensuring that right community-based persons are employed for this purpose, and the need to ensure that their 'right qualities' are sustained through regular trainings. It also shows how different ILK initiatives are synergistic and must connect to each other at the community level; in fact, they must be done in tandem. This provides the rationale for convergence of various ILK functions at the community level.

Overall, instead of looking at a simple process of top-down transfer of information, it is important to appreciate the the complexity of ILK processes, and the need for anchoring them at the community level, in a manner that is community-driven and -owned.

Review of some existing Information, Learning and Knowledge interventions of the State



Section 1.C. An assessment of some ICT-based convergent models for service and information delivery

New ICTs are at the centre of the knowledge society paradigm. At the community level, ICTs are being used to trigger new processes of information, communication, and learning . At the same time, institutional models built on ICTs are also seeking convergence of different service/ intervention verticals, across different departments and agencies. This is sought to be achieved through specialised community level information and service centres. We analyse a few such initiatives in this section, in order to glean lessons for the development of a new institutional model for SJK. Our inquiry focuses on the following aspects: What is the institutional mechanism by which these projects seek to achieve community level convergence? What kind of services and activities do they support? How do these initiatives ensure accountability, and community involvement and ownership; the key 'problem' areas in the earlier interventions of the State? The initiatives that we examine here are: the Common Service Centres of the Department of IT, Government of India; the Akshaya project of the Kerala State Government, the Village Knowledge Centres of MSSRF, and the Mission Convergence project in Delhi.

1. Introduction

As the previous section demonstrates, the traditional remotely organised ILK delivery mechanisms, with a satellite outreach presence in the community, do not seem to be working very well. Things have to be organised closer to the community, in a manner that is closely connected to the community's life, and is also accountable to it. ICTs seem to allow systems that can converge ILK and service functions across different departments and agencies at the community level, to enable specialised delivery centres. Such centres, due to cost-related and other forms of efficiencies, enabled by convergence, can now be located close to communities. Cost issues, while generally important, however, may not be too central here. This is because, we did see in our overview of large-scale ILK initiatives of the state that quite a few different schemes were able to deploy community level presence (though admittedly, they always remained resource starved). The real problem was not in deploying such presence, but in making them function effectively. One aspect of such a dysfunctionality was simply the inadequate organisational processes, whereby front-line workers did not have access to the needed information and communication facilities which are obviously key to ILK functions. This prevented them from effectively organising their local work, with the required

local flexibility without falling out of policy and programmatic compliance requirements. Also, the management could not effectively inform and track community level activities, in real time. The second issue was of community accountability. Typical electoral accountability acts from the state or centre based political system through respective departments and other agencies. However, such a system was too remote and inadequate to ensure responsiveness and accountability at the community level. Most government outreach points, especially in terms of their ILK functions, that have complex requirements to perform, seemed to simply not have enough mechanisms – either, from above, the management side; or, from below, the community – to ensure this.

ICTs can address the information and communication process deficiencies of organisations very well. This is a key knowledge society opportunity for governments. While governments have not undertaken holistic initiatives to do the required system re-engineering employing the new opportunities, some ongoing digitisation efforts have been used to develop community-based delivery systems, although in a largely *ad hoc* way. The models discussed in this section represent some such efforts. The community accountability part is even more important, and also more difficult to ensure. In some of the state-led new age convergent systems, the accountability problem has been sought to be addressed in two ways – by introducing private profit as an incentive for community responsiveness and by attempting to build heavy duty MIS (Management Information Systems) to remotely micro-track and micro-manage. We will discuss how these systems have worked. Other forms of community accountability, as we saw in the last section, was to involve *panchayats* centrally in supervising the community based delivery of services and ILK functions. We also found that without ensuring proper processes of fiscal capacity, proper training and instilling of values, norms and requirements of each community level activity and function among the *panchayat* members, and the concomitant community monitoring processes (including the monitoring of these processes through the *gram sabha*), simply handing over community level institutions to *panchayats* is not very effective. Proper use of ICTs can help address most of these problems, but again ICTs have not been systematically applied in the area of decentralisation and community monitoring in conjunction with their application to service and information delivery. In the absence of being able to use ICTs systemically to improve decentralisation outcomes and for community monitoring, the more successful ILK related new age convergent community level initiatives have been those which are NGO led, like those of DHAN Foundation and MSSRF in Tamil Nadu. Most of the large-scale government initiatives are not able to handle the services and ILK convergence, and have more or

less jettisoned the ILK functions. *Akshaya* of Kerala government, however, has tried to still manage some kind of information delivery, the success factors for which we will discuss shortly. Mission Convergence of the Government of Delhi handles the requirements of service delivery and ILK functions in a very interesting networked system method. The Common Service Centres programme of the government of India, however, remains the central paradigm across India for community level service delivery convergence. We will discuss, in brief, all the above mentioned initiatives which we visited for the present research (except for DHAN Foundation, which was not able to facilitate our visit to their centres). Though we have lots of data and information from our visits, as mentioned in the introduction to Part 1 of the research report, we will only present the key insights that emerge from each of the initiatives. We are interested only in the insights that directly bear upon our exploration of how best to meet community's ILK needs and whether a new village level institution of a *Samudaya Jnana Kendra* will be useful for this purpose.

2. Common Service Centres – The fulcrum of an ambitious governance system make over

The Department of Information Technology launched the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) in 2006, of which the Common Service Centres (CSCs) scheme is the flagship project. In fact, it can largely be considered the fulcrum over which an ambitious effort to effect deep structural changes in the governance system in India, especially as it relates to service delivery, is being made. However, since delivery of governance services, taken in its broadest meaning, is really what governments are about; this in reality, means that the impact of this initiative extends to the whole governance system.

Unfortunately, there is no policy document for the National e-governance Plan[28] (NeGP) that can help us understand the overall objectives of NeGP and CSCs, which we take to be a major problem for a programme that is so ambitious and involves such structural changes to our governance system. The guidelines for implementation of CSCs describe CSCs as "*the front-end delivery points for Government, private and social sector services to rural citizens of India, in an integrated manner. The objective is to develop a platform that can enable Government, private and social sector organizations to align their social and commercial goals for the benefit of the rural population in the*

28 See http://india.gov.in/govt/national_egov_plan.php for further details.

remotest corners of the country through a combination of IT-based as well as non-IT-based services."[29]

CSCs have a three-tier implementation framework[30]:

a. At the first level (the CSC level),the local Village Level Entrepreneur (VLE- loosely analogous to a franchisee), to service the rural consumer in a cluster of 5-6 villages.
b. At the second/middle level, an entity termed the Service Centre Agency (SCA – loosely analogous to a franchiser), to operate, manage and build the VLE network and business. An SCA would be identified for one or more districts (one district would cover 100-200 CSCs).
c. At the third level, the agency designated by the State, the State Designated Agency (SDA), to facilitate implementation of the scheme within the State and to provide requisite policy, content and other support to the SCAs.

The SCA, which is supposed to be a corporate entity, is considered the "*prime driver of the whole CSC eco-system*", and the "*success or failure of the CSC Scheme hinges to a large extent on the business and financial capabilities of the SCA, as the Scheme is (about) building 100,000 rural businesses in hitherto untapped and uncharted areas of the country, besides promoting rural entrepreneurship and involving community participation*"[31].

The ICT-enabled convergent system of CSCs is supposed to serve the needs of governance as well as commercial service delivery. The delivery system is largely considered to be agnostic to the kind of service that it will cater to. The logic is that as far as the intermediating private agents get the 'designated' fee/revenue for every case of service delivery, this should not really matter. This is a questionable stance. It is indeed possible to deliver some public services, or rather parts of public services, in a transactional mode against payment of designated fees, a part of which can go to the private intermediary. Three classes of services that can be dealt with in this manner are - obtaining government certificates and records, submitting various kinds of applications like those related to entitlements, and making various kinds of payments to government bodies. With proper checks and balances, it is also possible for private agents to act as banking intermediaries, and people can also receive payments through such a system.

29 See http://ittripura.nic.in/CSC/CSC_Guidelines.PDF
30 See http://ittripura.nic.in/CSC/CSC_Guidelines.PDF
31 ibid

The plan seems to be to develop the relevant parts of public services in a way that they could either be directly accessed over the Internet by a citizen, or with facilitated access at a public Internet facility. This is evident from the recent Electronic Service Delivery Bill that has been prepared by the Department of IT, Government of India. However, since an extensive private Internet access infrastructure does not exist at present in much of rural India, the CSC scheme, at one level, is just to provide subsidy for such rural Internet based businesses to develop – as evidenced by the fact that the subsidy support for the scheme is only for 5 years. As such, it appears a justified expenditure for the Government of India to help develop rural Internet businesses on the lines of PCOs, which had been similarly subsidised a few decades ago. The fact that these businesses also help in the electronic delivery of those aspects of public service delivery that can be so delivered, provides extra justification for such an expenditure.

A VLE collects payment for an electricity bill at a CSC in West Bengal.

However, the crucial question in this regard is, does the CSC operator have any kind of monopoly rights on any public service delivery? The implementation document seems to suggest that it is not so. On being directly questioned on this point, Department of IT officials confirm that there is no such principle of monopoly involved. Facts on the ground, however, speak otherwise. For example, the CSC operator in Chattisgarh has been designated as a 'public servant' and is thus officially a government agent in the community. Almost all CSC operators who we spoke to[32], were not only very clear that they were to be the sole delivery point of such services in the community, but they had also set great store by their role in and through these centres. In rural areas, being any kind of government agent can mean a lot in terms of social status. In fact, we found that a very large number of CSC operators have stayed on, despite the fact that not much is happening on the services front, simply because they do not want to lose this 'valuable position'. It is a major

32 Field research on Common Service Centres, Chattisgarh, March 2011

problem for a new institution if there is such a difference in perspectives on such a key issue among the policy makers, the programme implementers and the key operators of the programme on the ground. We mentioned earlier how there are no policy documents or any other kinds of normative documents that can help in developing a common view and perspective on what this ambitious new institution seeks to achieve, and how. We have noticed many other crucial design flaws that exist in the CSCs that have been set up. However, we are basically concerned here with community's ILK needs and functions, and are reviewing the CSC programme in that regard alone.

ILK functions involve complex and rich social interactions in the symbolic space. Norms, mutual expectations, etc. are of central importance in this regard. There is also a general public goods characteristic of the informal ILK processes. In very few places, if any at all, did we find a CSC operator thinking of himself/herself having any specific responsibility regarding community's ILK functions, to think that it was his/ her duty to inform the community of various issues in a proactive way, much less build the communities' learning and knowledge. However, if a skill development course was presented to him/ her as a commercially attractive option, he/she seemed immediately interested in its revenue potential. Sometimes, the interest may lie in getting more people to his centre in any way possible, which could have positive bearing on his/her other businesses. Accordingly, s/he may be open to conducting some non-revenue earning activities as well, which can include some ILK functions.

On a very low priority, though, there may be a pure service incentive of the kind, "*yes this kind of thing will be good for the people to know, and I can help in it*".Most of the time, the operators are found fretting about sunk investments and the little revenue they get, a story that was repeated in centre after centre. Some centres who were doing other non-CSC profitable business from the same place, with or without computers, had more patience. They hoped that some prospects will eventually materialize, transforming their centre into a lucrative business opportunity as well as an important, and respectable place in the community.

While the community entrepreneurs did show some concern, however low on his/her priority, about community's ILK needs, the (mostly) corporate intermediaries, i.e., the SCAs,,as expected, are very clearly business motivated, though they may sometime take a long term view of their business. Any kind of social responsibility for the SCA was largely synonymous with a

long term view of the business in the community. However, it should be obvious that the two are not the same.

We found that village entrepreneurs were able to show some degree of community responsibility and responsiveness, even if this can be attributed to the high value people lay on 'community standing' in rural India. However, SCA staff relentlessly bombard them with exhortations to be more business savvy, and to choose those services that have the greatest revenue potential. Professional managers that they are, they live by sales graphs, and hence, are only doing their job.

The SCA link in the CSC chain seems the most problematic one with respect to the public goods nature of much of the work associated with governance, and the specific norms and outlooks regarding public service. As in the case of *Askhaya* centres, the CSCs of Kerala which are discussed as a case study later in this document, when there are strong public sector agencies serving the service development needs of the village entrepreneurs and also seeking close accountability *vis a vis* community responsiveness, the entrepreneurs can be used for many public service functions without clear revenue models for him/her. The SCA in the case of *Akshaya* is a state agency, the *Akshaya* Society under the Kerala IT Mission. Also, the *Akshaya* centres have a close relationship with the local *panchayat* offices and are accountable to them. It is because of such close supervision by public agencies that the *Akshaya* centres have often been involved with general information delivery and even collection of useful local information, which we did not find the CSC system doing in any other state. It is instructive that that the two states that have the longest experience of running public funded telecentres, Kerala and Gujarat, have both not accepted the private sector SCA model of the government of India's CSC model, and have dedicated special public agencies to this task. Like in Kerala, the SCA in Gujarat is a government agency, the *eGram Vishvgram* Society. In Gujarat as well, the CSC centres are accountable to the village *panchayats*.

It is our view that if the SCA function is undertaken by a specialised public agency, and the village entrepreneur is made closely accountable to the *panchayats* and also directly to the community, many electronically deliverable aspects of public service delivery can very effectively be done by village entrepreneur run CSCs. However, public service delivery functions that involve core responsibilities of a monopolistic nature generally associated

with government bodies, should be devolved to the *panchayats* leveraging an ICT-enabled intra-governmental system.

However, our primary concern is with community level ILK functions. We did suggest in the last section on state's ILK initiatives, that, unlike service delivery which can be 'produced' and organised upstream to just be properly delivered at the community level against clear parameters, community ILK functions being both very context-specific and requiring rich social interactions, require to be organised at the community level. This will however require the necessary resource support from outside agencies. From our review of CSCs' working, we see no way for an entrepreneur can do this, even with the support of a specialised public agency devoted to ILK functions. This is a core public interest function, to be done in the full spirit of community service. However, to take a leaf out of the CSC book, in the same way as service delivery functions of multiple departments and agencies are being converged over the CSC platform, we should explore how we can use ICTs to converge the ILK functions of different departments and agencies over a new community based common ILK platform. Undoubtedly, such a convergence platform will have be run by a public interest group at the community level, perhaps a community based organisation, on a public funding model.

It was found in the last section that even within specific verticals, like agriculture, mixing service delivery with ILK functions can be very problematic, even when in such a case common domain expertise was a positive factor for performing these functions together. Against this background, such a mixing of service delivery with ILK functions is quite unjustifiable in the new age ICT-enabled convergent platforms, where the ' domain expertise' factor is not that significant. On the other hand, there is an increased specialisation in core service delivery expertise, which is sought to be made more and more 'productised' and in a transaction mode, so that it can be easily tracked and monetised. Such expertise for efficient 'trackable' service delivery expertise has little in common with what can be considered as the required competency - individual and institutional - for community level ILK functions. The problem with CSCs therefore is not so much in what they do, and can do well (electronic service delivery), especially if some design corrections as suggested above are made. Their main problem is what they claim to do, or at least aspire to do (all kinds of ILK functions for the community), which they simply cannot, as per the very competencies

that they are developing for doing their core functions well. If the policy makers can come out with clear, credible, mapping of what the core competencies of the CSC system are and what can these competencies be employed for, and for what they cannot, they will be easily able to figure out that community ILK is a different ball game altogether, requiring very different competencies, both at the institutional and individual level. Such a recognition could clear the ground for exploring another initiative that employs the new ICT opportunity for converging community level ILK functions.

Box 6. Business and community ILK functions do not mix

When the CSC scheme was launched in one of the larger states of India, one NGO with established ICT centres and a very good reputation in community development work, approached the SCA to explore if their centres can be considered as CSCs, so that they could use the resources they had brought into their community work. The SCA had a sister concern running insurance business. During the discussion, the issue of selling private services came up and the NGO representative said that they will not be able to 'advise' their community to buy a particular insurance scheme. They can only tell them about the benefits of insuring themselves, and at the best, the features of different schemes; the rest being for them to decide. The SCA staff did not find this acceptable. This incident shows clearly the lines between business and public interest ILK functions. One can say that the SCA staff took the right decision in his company's interest, which is his job to do. At the same time, if the NGO representative would have buckled, he would have done something very inappropriate for his area of work.

3. The case of *Akshaya* – Balancing private entrepreneurship with public accountability

The *Akshaya* project was launched by the Kerala State IT Mission in 2002 as a telecentre initiative that aimed at "*bringing about e-literacy,encouraging ICT and the development of local content on new ICT platforms, and bridging the digital divide in Kerala*" (IT for Change, 2008). The two imperatives of the inclusion of rural communities in the digital society, and the creation of centres that could act as support structures for skill up-gradation of migrants returning home from the Gulf countries guided *Akshaya's* pilot intervention in Malapuram district(IT for Change, 2008). By the end of 2007, the *Akshaya* project covered almost the entire state. Since the initial phase where the focus was on e-literacy, a variety of e-governance programmes and services have been launched through the *Akshaya* centres.

Currently, there are about two *Akshaya* centres in every *gram panchayat*, considering the high population density of Kerala. The centres are run by local entrepreneurs selected through an application and interview process, with the involvement of the local *panchayat*. During the selection process, a 'points weightage' system was followed, to give women applicants and those from SC/ST and other marginalised sections an advantage in the selection process[33].


An Akshaya entrepreneur interviewed in Kannur district

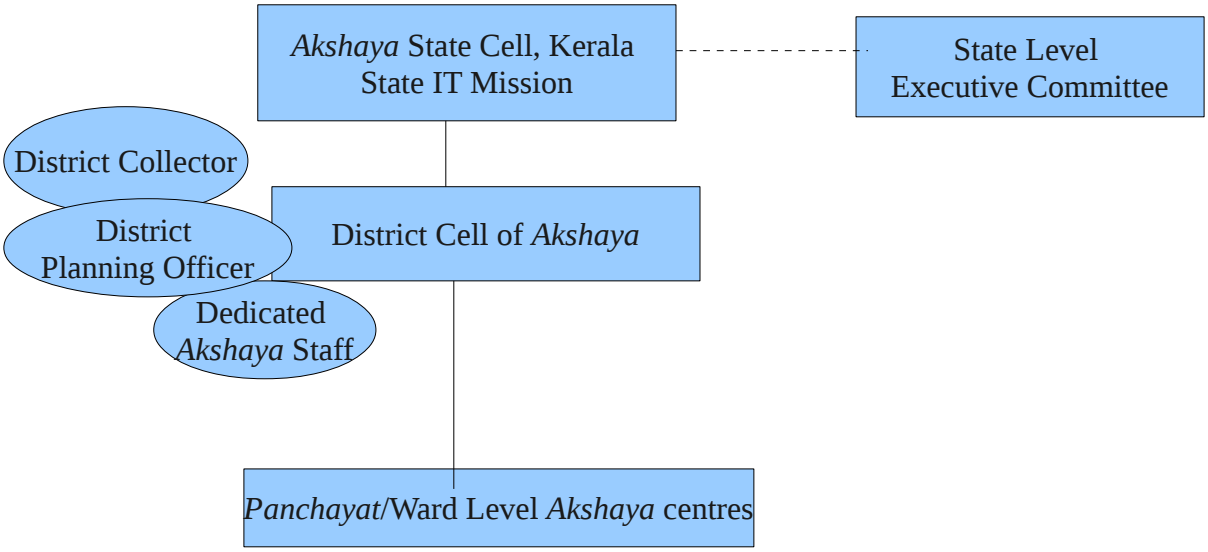
The entrepreneurs own the centres, meet the operational costs, and also make all the initial investments towards the infrastructure. The State assists in subsidising connectivity and availing loans, as well as procuring materials at lower costs (IT for Change, 2008). The entrepreneurs earn their income mainly from the service charges on the e-governance services and utility bill collections which the state government has devolved to the *Akshaya* centres, as well as data collection and data entry work for local governance institutions. Many entrepreneurs also run computer education courses, which provides a steady source of income. The Kerala State Government is also implementing most of the e-governance programmes of the government (including the UID-*Aadhar* project and the e-district project) through the *Akshaya* centres, ensuring a steady stream of income generation possibilities for the entrepreneurs. In the initial phase of the project, the *Akshaya* centres were expected to bring about e-literacy activities in their communities and there was a conditionality that the permission to entrepreneurs to start e-governance related activities would be given only if s/he had completed the e-literacy component. The *Akshaya* project centres of Kerala are now also considered to be CSC centres, under the CSC scheme of the Department of Information Technology, Government of India. However, it is important to remember that the *Akshaya* centres pre-date the CSC centres, and moreover, the implementation architecture of the *Akshaya* project in Kerala is markedly different.

33 Field research on the *Akshaya* project, July 2011

a. The implementation structure

The *Akshaya* project has been implemented by the Kerala State IT Mission - an autonomous nodal agency for the Department of Information Technology, Government of Kerala[34]. The implementation structure of the *Akshaya* project, evolved by the Kerala State IT Mission, is depicted in the organigram below.

Organisation structure of *Akshaya*



Source: http://www.*akshaya*.kerala.gov.in/index.php/institutionlaframework, last accessed August 5 2011 as well as Primary field research

The *Akshaya* State level Executive Committee functions under the aegis of the Chief Minister of the state of Kerala. Its members include Ministers in charge of key portfolios in the State Cabinet, the Director of the Kerala State IT Mission, higher officials from across various departments including education, local self government, planning & economic affairs and the Director of the *Akshaya* project.

It is useful to contrast *Akshaya's* organisational structure with that of the Common Service Centres initiative discussed in the earlier section. To begin with, there is no private sector Service Centre Agency (SCA) to mediate between the State and the entrepreneurs. Instead, the Kerala State IT

34The Kerala State IT Mission provides managerial support to various initiatives of the Department of IT of the Government of Kerala, and is registered as a Society under the Travancore Cochin Literary Scientific and Charitable Societies Registration Act (Act 12 of 1955)

Mission which functions as both the State Designated Agency(SDA) and the SCA, deals with the entrepreneurs directly through its implementation structure that extends right up to the grassroots level. The involvement of government departments other than the Department of Information Technology at the top level and the middle level, in a formalised manner, is important in effective implementation of e-governance and the re-packaging of governance services during digitisation. Though there is no formal platform that has been set up for the entrepreneurs of *Akshaya* centres and the local governance institutions to interact periodically, field work revealed a good rapport between the *panchayat* members and *panchayat* officers and the *Akshaya* centres. Many entrepreneurs in our field research opined that they felt *panchayats* played a key role in their success. *"Running an Akshaya centre has been a very successful experience, especially after a number of services of the government started flowing in. A major reason for this success is the active support the panchayat has given us. Without them, it would not have been possible to run the centre. They give us a chance to speak in meetings, they apportion funds for other local governance schemes to be routed through the Centre - and they also help us get recognition among the villagers. I think if such a scheme has to succeed, the cooperation of panchayats is absolutely necessary",* shared an entrepreneur from Kannur district. These views were shared by almost all the entrepreneurs we interviewed in Kannur and Kochi districts.

Box 7. Decentralisation and the success of e-governance: Insights from field research

"I think *Akshaya* centres work very well in Kerala because both the IT Act of Kerala and the 73rd and 74th amendment to the Indian constitution have been implemented in letter and spirit. When *panchayats* are strong, such centres that serve the citizens can work well and in coordination with the local level government.

Only strong *panchayats* will have plans, members, funds and work to do. If they have none of this, what use is a *Akshaya* centre to them? I firmly believe that digitisation of *panchayats* is meaningless if there is no effective local governance. In Kerala, the People's Planning process revolutionized local governance and strengthened *panchayats* immensely. *Panchayats* have the budgets and the decision making power over many areas of governance – this means more opportunities for *Akshaya* entrepreneurs to work with *panchayats*. More importantly, years of people's struggles has bequeathed us a political culture which is information-oriented, rights-oriented and focused on decentralization – We carry this political culture even to the new e-governance initiatives which have been proposed. In Kerala, *Akshaya* works because of this culture in our political life. Without this political culture, nothing would have been possible here."

Source: Excerpt from an interview with a *panchayat* member in Kannur district, July 2011

The *Akshaya* model seems to work effectively as far as delivery of services under e-governance is concerned. However, the *Akshaya* centres are projected not only as service centres, but also information centres. This view was shared by many of the entrepreneurs we interviewed *"Akshaya is a service, business and information centre - all in one"*- said an entrepreneur from Kochi district. We enquired how information provisioning takes place in this model that combines it with service delivery and business, and our findings were as follows.

1. Many entrepreneurs recognised that some information provisioning activities were a part and parcel of service delivery, and it was essential for it be undertaken. "*When people come, it is only if we address their information queries that they will try to use our services*." (an entrepreneur from Kochi district).

2. Entrepreneurs also felt that information enquiries unrelated to service delivery were part of their responsibility. Some said this out of the public spiritedness they felt was invested in their role. Others felt information provisioning was an effective way of building good will. However, all entrepreneurs interviewed felt that information provisioning had to be free, and could not be a paid service. Interviews revealed that some of the entrepreneurs tried to put a lot of effort in initiating information provisioning activities, though it was not remunerative. *"I think that we must answer people's queries if we are going to give them services. I think these two are both parallel needs that we have to address. In fact, I have also tried to initiate a help desk in the municipality but there has not been much progress. Akshaya has got an order for the Kannur collectorate but since my centre is very far, I don't want to take that up. I think it will be very useful to run a help desk – we get a lot of goodwill and contact with local officials that way"*, shared one of the entrepreneurs from Kannur we interviewed.

3. Some of the interviews revealed that entrepreneurs felt that there were more information activities in the earlier period of the *Akshaya* project, when the e-literacy was on, compared to the present when they had a lot of activities under service delivery. *"I always try and answer the queries that people have, for it is only then that they will come here again and again. When people come here and ask something, very often I learn about it by online searches and then tell them. But after e-district started, with 60-70 people coming in*

everyday, I am not able to give as much time as earlier. In fact, recently, the panchayat president had suggested that we set up a help desk at the panchayat office to handle information inquiries. I would like to, but I don't have the time"- shared an entrepreneur we interviewed in Kannur district.

In the *Akshaya* model, there is an over-reliance on individual motivation of entrepreneurs towards information awareness to ensure information provisioning. This seems to have worked well in Kerala, maybe due to the presence of other factors such as powerful *panchayats*, and an extremely information-oriented political culture, which need to be further investigated and understood. Whether this model can be replicated for an integrated approach to information and service delivery functions, through a single outreach point, is quite debatable. It is important to note that even in *Akshaya*, ILK functions are not performed in a systematic manner. Even then, there are some aspects from Kerala's *Akshaya* model that we can emulate, while designing ILK interventions:

1. In Kerala, the *Akshaya* model has worked well because the Kerala IT Mission invested dedicated effort in developing the associated structures and systems, and the 'back end' support for the *Akshaya* centres.

2. The choice to opt out of a corporate SCA structure (as was adopted by the CSC centres examined earlier in the section) and instead opt for driving the programme through a dedicated state agency (Kerala State IT Mission) reveals the clear vision and accurate understanding of the public good character of public service delivery.

3. The strong information orientation of the entrepreneurs has certainly enabled successful information provisioning through *Akshaya* centres. In the case of Kerala, this information orientation seems to be enmeshed with other factors peculiar to Kerala, such as powerful *panchayats*, and an extremely information-oriented political culture, which need to be further investigated and understood. Kerala's unique socio-political climate may not be replicable elsewhere, but there needs to be investment in developing the information orientation of entrepreneurs, and

developing the potential of *panchayats* to be crucial components of the local community's ILK infrastructure.

4. The Village Knowledge Centres of M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation – Lessons for effective community ownership

M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) was established in 1989 to work towards developing 'sustainable, pro-poor , pro-nature, and pro-women' on-farm and non farm livelihoods through 'appropriate ecotechnology' and 'knowledge empowerment'[35]. The deployment of technologies in a context-specific manner was always considered by the Foundation, to be a crucial component in working towards this mandate. In the 1990s, when MSSRF was working in Puduchery on the issue of livelihood development as a part of its "Bio-Village project", it received funding from International Development Research Centre[36] for carrying out a project to investigate the effectiveness of various technologies for information dissemination in communities[37]- the Information Village Research Project. In 1997, the Information Village Research Project was piloted in Puduchery, and since then it has been expanded to seven other districts in Tamil Nadu as well as some locations in Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Orissa and Kerala (MSSRF/MG/07/25).

a. Operational structure

MSSRF has adopted 'a hub and spoke model' under which Village Knowledge Centres (VKCs) were set up for village clusters, which in turn were connected to block level hubs called the Village Resource Centres for coordination, and operational and management support. The block level hubs were brought under the control and management of a central hub at the state level. This state level hub is the main knowledge resource base for the VKCs. The Tamil Nadu state level hub also acts as the national level hub for the other states where the MSSRF programme is operational.

This excerpt from the interview with the Programme Coordinator[38] makes the operational structure of the project clearer: *"The Village Resource Centres have V-SAT connectivity and they also have a three-four member team consisting of technical experts, scientists and social scientists. The Village Resource Centres are in charge of working with communities for the establishment of Village*

35 http://www.mssrf.org/ Accessed July 2011
36 IDRC is a public corporation created by the Canadian government to help communities in the developing world. Read more at www.idrc.ca
37 Field research at MSSRF centres, July 2011. Information from an interview at the Pillayarkuppam VRC, Puduchery.
38 Interview with Mr. Senthil Kumaran, Programme Coordinator, MSSRF as part of field research July 2011

Knowledge Centres in their villages, interacting with the workers of the Village Knowledge Centres, monitoring the Village Knowledge Centres and helping them resolve issues, training the knowledge workers and providing them with locally relevant context-specific information. The Village Knowledge Centres are the face of the project- We are very clear that there should be community ownership of the centres for sustainability, and so we make it clear at the outset that we can set up a knowledge centre in an area only if the community provides a rent-free building, makes provisions for payment of electricity charges and identifies a volunteer/volunteers to operate the centres. MSSRF, of course, provides the technological hardware, training to the knowledge workers selected by the community, and supports them in addressing the community's information needs."

b. Approach towards sustainability

Right from the beginning, MSSRF has believed that sustainability cannot be measured in financial terms alone, and that a successful intervention has to be a 'socially sustainable' one. As the Programme Coordinator explained during the course of our interview with him, *"We insist on community ownership of the VKCs as a way of ensuring sustainability of the centres. If you look at telecentre interventions that advocate community ownership, one finds two broad models – the entrepreneurial model and the social model. I think that the social model pays more dividends in the longer run – though it takes one-two years to establish unlike the entrepreneur model which may be established in six months. The social model is better in the long run to work towards sustainability".*

This approach towards sustainability guides MSSRF's emphasis on community identification of a rent-free space, and community commitment to MSSRF towards managing the operational costs and community identification of volunteers to run the centre. However, MSSRF makes a conscious choice of not

One of the Village Knowledge Centres of MSSRF in Puduchery.

interfering in community power politics during the process of engaging with the community. It often chooses opinion leaders in the villages as the first points of contact, and also consults with them in the formation of a local Managing Committee to run the village level centre. There are some broad principles that MSSRF specifies – such as ensuring the presence of at least some members from minority and marginalised groups of the village and the presence of representatives from local governance institutions, within the Managing Committee; and keeping party politics outside the Village Knowledge Centre. In fact, because of MSSRF's deliberate effort to keep local politics out of the Village Knowledge Centre, it has decided not to interfere explicitly in the selection and functioning of the Managing Committee beyond setting broad principles.

The nature of issues debated during the Managing Committee meetings becomes clearer from the following excerpt from our interview with the Programme Coordinator, MSSRF- *"The Managing Committee meets once a month to discuss operational issues, as well as determine what services should be paid and what services should be free at the Village Knowledge Centre. The Managing Committee also decides how to allocate funds for the operating costs of the centres. Sometimes, they collect donations from the community. Otherwise they set aside a certain percentage from the sale of agricultural produce from community lands or from the donations given to the village temple (undiyal) as funds for the Village Knowledge Centre."*

Certainly, there is an emphasis on community ownership of the VKCs in the MSSRF model. The only control built into the selection process of the Managing Committee members is the criterion that requires the presence of members from minority communities and other marginalised groups in the village. There are no further guidelines for the process of operationalising this criterion. While it might be easier to critique the MSSRF model for this oversight, which can increase the risk of powerful members and opinion leaders hijacking the selection process, we must not forget to acknowledge that MSSRF model is one of the few models that consciously emphasises community participation.

c. Women's involvement at the VKCs

Keeping with the logic of the social model of community ownership, the operators of the centre do not receive any financial incentives, except for a Rs. 800/ per month[39] honorarium that MSSRF pays

39 Field research at MSSRF centres in Puduchery, July 2011

them for documentation work (such as maintaining user registers). The operators are appointed by the Managing Committee. A majority of the operators are women, possibly due to the unpaid nature of the work. While the unpaid use of women's labour for community welfare can be problematised as further reinforcing the stereotype of the 'idle house wife', it needs to be acknowledged that the experience of working in the telecentres as volunteers has empowered individual women. "*Earlier, I was very shy. In fact, as a young woman, I would not even go to the tailoring class in the same village. My brother had to accompany me everywhere. But now after joining here, I am much more confident. I can speak in front of a thousand people even",* shared one of the operators interviewed at the Puduchery centre.

d. Approach towards information and knowledge processes

The VKCs of MSSRF attempt to primarily address community information needs through a 'locale -specific, demand -driven' approach- in the areas of agriculture, animal husbandry, fishing, education, livelihoods training and civic services (this refers to developmental programmes of the State). The information needs at the start of the telecentre project were identified through a Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) process with the community members. Following the establishment of the VKCs and the VRCs, information & training needs are identified through an annual planning process that is jointly undertaken by the VKC & the VRCs (Village Resource Centres at the block level) wherein information & training needs are identified, and activities for each centre are drawn up.

The focus in all the activities, is on transferring information from experts to communities, through the innovative use of technologies such as, Electronic Display Boards where oceanographic information is made available in fishing villages, text messaging services for farmer communities, phone-in programmes and so on.

There is also a great deal of emphasis on network building to maximise information access to communities. *"All VRCs are required to build a network of advisors with scientists, technical experts, staff of local universities and research institutions, government officials of the line departments at the block level and government functionaries at the village level such as ANMs, school teachers and balwadi workers. Whenever there is a demand for training from the community or when there are some information needs expressed by a lot of community members, the VRC arranges a talk/training by the relevant expert or official, provided the Village Knowledge workers mobilise community*

members and communicate dates for the training/talk" - Excerpt from an interview with the Programme Coordinator of MSSRF.

The MSSRF model, however, pays much more attention to the transfer of information from experts to the communities than building horizontal information and knowledge processes. The following illustration may make this point clearer. MSSRF has experimented with a number of technologies in its telecentre initiative – VSAT, spread spectrum,Mobile phones, Community Radio, Public Address systems, telephones and the internet. However, we observed that there have not been many attempts to encourage local communities' use of ICTs for their own creative expression and encourage bottom-up content development processes.

There was also no attempt made to transfer the centres into discursive spaces where entitlement seeking and rights-oriented actions could be initiated. In the two centres visited at Puduchery, it was observed that there was no internet connectivity[40]. The women volunteers (Village Knowledge Workers) shared that they had been given Datacards , but as the Datacards kept getting lost, the MSSRF staff at the VRC had started retaining the Datacards and they bring them along only on their visits to the centre. During these visits, the MSSRF staff from the VRCs download information from the MSSRF site which they consider relevant for the VKC. None of the women Village Knowledge Workers interviewed use emails or the Internet for their personal learning or even entertainment. Two of them did not even have email addresses. In fact, the Village Knowledge Workers do not view the Internet as a platform that can open up new avenues for ILK processes. In the MSSRF model, the emphasis seems to be on information processes that are 'assisted' by technology rather than the construction of technology as the space or platform for promoting and encouraging new ILK processes.

5. The Gender Resource Centre - *Suvidha Kendras* of Mission Convergence: A networked governance model

40 Field research at MSSRF centres in Puduchery, July 2011

The Mission Convergence programme (also called the *Samajik Suvidha Sangam)* was conceptualised by the Government of Delhi and conceptualised in February 2008. It was formally launched later that year, in August 2008. The objectives of the project are to[41]:

1. Establish, manage, operate, maintain and facilitate welfare programmes throughout the National Capital Territory (NCT) of Delhi for providing welfare services in an integrated manner to the under-privileged citizens in an efficient, transparent, convenient, friendly and cost effective manner.
2. Identify and recommend the welfare services which can be provided in a converged manner after consultation and coordination with the appropriate departments.
3. Work out and implement the action plan for the welfare schemes in the NCT of Delhi in collaboration with the private sector, NGOs, or Public Private Partnership (PPP) or other innovative methods as per the requirements of the specific areas.
4. Rationalise and streamline the implementation of the schemes related with social services.
5. Generate awareness on the welfare schemes and programmes amongst the masses.
6. Facilitate and promote public-private partnerships and community ownership in efficient service delivery of social services.
7. Improve access of the poor to get the maximum benefits of the welfare schemes.
8. Promote women's empowerment.

These objectives were conceived on the basis of the findings of the Delhi Human Development Report 2006[42] which noted that although levels of income poverty were declining, other forms of deprivation of people living in slums, informal settlements and unauthorised colonies remained unchanged to a large extent. The majority lacked access to even basic public amenities and were unable to access the benefits of government schemes due to lack to information as well as systemic exclusions. The report observed that one of the reasons for these systemic exclusions is that the governance structure is characterised by overlapping jurisdictions. As a result, *"the distribution of powers across*

A GRC-SK worker conducts registrations for a government health scheme at a service delivery cum gender resource centre (GRC-SK) in Meethapur, Delhi

41 http://www.missionconvergence.org/vision-mission.html (Last accessed August 2011)

42 Government of NCT of Delhi (2006), *Delhi Human Development Report: Partnerships for Progress*, Oxford University Press: New Delhi.

different agencies leads to the diffusion of responsibility and frequent public inaction" (ibid: 9). To counter this , the project was envisaged as a single window delivery system based in the community and managed by Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), through a Public Private Community Partnership (PPCP) model. As Rashmi Singh, former director of the Mission Convergence programme shared with us in an interview[43], *"The evolution of the programme grew from the realisation that vulnerable people are getting left out of the social security ambit as the multiplicity of initiatives, coupled with a large number of implementing agencies has resulted in a duplication of efforts."* Singh added that partnering with CSOs would bring *"greater transparency in implementation of the schemes, and address the errors of inclusion and exclusion [in beneficiary identification] in a focused manner."*

a. Operational structure

Samajik Suvidha Sangam is a state level body registered as a society and is the implementing arm of the Mission Convergence endeavor. The project has an innovative and complex institutional structure. Its daily management is under the Programme Management Unit (PMU) headed by the Managing Director. Above the PMU, to support the convergence of nine departments[44], is the State Convergence Forum headed by the Chief Secretary. The overall policy direction to the project is given by the Policy Review Committee which is headed by the Delhi Chief Minister.

Below the PMU are the nine District Resource Centres (DRCs) located at the office of the Deputy Commissioners of each district which are the main sites for ensuring the smooth functioning of the project. The DRCs are under the management of sanctioned NGOs and undertake the responsibility of following up on processes from the field, liaising with the government and the community, addressing grievances and additionally act as a hub of knowledge and information services, mainly on schemes and programmes of the government. Most importantly, DRCs monitor and collate the district level reports on the performance of community based structures in their respective districts. However, since the DRC is run by an NGO with orientations and systems that are often very different from the government's style of functioning, Mission Convergence conceived of a way to bridge this communication gap. A District Management Unit (DMU) was set up, comprising a retired government official, to advise the NGO on how to interact with the government and help develop an understanding of its processes. The role of this official is thus largely advisory and liasoning, and envisioned to facilitate the efficient and smooth functioning of the DRC.

43 Interview conducted as a part of a primary field study on Mission Convergence, January 2011

44 Namely, Health & Family Welfare, Food & Civil Supplies, SC/ST/OBC & Minorities Welfare, Social Welfare, Urban Development, Labour and Information Technology.

The community based structures are called the Gender Resource Centre - *Suvidha Kendras* (GRC-SKs) and have been set up in regions where vulnerable populations have been mapped, each of which is to serve approximately 15000 to 20000 households. The GRCs were originally established under the *Stree Shakti* programme of the Department of Social Welfare (DSW). At the time the Mission Convergence programme was conceived, it was felt that the GRCs would provide the ideal location for the *Suvidha Kendras*. The original objective of the GRCs was improving the condition of women by providing them means of social, legal and economic empowerment. For this purpose the GRCs run skill based training for women in the region along with undertaking regular health camps, providing doctor visits and legal counsel, non-formal education opportunities. After the lauch of Mission Convergence, through the *Suvidha Kendras (l*ocated within existing GRCs), the community is provided information regarding the government schemes and programmes. The GRC-SKs thus perform an amalgam of functions to meet the original objectives of the *Stree Shakt*i programme as well as the objectives of Mission Convergence.

The GRC-SKs also provide a single application form for people to seek their entitlements under 43 schemes making it more people-friendly. One of the first tasks undertaken by the GRC-SKs was to undertake a survey using the vulnerability index[45] and identifying the most vulnerable households in the city. This supported the process of providing basic services and schemes to such households.

Mission Convergence has engaged two mother NGOs to 'facilitate, guide and supervise the functioning of the field NGOs' (Mission Convergence, 2010). They also hold capacity building and training sessions for members of the GRC-SK on how to create self help groups, conduct health trainings and nutrition camps and provide legal literacy services. Mother NGOs supervise the community mobilization and trainings component of the work of GRC-SKs. The DRC-DMU, on the other hand, supervises household surveys, forwards service applications etc.

b. Mainstreaming gender concerns

Considering Delhi's negative reputation for being increasingly unsafe for women, in addition to a declining sex ratio in the 0 to 6 age group signifying the persistence of strong anti-female biases, the decision to structurally embed the *Suvidha Kendras* within the existing DSW *Stree Shakti* programme is an innovative aspect of Mission Convergence. The GRCs set up under the Stree Shakti programme had a decentralised structure, and were backed by an established infrastructure of individual centres located within vulnerable population dwellings, that were being run by NGOs working with the

45 A new criteria for beneficiary identification which took into account social and occupational vulnerability indicators like disability, gender and age.

mandate of gender justice and inclusion. The GRCs were also a much lauded initiative of the Delhi government with an established and growing social capital. Thus, the GRCs were strategically poised for taking on service delivery responsibilities, as required by Mission Convergence.

The outcome of this combination has been the creation of decentralised spaces geographically accessible to marginalised women, which serve as support structures where they can access skill building trainings, join self help group (SHG) activities, receive legal and health counsel along with being able to access information on basic services and schemes. Interviews with women users showcased that increasingly women are entering traditional male domains within information seeking, such as information seeking for financial assistance, because they have increased access to such domains, through the SKs located in the GRC space[46]. The GRCs also provide a safe space for women to meet, mingle, discuss and learn about their community and life outside through the new networks that are formed by their interactions. Community mobilisers associated with the programme gave several examples of women who have even begun to imbibe rights based attitudes and have courageously challenged government officials to demand services. It is also notable that several of the women SHGs are beginning to collectively build small trades, negotiate markets and learn skills which were traditionally male dominated in their culture[47].

c. Facilitating convergence and decentralisation

The process of convergence and decentralisation, being politically sensitive, has been negotiated with much care within the project. At several levels, coordinating groups have been set up to ensure smooth functioning. The State Convergence Forum has been created to deal with larger policy issues while for the daily functioning, the DRCs and the DMU, located strategically within the District Collector's office, deal with issues of co-ordination and grievances. As B.D. Sharma, the appointed DMU official at the District Collector's office in East Delhi, stated in an interview[48], "*Government departments have a particular culture and age-old style of functioning. If they feel that their power is being challenged or there is an encroachment being made on their territory, they will not be amenable towards any new programme".* In this context, the DMU's role is to ease frictions and build an understanding between the CBOs and government machinery. A monthly District Convergence Forum (DCF) meeting headed by the District Collector (DC) and attended by the GRC-SKs of the region, further facilitates this process. The effectiveness of this forum, however, is dependent on the approachability of the DC. In an ideal scenario, the DCF meeting could promote downward

46 Based on interviews conducted as a part of the field study on Mission Convergence, Delhi. (August 2011)
47 Based on interviews conducted as a part of the field study on Mission Convergence, Delhi. (August 2011)
48 Interview conducted as part of the field study on Mission Convergence (January 2011)

accountability where the CBOs could ask for the status of applications that are delayed or caught in a bottleneck, etc. and this information could then be relayed to the community. At this juncture, however, it remains at a level where, for the most part, inherent structural hierarchies are exercised to emphasise the superiority of government officials over CBOs. Smita K, who works at the St. Stephen's DRC in East Delhi, shared with us in an interview *"If the DC is not cooperative, things get very difficult. People look at the hierarchical position of a government official and treat you accordingly, depending on what terms you are on with that official".*

The geographically decentralised location of the centres in vulnerable regions of the city has also been very crucial to the success of this programme which has the mandate of supporting the governments 'goals of poverty alleviation and inclusive growth'[49]. The engagement with qualified and established NGOs which practice and believe in a people friendly democratic approach, has brought to the project a sensitised second rung leadership which ensures that shifts in the leadership of the project at the political or bureaucratic level will not have severe repercussions on the field. This accountability of NGOs towards the community is highlighted by Lakshmi Krishnan, chief functionary of Society for the Promotion of Women & Child Welfare (SPOWAC), a GRC-SK in Paharganj. She states, *"People do not have much confidence or trust in the government and many govt programmes have failed miserably. As an NGO, we have had a presence in the community prior to the introduction of the Mission Convergence programme and we are answerable to the community – the people have a claim on us."*[50] This sentiment of accountability to the community is also voiced by Manu Chaudhary, coordinator of the Guild of Service GRC-SK in Najafgarh, *"People in the community have expectations from us. Before the partnership with the government, they would see me as an activist, someone always ready to start a fight, but now I have a bigger responsibility in ensuring that they can access their social security services and claim rights. The partnership with the government has brought credibility to our work as well as responsibility."*[51]

Unique to Mission Convergence is also the strong information technology backbone that has been created and built upon, right from its conceptualisation. The initial vulnerability index based survey was digitised and centrally maintained at the PMU with a strong process of field based authentication from an early period to ensure transparency and accountability. The database is actively used by the PMU to monitor and plan for the project. The PMU has also been in the process of evolving a systems integration platform which provides an interface at the GRC-SK level through which a common dynamic database of beneficiaries can be maintained, automated tracking systems

49 http://www.missionconvergence.org/vision-mission.html (Last accessed August 2011)
50 Interview conducted as part of the field study on Mission Convergence (January 2011)
51 Interview conducted as part of the field study on Mission Convergence (January 2011)

for the services can be created, redundancies and errors can be recognised and most importantly, field level authentication of data can take place. These ICT-enabled processes, as they develop, will become fundamental to streamlining and transparency within the project.

This project is an excellent example of institutional innovation that responded to real challenges in a dynamic way, from dealing with the issue of non-income poverty to addressing the problem of multi-agency engagement required for social welfare services, and to meeting the complex governance needs of a programme which involves so many different kinds of partners. It has also been very innovative in using ICTs both for convergence and for ensuring that arbitrariness in beneficiary selection is progressively reduced. The manner in which innovations are immediately institutionalised is also important to learn from. Through the dual GRC-SK structure, the initiative has been able to both keep services and ILK activities separate as well as leverage their selective complimentarity. It has also avoided the temptation of using private sector partners which would bring business models to core governance activities involving marginalised people. Lastly, the manner in which the best competencies of NGOs and public bodies are combined and used appropriately provides very good insights on how the new age networked institutions and their governance systems may be shaped.

Take-aways for the *Samudaya Jnana Kendras* initiative

Many ICTs based initiatives have demonstrated the possibility of community level convergences of various activities and functions. What institutional models are best for this purpose, and what kinds of activities/ functions can be converged and what cannot, emerge as the key questions for learning from these interactions.

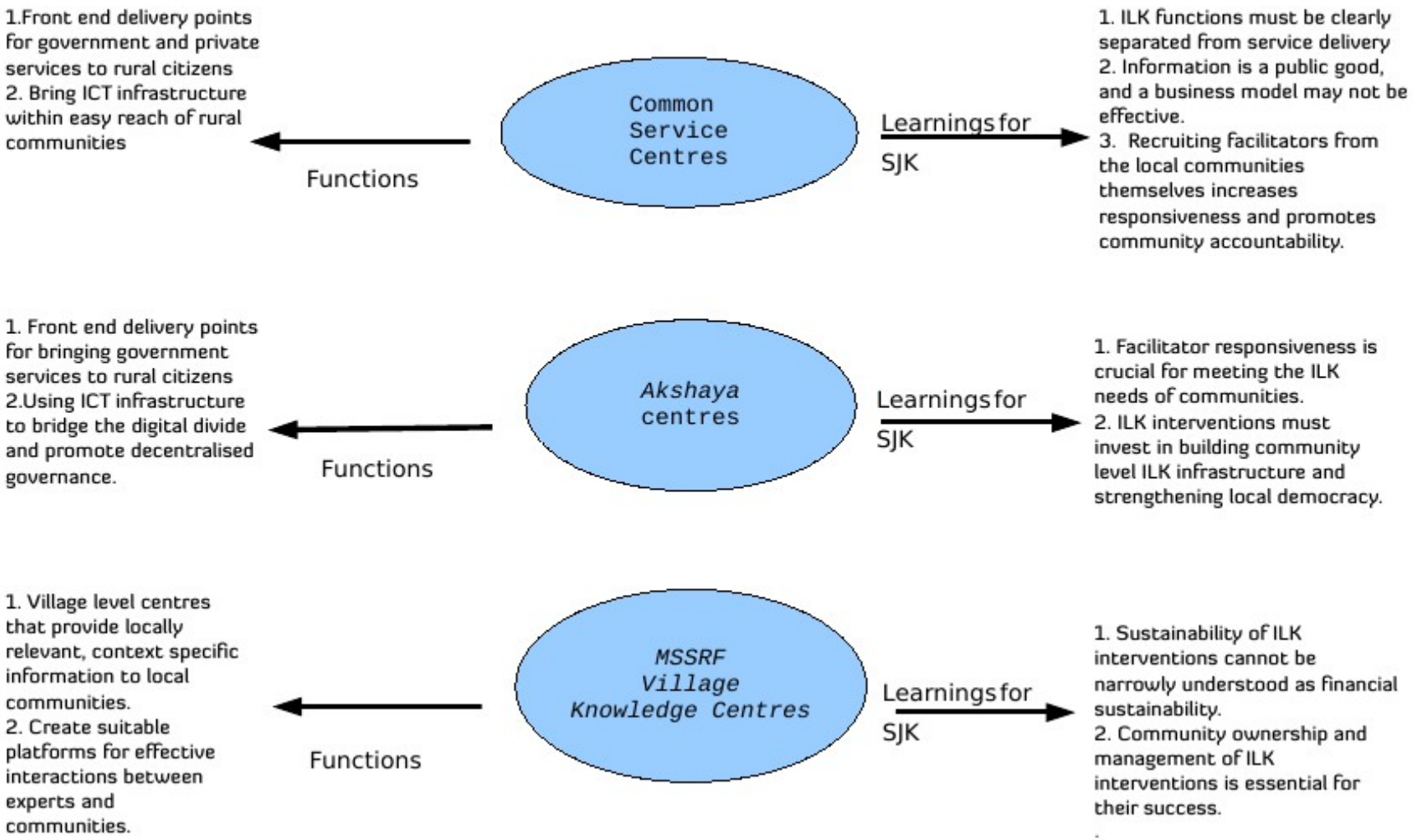
Our study of Common Service Centres show both the desirability and feasibility of bold new initiatives that have universal coverage; seeking to reach practically all villages. It also shows the useful possibility and requirement of making use of local partnerships instead of a public servants run top-to-bottom integrated system. However, the attempt to provide just every kind of delivery – service or ILK, commercial or of a public goods nature, is found to be problematic and largely not successful. What suffers most are the ILK functions, which more or less do not happen at the Common Service Centres. This study highlights the need for a separate initiative that converges only the community ILK activities and functions, following a public goods model.

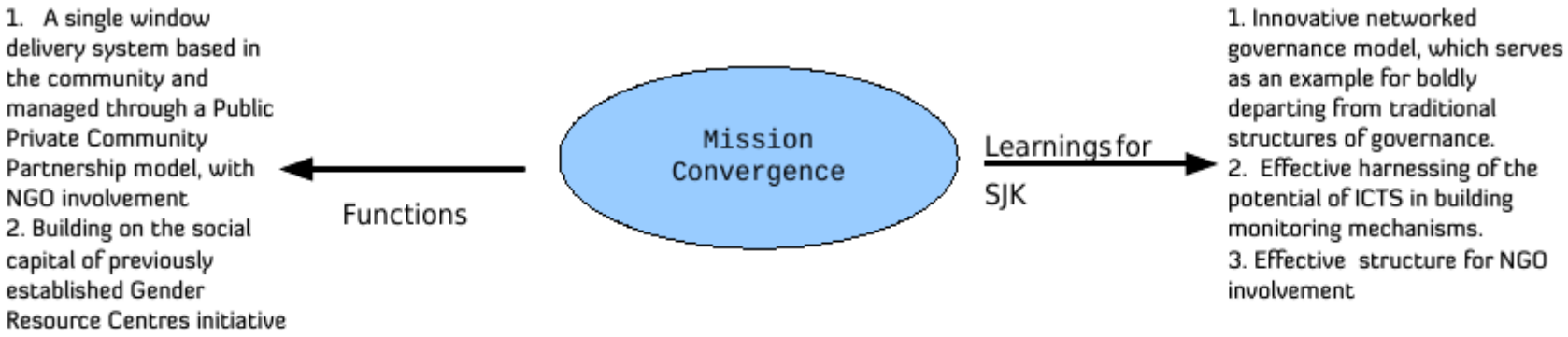
The Akshaya initiative of Kerala shows how a specialised public agency with an innovative design, instead of a corporate body, as in the case of Common Service Centres, can help ensure that public interest is assured in community-based convergence systems. This is especially valid for ILK activities/ functions. The supervision of panchayats over such convergent delivery centres also has important positive implications. Akshaya has been successful in ensuring some very significant ILK activities at the community level. However, with the entrepreneurs' focus being basically on revenue earning, it appears unlikely that such business model based centres can holistically cater to the full range of community's ILK needs.

The Village Knowledge Centres of M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation (MSSRF) are committed to community ILK functions, and the whole institutional system is designed with this in mind. The back-end resource providing system, which includes accessing resources from government bodies,works on a public goods model, . The most important learning from MSSRF centres is the community responsibility and ownership of the ILK centres. However, the centres do not seem involved in local self-governance related activities, or other kinds of community activism. While this may help insulate the centres from the divisiveness of local politics, it may also limit the community engagement and energy available to the centre. In the current scenario of very active political-democratic processes at the village level, like right to information, community monitoring and social audit, building capcities of newly elected panchayat members and working towards effective functioning of gram sabhas, it may not optimal for a village ILK centre to avoid linking up with these 'more political' ILK processes.

Mission Convergence of Delhi shows how an ILK initiative must focus on the most marginalised people, even if serving the need of the broader community. This model also demonstrates the need to do ILK work on a completely public goods model, without relying on revenue earning and entreprenuer based strategies. What is perhaps most interesting is its networked institutional model, where a specialized new age government body, Mission Convergence, exercises governance in partnership with NGOs. The actual centres are run by NGOs. The model ensures accountability normally associated with government agencies at the same time as it takes advantage of the superior skills of NGOs in community level facilitation.

Review of some new age convergent models for information and service delivery




1. A single window delivery system based in the community and managed through a Public Private Community Partnership model, with NGO involvement
2. Building on the social capital of previously established Gender Resource Centres initiative
Functions
Mission Convergence
Learnings for SJK
1. Innovative networked governance model, which serves as an example for boldly departing from traditional structures of governance.
2. Effective harnessing of the potential of ICTS in building monitoring mechanisms.
3. Effective structure for NGO involvement

Annexures to Part 1 of the Report

Annexure 1 : Focus Groups formation guidelines

Participant selection process

a) Participants for each of the groups can be selected from different villages across the district. In the formation of groups, we will avoid mixed gender groups (to guard against "peacock effect") whenever possible, and also avoid bringing together family members and neighbours in the same group.

b) Process for picking the groups: The partner organisation with rich field experience in the district where the study is going to be conducted will select participants using their discretion. For each group specified below, we require 10-12 participants.

Guidelines for group formation

Group 1: PUC and College going male students

- Try and pick students from households with varying socio-economic status.
- Try and pick students in equal numbers for both categories
- Some of the participants could be those who are active in youth clubs, associations and other CBOs.

Group 2: Young men in the age group of 16-20 years who have discontinued their education

- Try and select participants from households with varying socio-economic status.
- Some of the participants could be those who are active in youth clubs, associations and other CBOs.

Group 3: Young unmarried women in the age group of 15-20 years who have discontinued their education

The young women should include:

- Women who have discontinued their education and are at home.
- Women who have discontinued their education and are working.

Select participants from households with varying socio-economic status.

Group 4 : Young women in the age group of 15-20 years who are continuing their formal education

Select participants from households with varying socio-economic status.

This group may be much smaller in size than the others.

In case there is a married woman in this age group who is continuing her formal education in the areas from which we are selecting participants, she could be included in this group.

Group 5: Male Farmers with medium and large landholdings [52]

Group 6: Male farmers with marginal and small landholdings

Group 7 : Women who are heading their households

- This could include women from households that have no adult males
- Women who are handling the economic affairs of the household by themselves even when there are adult males.

Group 8 : Married women who are not the main earning members in their households

This could include women who are only engaged in household work

This could include women who work only on their family lands.

This could include women who occasionally work on others' lands to supplement the family income.

Group 9 : Self employed men

Men running small businesses (grocers, greengrocers, photo studio owners) and men in the service sector (hairdressers, caterers, Internet café owners, etc.).

Group 10 : Elderly men and women who are living alone or heading their households

This is the only mixed group in the list, as the possibility of a skewed discussion because of peacock effect is expected to be balanced to some extent by the data collected from the discussion in Group 7.

This could include men and women who are above 65 years who are living on their own, as well as men and women who are above 65 years who are living in households with no adult members.

52 The definition of what constitutes large, medium, small and marginal landholdings is context specific. In the FGDs, the definition was not stressed upon in a rigid manner as the idea was to form groups such that social power hierarchies would not derail group processes.

Annexure 2: Focus group discussion guide for information needs assessment of rural communities for the KJA

A. Note for moderator introduction

Thank you all for taking the time to participate in this discussion today. We are from a Bengaluru based NGO called IT for Change. This discussion today will help us in a research study that we are doing for the Karnataka *Jnana Aayoga* (KJA). The Karnataka *Jnana Aayoga* has been set up by the State Government to examine how new technologies such as computers can offer possibilities for improving the quality of education and health services provided by the government, as well as the potential of these technologies to enhance rural development.

The KJA wants to proposes to set up *Samudaya Jnana Kendras* (Community Knowledge Centres) in various rural locations across the state, to address the information needs of local communities in rural areas across the state. However KJA realises that it does not know what kinds of information are most useful to those living in rural areas, and how rural communities address their information needs. KJA also realises that different groups – women, youth, old people – may not have the same information needs. Most importantly, KJA feels that it cannot design SJAs for the use of rural communities without consulting the communities themselves. Hence, we are trying to meet different groups of people in the two districts of Koppal and Mandya to understand their thoughts and perspectives on the information needs of their village communities.

It is in this context that we are holding a group discussion with you today. I will be raising some questions here, and I request all of you to share your views on each question that is raised. Please feel free to express your agreements and disagreements with other people in the group. If you do not want to answer a question, you may say so. For the purposes of documenting our research comprehensively, and to avoid missing any of your suggestions and comments, we would like to record this discussion. Please tell us if you have any objection to this. We will be writing down the key points of our discussion. The discussion will take about 1-1.5 hours of your time. I request you all to stay for the entire discussion, and not leave midway, as your participation in the process from

beginning to end is important for the discussion to be enriching. Thank you, and now I would like to begin the discussion.

B. Question Guide

1. What information[53] do you find most useful to you in your daily life?
   (Probe for the perceived relevance of information about:
   a. government schemes (not the welfare benefits themselves but information about this),
   b. formal transaction procedures,
   c. health information,
   d. educational opportunities,
   e. local governance processes,
   f. livelihoods and
   g. knowledge enhancement.
   h. Also allow other responses to emerge)
2. How do you usually access the information you need? (Probe for the institutions/persons/media from which information is accessed for the kinds of information that are stated as response to the first question)
3. What kinds of information do you find difficult to access? (If question is not comprehended, restate the kinds of information that the group itself has given in response to the first question and ask the question)
4. In your opinion, what can be done to make the access to this information easier?
5. Discuss the importance of the following sources of information.
   - Block office staff
   - PHC staff
   - Panchayat members
   - Community elders
   - Village school staff
   - Family members
   - Newspapers
   - TV

53 Convey plurality in translation.

- Radio
- Books
- Community meetings
- Computers

6. If the government wishes to set up a centre in your village that will help you get the different types of information that we have been discussing so far, how do you think it should be?

   (Probe for

   a. Who should fund it?

   b. Who should answer the queries?

   c. Where should it be located in the village?

   d. What community events/ activities can be organised at the centre?

   e. What kind of materials should be available – books/ educational videos/radio/ computers

   f. Other kinds of information the centre can provide)

This FGD guide was used as a starting point by the moderators, who were aware of the challenges in conducting ILK discussions with communities which are not used to articulating their needs and demands around ILK processes, or whose members sometimes fail to recognise the empowering possibilities ILK offer due to their position of extreme marginalisation. The moderators crystallised from the six questions above, the following objectives which would determine their steering of the FGDs.

Three main objectives from the FGDs:

1. To understand thoughts and perspectives of rural communities on the issue of what kinds of information are most useful to those living in rural areas,

2. To understand how rural communities address their information needs at present, and

3. To gather thoughts around elements of a relevant village information centre

The moderators also designed a story telling exercise to steer the FGDs in this direction. A bottle was passed around in each group, and the group members were asked to imagine that it represented a new arrival to their village who shared the socio economic context of the group members. The group members were then asked to create a life story for this new entrant, as an exercise to put them at ease and then they were asked *" What should this new entrant know in order to live in the village and from where can s/he learn this?"* From the group's responses to this question, the discussion was

steered towards their own experiences of dealing with their ILK needs. The specific FGD probes were mainly in the "information" area of the ILK, but this was a conscious choice as probing into the "information" component offers easy access to articulations around learning and knowledge processes as well, as evidenced by the findings of the assessment.

Annexure-3 Details of participants in the ILK needs assesment (FGDs) at Mandya and Koppal

Needs Assessment Study in Mandya District (July 19-22 2011):

1. Young men in the age group of 16-20 years who are continuing their education

Moderator: Chinmayi Arakali
Notes: Anita Gurumurthy
Venue: Mandya

Group Profile:

No.	Name	Educational qualification
1	Name withheld	BA – Kannada major
2	Name withheld	BA – Kannada major
3	Name withheld	BA – Kannada major
4	Name withheld	BA – Kannada major
5	Name witheld	BA – Kannada major
6	Name withheld	BA – Kannada major
7	Name withheld	BA – Kannada major
8	Name withheld	MSW (Mysore University)
9	Name withheld	MSW (Mysore University)
10	Name withheld	MSW (Mysore University)
11	Name withheld	MSW (Mysore University)

Most of the participants were studying BA with a Kannada major, in the Mandya college. Four of the participants were older and studying MSW in the Mysore University and also volunteering/ interning with *Vikasana* and were interested in joining the FGD. One of the MSW students was from Gulbarga, the other from Mysore. The rest were all from villages in Mandya district.

2. Young men in the age group of 16-20 years who have discontinued their education

Moderator: Aparna Kalley
Notes: Sapthami
Venue: Honnavara village,Mandya

Group Profile:

No.	Name	Educational	Village

		qualification	
1	Name withheld	SSLC	Honnavara village
2	Name withheld	V std.	Honnavara village
3	Name withheld	V std.	Honnavara village
4	Name withheld	II PUC	Honnavara village
5	Name withheld	VII std.	Honnavara village
6	Name withheld	SSLC	Honnavara village
7	Name withheld	VIIstd.	Honnavara village
8	Name withheld	VII std.	Honnavara village
9	Name withheld	SSLC	Honnavara village

This group belonged to the 18 -23 age group. They were extremely shy and were embarrassed to hold a conversation with two women. All of them have discontinued their education and none of them showed any inclination towards getting back to education.

3. Young unmarried women in the age group of 15-20 years who have discontinued their education

Moderator: Chinmayi Arakali
Notes: Anita Gurumurthy
Venue:Mandya

Group Profile:

1.	Name withheld	19	Shankarmata town
2.	Name withheld	25	Shankarmata town
3	Name withheld	21	Shankarmata town
4	Name withheld	19	“Muslim Block”
5	Name withheld	23	Housing Board
6	Name withheld	23	Holalu vilage
7	Name withheld	24	Holalu village
8	Name withheld	19	Holalu village
9	Name withheld	24	Shankarmata town
10	Name withheld	23	Kallali
11	Name withheld	18	Hosahalli
12	Name withheld	23	Mandya city
13	Name withheld	21	Housing board colony

The group consisted of 13 girls – 6 of them Muslim and the rest Hindu. 3 of them were from villages, and the rest from settlements, small towns close to Mandya city. There seemed to be a mix of lower middle class and poor participants, one or two of the Muslim girls being from lower middle class/

middle class households. A couple of them have completed their 10th standard, some have studied till 7th standard or less. One has not studied at all – this girl is also the only breadwinner in the family. All these girls are now employed at a factory making handicraft/ paperwork flowers that are sold in the national/ international markets.

4. Young women in the age group of 15-20 years who are continuing their formal education

Moderator: Aparna Kalley
Note taker: Sapthami
Venue:Mandya

Group Profile:

S.No.	Name	Educational qualification	Village/Town
1.	Name withheld	BA 1st year (currently studying)	Cheernalli
2	Name withheld	BA 2nd year (currently studying)	Arakere
3	Name withheld	BA 1st year (currently studying)	Sangapura
4	Name withheld	BA 1st year (currently studying)	Dudda
5	Name withheld	BBM Final year (currently studying)	Mandya
6	Name withheld	BA 2nd year (currently studying)	Beesegowdana Doddi
7	Name withheld	BA 2nd year (currently studying)	Kontegowdana Koplu
8	Name withheld	BA 2nd year	Mandya
9	Name withheld	BA 2nd year	Mandya
10	Name withheld	BA 2nd year	Mandya

Except for the 3 girls who came from Mandya, the rest of the 6 were from village communities. They commute everyday to college. All of them are from the same coeducation college (Govt). Except for a couple of girls, the majority were very articulate and forthcoming in their engagement. Some of them were eloquent speakers and the moderators had to intervene many times to ensure that everyone got a chance to speak.

5. Male farmers with medium and large holdings

Moderator: Aparna Kalley
Notes: Anita Gurumurthy and Sapthami
Venue:Chikkaharanahalli village, Mandya

S.No	Name	Landholding	Village
1.	Name withheld	8 acres	Chikkaharanahalli
2	Name withheld	4 .5acres	Chikkaharanahalli

3	Name withheld	1.50 acres	Chikkaharanahalli
4	Name withheld	2 acres	Chikkaharanahalli
5	Name withheld	15 acres	Chikkaharanahalli
6	Name withheld	2.5 acres	Chikkaharanahalli
7	Name withheld	1.5 acres	Chikkaharanahalli
8	Name withheld	5 acres	Chikkaharanahalli
9	Name withheld	8 acres	Chikkaharanahalli
10	Name withheld	2 acres	Chikkaharanahalli
11	Name withheld	2 acres	Chikkaharanahalli
12	Name withheld	8 acres	Chikkaharanahalli

The majority of the farmers had small and marginal landholdings . Our field contact from the partner organisation *Vikasana* shared that it is difficult to gather more than 4-5 medium – large farmers from a village. We decided to ask the medium and large farmers to respond first and then others to add points later on , after explaining the importance of following the criterion for the Focus Group Discussions.

6. Male farmers with marginal and small landholdings

Moderator: Aparna Kalley
Notes: Anita Gurumurthy and Sapthami
Venue:Somenalli

S.No.	Name	Landholding	Village
1	Name withheld	2 acres(a) 20 kuntes (k)	Somenalli
2	Name withheld	2.30 acres	Somenalli
3	Name withheld	2.20 k	Somenalli
4	Name withheld	1.30 k	Somenalli
5	Name withheld	2.30 a	Somenalli
6	Name withheld	1.30 a	Somenalli
7	Name withheld	2 a	Somenalli
8	Name withheld	1.30 k	Somenalli
9	Name withheld	1.30 k	Somenalli
10	Name withheld	1A	Somenalli

11	Name withheld	1A	Somenalli
12	Name withheld	1.30 a	Somenalli
13	Name withheld	2.30 a	Somenalli
14	Name withheld	2.30 a	Somenalli
15	Name withheld	3a	Somenalli
16	Name withheld	3a	Somenalli
17	Name withheld	1.30a	Somenalli
18	Name withheld	2A	Somenalli
19	Name withheld	2A	Somenalli
20	Name withheld	2A	Somenalli
21	Name withheld	2.30 a	Somenalli
22	Name withheld	3.15 k	Somenalli
23	Name withheld	2A	Somenalli
24	Name withheld	2.30 a	Somenalli
25	Name withheld	2A	Somenalli
26	Name withheld	1A	Somenalli
27	Name withheld	2.30 a	Somenalli
28	Name withheld	2A	Somenalli
29	Name withheld	2A	Somenalli

When we started the number was 29. We had to spend some time explaining the purpose of the FGD, and the need for participants to stay for the entirety of the discussion. At this, many left and 12 participants chose to stay back for the whole process. The majority of the participants were in their 30s and they all belonged to the *Vokkaliga Gowda* community. Incidentally, only *Vokkaliga Gowdas* reside in the village. This village does not have irrigated agricultural land. Some of them had completed their schooling. The members of this group were all enthusiastic to share their problems

and needs. They seemed aware of the workings of many departments and were eager to share their impressions of the *panchayat* and the workings of the administrative system. This group also seemed to firmly hold the view : *"nobody really cares for the farmer"*.

7. Women who are heading their households

Moderator: Aparna Kalley
Notes: Anita Gurumurthy
Venue: *Vikasana* factory site
Group Profile:

1	Name withheld	Hollali
2	Name withheld	Hollali
3	Name withheld	Hollali
4	Name withheld	Mandya town
5	Name withheld	Mandya town
6	Name withheld	Mandya town
7	Name withheld	Mandya town

Out of the 7 women in this group, 2 were Muslim. Their ages ranged from 28 to 45 years. The FGD took place in the Vikasana factory site where the women come to assemble accessories for garments and make foam-stickers for Rs 55 a day and have children to support. All the women were from extremely trying circumstances, trying to make ends meet . One has a husband who is suffering from TB, one woman had been deserted, another woman's husband is an alcoholic and one woman was divorced.
Some women were a bit reluctant to sit for the entire hour, however once they warmed up, they spoke with involvement. The probing moved from exploring the participant's perception of needs of someone like herself (in third person, aided by the activity "Passing the Bottle" described in the question guide) to personalised accounts of what information would she like.. and where she would go for it.

8. Married women who are not the main earning members in their households

Venue: H.Kodihalli village,Mandya district
Moderator: Aparna Kalley
Notes: Sapthami
Venue: H.Kodihalli village, Mandya

Group Profile:

S.No.	Name	Educational qualification
1	Name withheld	SSLC
2	Name withheld	Not studied
3	Name withheld	Not studied
4	Name withheld	SSLC
5	Name withheld	N.A
6	Name withheld	N.A

7	Name withheld	N.A
8	Name withheld	N.A

There were 9 participants -in the age group of 25-50. One of the participants was a widow. Their village, located in the catchment area of the *Vikasana* watershed project, had only *Vokkaliga Gowda* residents. The activity based probe did no work well with this group, so we opted for a question based approach. Initially, we were reluctant to go ahead with the FGD on finding out that the residents of the village belonged to a single caste, as this could skew the findings. However, considering that there are numerous studies that contrast the differing impact of patriarchal structures on the life contexts of *dalit* and non *dalit* women, we decided to go ahead with the FGD and place the findings within this larger framework recognising the multiple axes of gender, caste and class on the life experience of women.

9. Self employed men

Moderator:Aparna Kalley
Notes: Anita Gurumurthy and Sapthami
Venue:Mandya
Group Profile :

1	Name withheld	Mason
2	Name withheld	Auto driver
3	Name withheld	Auto driver
4	Name withheld	Panipuri seller
5	Name withheld	Travel agent
6	Name withheld	Auto-mechanic
7	Name withheld	Dairy owner
8	Name withheld	Poultry shop owner
9	Name withheld	Poultry shop owner

The participants of this group were in the age group of 30-50 years. A question based approach was used with this group and it was felt that this group was very reflective about the knowledge centre and the possibilities it could open up.

10. Elderly men and women who are living alone or heading their households:

Moderator: Aparna Kalley
Notes: Anita Gurumurthy and Sapthami
Venue: Sharalli village, Mandya

Group profile:

Number of participants: 17 (names withheld)

There were 6 elderly men and 11 elderly women in this group. The participants' ages ranged from 65-80. The majority of participans had health related problems such as complications from arthritis, vision loss, hearing loss, abnormal upward curvature of the spine ('hunchback') and so on. Most of them seemed dis heartened by the fact that they were old and not capable of taking care of themselves economically. During the course of the discussion, some of them expressed that *" We may die any day, any moment, whats the use of talking about information ?"*. It was evident that they were not in a frame to engage with a discussion around how their lives are and what information

would be useful at this stage. This made the process of facilitating a group discussion extremely difficult. We had to change course with each question and some of them shared that *"We dont understand what you are asking, please give us info or make sure we get some money at least"*. As this experience was really traumatic for the participants and for the team steering the discussion, we decided against conducting this FGD in Koppal.

Needs Assessment Study in Koppal District (July 26-28 2011):

11. Young men in the age group of 16-20 years who are continuing their education

Moderator: Chinmayi Arakali
Notes: Sapthami
Venue: Kanakagiri campus, Samuha

Group Profile:

S.No.	Name	Village	Education	Age
1	Name withheld	Kanakagiri	I PUC	17
2	Name withheld	Kanakagiri	II PUC	17
3	Name withheld	Kanakagiri	II PUC	17
4	Name withheld	Chikdanga	II BA	19
5	Name withheld	Arsinkere	I D Ed	18
6	Name withheld	Jinnaapura	I PUC	17
7	Name withheld	Uppaldindi	Bsc final year	22
8	Name withheld	Kanakagiri	I PUC	17
9	Name withheld	Mudgal	I PUC	16
10	Name withheld	Kanakagiri	I PUC	15
11	Name withheld	Jinnapura	I BA	20

12. Young men in the age group of 16-20 years who have discontinued their education

Venue: Kanakagiri campus, Samuha

Moderator: Aparna Kalley
Notes:

Group Profile:

S.No.	Name	Age	Educational qualification	Occupation
1	Name withheld	25	PUC	Undergoing horticultural departmental training
2	Name withheld	18	SSLC	Agriculture
3	Name withheld	22	Std IX	Tailoring
4	Name withheld	17	SSLC	Agriculture
5	Name withheld	19	SSLC	Agriculture
6	Name withheld	15	SSLC	Petty shop
7	Name withheld	22	II PUC	unemployed
8	Name withheld	18	SSLC	Agriculture
9	Name withheld	18	PUC	Undergoing horticultural departmental training
10	Name withheld	20	Std VIII	Undergoing horticultural departmental training
11	Name withheld	21	SSLC	Agriculture
12	Name withheld	21	SSLC	Agriculture
13	Name withheld	18	SSLC	Agriculture
14	Name withheld	22	PUC	SC/ST project of the Municipal corporation
15	Name withheld	22	PUC	SSA (temporary teacher for the mentally challenged)

13. Young unmarried women in the age group of 15-20 years who have discontinued their education

Moderator: Aparna Kalley
Notes: Shivamma
Venue: Kanakagiri campus, Samuha
Group Profile:

S.No	Name	Age	Educational qualification
1	Name withheld	20	II PUC
2	Name withheld	18	II PUC
3	Name withheld	18	II PUC
4	Name withheld	19	II PUC
5	Name withheld	19	SSLC
6	Name withheld	19	II PUC
7	Name withheld	14	SSLC

8	Name withheld	16	SSLC
9	Name withheld	15	SSLC
10	Name withheld	16	SSLC
11	Name withheld	16	SSLC
12	Name withheld	19	II PUC

14. Young women in the age group of 15-20 years who are continuing their formal education

Moderator: Chinmayi
Notes: Sapthami
Venue: Kanakagiri campus, *Samuha*
Group Profile:

S.No.	Name	Village	Education	Age
1	Name withheld	Haskal	BA (I year)	18
2	Name withheld	Tavargere	PUC (I year)	16
3	Name withheld	Tavargere	PUC (I year)	
4	Name withheld	-N.A	D Ed (I year)	18
5	Name withheld	N.A	10th Standard	15
6	Name withheld	Amarapura	B Ed	22
7	Name withheld	Kanakagiri	PUC (II year)	17
8	Name withheld	Matgal	PUC (I year)	16
9	Name withheld	Matgal	PUC (I year)	16
10	Name withheld	Kanakagiri	PUC (II year)	17
11	Name withheld	Kanakagiri	PUC (I year)	16
12	Name withheld	Kanakagiri	PUC (I year)	16
13	Name withheld	Kanakagiri	PUC (II year)	18

15. Male farmers with medium and large landholdings

Moderator: Chinmayi Arakali
Notes: Sapthami
Venue: *Kanakagiri* campus
Group Profile:

S.No.	Name	Village	Land holding
1	Name withheld	Hosuru	5 acres land
2	Name withheld	Sulekal	5 acres
3	Name withheld	Honagadde	
4	Name withheld	Honagaddi	
5	Name withheld	Lingdalli	4 acres irrigated land
6	Name withheld	Lingdalli	Farmer + runs a petty shop
7	Name withheld		6 acres
8	Name withheld	Honagaddi	7 acres
9	Name withheld	Irupapura	9 acres irrigated land
10	Name withheld		3 acres irrigated, approx 5 more acres dry land
11	Name withheld	Eeresulekere	20 acres

16. Male farmers with marginal and small landholdings

Moderator: Aparna Kalley
Notes: Sapthami
Venue: Kanakagiri campus

S.No.	Name	Landholding	Village
1	Name withheld	4.25 acres	Lingadalli
2	Name withheld	4.11 acres	Irupapur
3	Name withheld	4 acres	Irupapur
4	Name withheld	3 acres	Kattigehalli
5	Name withheld	4 acres	Hosuru
6	Name withheld	4.11 acres	Hosuru
7	Name withheld	4.2 acres	Sulekal
8	Name withheld	5 acres	Sulekal
9	Name withheld	2 acres	Hiresulekal
10	Name withheld	1 acre	Ganganal

There were 2 marginal farmers and 8 small farmers. Except for one person, all of them belonged to upper caste groups. Their ages ranged from 25 – 65 years. They are all dry land agriculturists.

17. Women who are heading their households

Moderator: Aparna Kalley
Notes: Shivamma
Venue: Kanakagiri campus, Samuha

Group Profile:

There were 13 participants in this group. Six of the women were widows, one woman was a man's second wife , another was married to an alchoholic and there was an elderly woman who had no immediate family to take care of her and her aged husband. The participants' ages ranged from 30 to 65 years. Some of the women were part of *sangha*s.

18. Married women who are not the main earning members in their households

Moderator: Chinmayi Arakali
Notes: Shivamma
Venue: Kanakagiri campus, Samuha

S.No.	Name	Village	Family and other
1	Name withheld	Jumlapura	Husband and three children – 2 girls and 1 boy She works as the supervisor at the village library. Husband a KSRTC driver. She is also part of the *sangha* (formed by Samuha)
2	Name withheld	Tavargere	Not part of any *sangha*
3	Name withheld	Tavargere	No children yet. Has completed BA.
4	Name withheld	Tavargere	Husband and three children – two girls and a boy. Part of a *sangha*
5	Name withheld	Onkalkunta	Husband and three children – one boy and two girls. Part of a *sangha*
6	Name withheld	Yappaldinni	Husband and three children – two boys and one girl. Part of a *sangha*
7	Name withheld	Yappaldinni	Husband and three children – one boy and two girls. Part of a *sangha*
8	Name withheld	Chilkmuki	Husband and two children – one boy and a girl. Part of a *sangha*
9	Name withheld	Kanakagiri	Husband and five children – three boys and two girls. Part of a *sangha*
10	Name withheld	Kanakagiri	Husband and son, sister and younger brother. Part of a *sangha*
11	Name withheld	Talekeri	Husband, three boys and three girls. Part of the *sangha*

19. Self employed men

Moderator :Aparna Kalley

Notes: Chinmayi Arakali
Venue: Kanakagiri campus, Samuha
Group Profile:

S.No.	Name	Village	Occupation
1	Name withheld	Hedoni	Tailoring
2	Name withheld	Hireunkalkunta	Retired primary school teacher, now runs a pharmacy
3	Name withheld	Garjnal	Kirana shop (and also does farming)
4	Name withheld	Narnal	Tailoring + farming
5	Name withheld	Narnal	Construction work
6	Name withheld	Narnal	Animal husbandry – rears and sells sheep, also does farming
7	Name withheld	Chikmadnaal	Sells vegetables
8	Name withheld	Chilukmukhi	Pan shop
9	Name withheld	Tavargera	Tea shop
10	Name withheld	Tavargera	Mobile recharge shop
11	Name withheld	Tavargera	Kirana shop
12	Name withheld	Kanakagiri	Kirana shop
13	Name withheld	Kalikere	Kirana shop
14	Name withheld	Gunnal	Runs a hotel
15	Name withheld	Gunnal	Barber

Annexure 4 :Developing an appropriate model for *Samudaya Jnana Kendras :* A one day consultation with community leaders and grassroots development workers

The Karnataka *Jnana Aayoga* (KJA) is a high powered commission of the Government of Karnataka that was constituted in 2008. It was set up with the mandate of enabling the State Government to pro-actively take steps for the transformation of Karnataka into a vibrant knowledge society, taking advantage of the opportunities offered by ICTs in the present age. As part of its Terms of Reference, the KJA is required to "enhance the use of knowledge capabilities in making the government an effective service provider to the citizen and promote widespread sharing of knowledge to maximize public benefit". In this context, the KJA commissioned a study on developing an appropriate model for setting up *Samudaya Jnana Kendras* in various locations across rural Karnataka, which could serve as community nodes that could help in availing of new knowledge opportunities in local development and community empowerment processes. IT for Change is undertaking this study on behalf of the Karnataka *Jnana Aayoga*.

The proposed *Jnana Kendras* will be much more than the concept of information centres being set up in many projects, whether ICT enabled or not. These centres are not being seen as merely information delivery points for communities. Instead, the *Jnana Kendras* are seen as key nodes in communities that will facilitate horizontal and vertical linkages with government institutions, research centres,community institutions and within the grassroots level communities themselves. Through the development of such extensive linkages, it is hoped that the *Jnana Kendras* will enable the creation of community centric knowledge processes.

IT for Change recognises that without tapping into the rich experiential understanding of community leaders and grassroots development workers, the task of developing an effective and appropriate design for the *Samudaya Jnana Kendras* is very difficult. For, local community leaders and grassroots development workers have a rich understanding of community information needs, the systemic challenges in meeting community information and knowledge needs as well as local

cultural influences on informational and knowledge seeking behaviour in rural communities from their extensive engagement with members of the communities they are situated in.

In order to get these valuable inputs, IT for Change is organising an one-day district level consultation in Mysore on 23 July 2011 with community leaders and grassroots level workers. The venue and timings of the consultation will be intimated on a later date.

The consultation will focus on the following questions:

1. What information do you consider most useful to village communities?
2. What are the roadblocks to effective information processes at the community level?
3. What is your experience with government and NGO initiatives that try and address the information gap at the grassroots level?
4. What do you think are the key learnings from such earlier initiatives of similar or related kinds?
5. Design issues related to the *Samudaya Jnana Kendras*
    a) Where should it be located ?
    b) Who should be the operators ?
    c) What kind of materials should be available at the centre - books/educational videos/radio/ computers ?
    d) In addition to providing various kinds of information, what other role can the centre play?
    e) How can we ensure that women, *dalits* and other marginalised groups can access this centre without difficulty?

Note: The same concept note was shared before the Koppal consultation as well.

Part 2. Exploring an institutional model for *Samudaya Jnana Kendras*: Main report

Introduction – A proposed institutional model for SJKs

The discussion in part 1 of this study report reveals that there is: (1) an urgent imperative for the State to perform its community level information, learning and knowledge (ILK) functions in a much better way than is done at present, and that there is (2) a significant new opportunity in leveraging of ICTs for innovative institutional models for information, learning and knowledge (ILK) at the community level. The State's current interventions in these areas seem to lack imagination and also seem to have run out of steam. There appears to be a move towards abandoning any serious involvement in the core areas related to informal ILK needs of the communities. The focus, instead, is shifting to 'hard' functions such as service delivery (Common Service Centre and similar schemes), skill building (National Literacy Mission or *Saakshar Bharat*, and disparate vocational education programmes) and organising community groups around credit and livelihood opportunities (National Rural Livelihoods Mission). These functions and activities are of course important because people cannot survive on knowledge alone. However, it should not be a case of either or, and these functions have to be seen in their complementarity with core ILK needs and functions of the communities.

Sustainable development cannot take place without sufficient investments in society's ILK infrastructure and functions. Such investments must extend beyond the formal institutions of education, research, etc., to centrally include the informal ILK spaces which directly and continually engage ordinary people in their everyday community life.

The advent of the so-called knowledge society is supposed to be characterised most of all by the strengthening of informal ILK processes, whereby the narrow boundaries of formal ILK institutions are breached, and ILK functions and activities flow into all aspects of social life; making knowledge an important and explicit component of everyone's daily lives, in a much more complex manner than ever before.

With the ushering in of the so called knowledge society all over the world, it would be a travesty if the State were to abandon or dilute its ILK related role, or limit it to the existing formal ILK systems. Perched on a cusp of new exciting opportunities, the State's current priority must be to rethink its ILK role with a view to strengthening and expanding it throughout the society. The concept of *Samudaya Jnana Kendra* seeks to capture this imperative and opportunity. It addresses the

challenge of whether a real knowledge society can ever be built in Karnataka without building local knowledge societies in its myriad small communities. The concept emerges from the understanding that without addressing this challenge head-on, these communities would remain on the periphery of the dominant global knowledge society model; they will just be the passive consumers of what is offered to them, if not mere dis-empowered bystanders, looking-in-from-the-outside. Thus the SJK concept emerges as a response to the imperative for, and the challenge of, building local knowledge societies at the grassroots in Karnataka.

This second part of the report is devoted to a detailed discussion on the SJK concept – and is divided into two sections. Section 2A will map some of the new ILK opportunities that have arisen in relation to the existing ILK needs of grassroots communities in Karnataka. Such a mapping will suggest the functions that the proposed SJKs can take up, and these will be discussed in some detail. The next section (Section 2B) will discuss the feasibility and viability of a new institutional model for SJKs which can successfully perform all these functions and activities.

Section 2.A. The emerging knowledge society paradigm – Mapping the new community level opportunities

This section of the Report systematically explores a range of functions that a new community level information, learning and knowledge (ILK) institution must perform, in order to fully capitalise on the opportunities, and also meet the challenges that the emerging knowledge society paradigm offers. There are numerous informal ILK needs at the community level, which however need to be categorized under some specific heads to systematically analyse their dynamics, and explore the the manner in which they can be successfully addressed. For this purpose, we list ILK functions that need to be performed at the community level that range from pure knowledge functions, like information delivery, library function and traditional knowledge; to those related to development, like interacting with experts, skill building, etc.; to community media and public access to ICTs related activities; to functions related to local democracy, like RTI facilitation, social audits and acting as a gram sabha resource centre. In looking at the needs and possibilities of all these diverse functions, we will also sense the areas of synergy and convergence. Such a study will suggest the outlines of the institutional model that is required and is possible in the context of a knowledge society, which model will be fully explored in the next section.

This section of the Report makes a systematic exploration of what the so called emerging knowledge society paradigm means, in the context of new opportunities that may have been opened up for ILK needs and functions at the grassroots community level.

1. Convergent information delivery – All in one place

Within an ILK ecology, the information disseminating functions of the government are among the most clearly understood and appreciated by people. Since networked computers allow real time access to almost unlimited information, it is now possible that any person can impart information on a variety of subjects to the community without any special expertise in any of these subjects. It is possible for this person to develop specific expertise in the activity of information delivery itself, which can be expected to significantly enhance the outcomes of information delivery. The opportunity for a community level convergence for information delivery across government departments and other agencies that hold useful information is therefore widely recognised. As discussed in Part 1 of this research report, many such initiatives are already in place.

The first thing therefore that can be said about the proposed *Samudaya Jnana Kendra* is that it should be a convergent information delivery mechanism at the community level. It should be a place where anyone can seek 'any' information. Its institutional character should invoke the belief in people's minds that the SJK is likely to have every information that they may need, or else can help them get it. Its design should work backwards from this imperative. At one of the consultation workshops with community members and grassroots NGOs that we held on the *Samudaya Jnana Kendras*[54] , one of the observations was; '*When a person visits the centre, he should get what ever information he wants*'. One key informant, during a personal interview, said '*The ethics of the centre should be that, when a person comes with a need – then, if the information is not available at the centre then the person who runs the centre should fetch it from wherever it may be available.'* Such a commitment of catering to all and any community information need, without sectoral distinctions, is very important. It is possible that the SJK may not have some information readily available, but it cannot say it is not its job to provide it. This is an important departure from most existing information centres that only provide certain categories of information.

Our field work indicates that people have information needs that are very embedded in their specific life situations, which cannot necessarily be expressed in the manner to correspond with how government and other development agencies present information. In fact, field research revealed that the most marginalised people could not even use the vocabulary of 'information needs' and could only state what their 'problems' were[55]. It must be recognised that an information delivery method should focus on what a community member wants to know, not what an external agent has to give. However, it is almost exclusively the latter orientation that informs current information delivery methods. (At the same time it is important that an appropriate knowledge culture is built to enable people to be able articulate their information and knowledge needs.)

SJK should not be a space where government and other agencies can dump what they want communities to know, in print or audio-visual form or through human agents. Among the people and groups we talked to, this kind of information delivery was found to be of very little use.[56] SJKs are to

54 See Section 1A for further details on the consultations.
55 See Section 1A for further details
56 See Section 1B for a detailed discussion on community dissatisfaction with existing State information

be community agents (and not government agents, as many information centre operators set themselves up to be) gathering communities' information needs and seeking their fulfilment from all avenues available, including various avenues made available by government departments. In an ICT-enabled environment, it is possible to get much of the required information from a community perspective through such a 'pull method'. For this purpose, however, government and other development agencies will have to begin devising their information systems and strategies – whether digital or print/ audio-visual/ human based – in a manner that feeds this new community based informational infrastructure. This mechanism will by far be less costly and more effective, in enabling the actual reach of these agencies. At the same time, using online means, these agencies can still monitor how, and how much, is their information being used by the communities, and what kind of changes in content and process are needed from their side to make information delivery even more effective. This is the new model of public information delivery and development communication of which SJKs should be the focal point.

As the community's informational agents, SJKs will seek, collate and provide information to community members. This could involve any information required by the community. Government departments and other outside agencies will accordingly have to respond to the needs of the SJKs, and keep a constant interaction with them for this purpose. The SJK however of course does not become a gate-keeper of information. Quite often different agencies may like to have specialised direct outreach initiatives for the communities, which, if required, can be facilitated by SJKs for maximum impact. This will especially involve devising appropriate participatory processes that are mentioned in a later section.

The SJKs should pull information from all possible sources that could be relevant to the community. Some part of such information may be available in print and audio-visual forms. However, a very large part of it will have to be maintained in digital form over computers. SJKs should obtain community specific information that is available with any government (and other development) agency anywhere, and arrange it in a community-centric manner on a community portal. Recently, in the US, the report of the Knight Commission on the Information Needs of Communities in a Democracy, called for *"every local community [to have] at least one high-quality online hub"* (Knight Commission 2010). This need for community specific information was expressed by one of the

delivery models

participants in our community consultations on the SJKs, who observed that *'"this place (referring to the proposed SJK) should have an integrated and holistic picture of the village"*[57]

Box 8. Knight Commission's (in the US) recommendation relating to community online hubs

- Ensure that every local community has at least one high-quality online hub. Given the volume of information on the Internet and the infinite diversity of user interests, it is not possible for any one website to aggregate all of the online information local residents want and need. Just as communities depend on maps of physical space, they should create maps of information flow that enable members of the public to connect to the data and information they want.
- Communities should have at least one well-publicized portal that points to the full array of local information resources. These include government data feeds, local forums, community e-mail list serves, local blogs, local media, events calendars, and civic information. The best of these hubs would go beyond the mere aggregation of links and act as an online guidebook. They would enable citizens to map an effective research journey by letting people know what is available and where. The site should leverage the power of new forms of social media to support users in gathering and understanding local information.
- Where private initiative is not creating community online hubs, a locally trusted anchor institution might undertake such a project with the assistance of government or foundation funding, or support from those who also support public media.

Source: Knight Commission,2010: Informing Communities: Sustaining Democracy in the Digital Age

A surprising amount of information generated within the village is not available to the village community – for instance the various reports that public servants write to their superiors, and even many of the village *panchayat* documents. All this information should be available to the community in a neutral place; by this, we mean a place that is removed from the influence of those who may have vested interest in not disclosing that information. While SJKs should be able to digitally pull locally relevant information from various department websites, at least at the initial stage, much of the required information will have to be sourced by SJK workers manually from different government offices and then digitised for the community. A lot of the more useful information for the communities is dynamic, and processes for SJK workers to regularly source such information from government offices have to be developed. All government officials and offices have to be obliged to give all

57 See Section 1A for further details of the consultations.

the required information on a regular basis to SJK workers, as they act as the community's agents for informational needs. This is the spirit of the Right to Information Act.

2. SJKs and the Right to Information

Development communication mostly concerns information that governments and other development agencies pro-actively share with communities to assist in their development, which category of information may be considered apolitical. On the other hand, the Right to Information legislations and discourse is mostly invoked to get information from governments in order to enforce accountability, which is clearly a political act. However, these two informational activities may be closely aligned. For instance, detailed information about a new government scheme, normally the substance of development communication, may deliberately be withheld or made scarce to enable *mala fide* use of discretion in picking beneficiaries. Accessing such information, possibly through invoking the Right to Information (RTI), becomes an accountability enforcing measure.

Getting the required information out effectively through an RTI application may often require considerable 'RTI expertise'. It is also mostly a laborious process, whereby repeated clarifications may need to be provided, and/ or repeated appeals may have to be filed. RTI has mostly been used either by activists for public interest purposes or by the more articulate, and thus relatively advantaged members of the society for personal purposes. Direct impact of RTI on the life of marginalised people has been rather limited. To be able to file an RTI application, most community members will require considerable help. SJKs, as RTI centres of the community, should offer such help, especially to the marginalised groups.

During recent consultations that the Government of India held with civil society groups for better implementation of the sections of the RTI Act relating to proactive disclosure, three things became apparent.

1. Proactive disclosure was perceived as the real spirit of the RTI Act, and this is clearly affirmed in the Act. Therefore, governments should be made to move towards complete proactive disclosure, if needed, through active enforcement invoking penal provisions of the Act.
2. Though the relevant section of the Act mentions some categories of information as priority for proactive disclosure, the purpose of the Act is for proactive disclosure of *'all'* information that is possible to pro-actively disclose. As more and more information is available with the

government in digital forms, it is possible for all of it to be put in the public domain at almost no extra cost, and therefore, it *should* be so put out.

3. It is part of RTI obligations on the governments not only to make information available but to ensure that it *actually* reaches all people in a usable form. Informational outreach efforts are thus a part of RTI work that governments need to do. Suggestions were offered during the mentioned consultations for creating a specialised new government agency to act on the behalf of the whole government as its informational delivery and outreach agent. One important function of this agency would be to organise all government information on an easy to access and use common RTI portal. An initiative of the Department of Science and Technology of the Government of India and another one of the Central Information Commission already propose such a common RTI portal. This specialised RTI agency should also be required to put up RTI centres in communities for easy access of public information to all, apart from using call centres, community radio and mobile networks for information outreach.

   We are of the opinion that SJKs should act as the required RTI centres in the community, making the intention of the revolutionary RTI Act real for the marginalised people.

3. Converging with service delivery, or separating from it – Should ILK functions be productised?

In most of the initiatives discussed in Part 1, where ICT enabled convergent platforms were developed, service delivery and information delivery is attempted through a single system. In cases where this is done through private sector participation involving a business model, there is a tendency to see information delivery simply as yet another service that could be taken as a well-bounded 'product' and thus enabling monetised delivery. (For instance, someone who wants to know specific details about a scheme can either buy internet time and look it up directly on the Internet, or the service provider can look it up for her against payment of a service fee.)

The problem is that most information required by people does not submit to such a modular transactional model. In our case studies of rural ICT-enabled information and service centres, described in part 1, we found very few categories of information that could be provided and used in this manner – examination results being by far the most common kind. Some people may also be able to use other kinds of sundry information provided in this manner. We found no difference between the role of the centre operator in government subsidised schemes such as CSC and private Internet kiosk operators operating in areas similar to those catered to by these schemes. Perhaps, this is also

the intention of these schemes. In fact, many of the service delivery centres, such as *Nemmadi* in Karnataka and *e-Gram* in Gujarat, as also many CSC centres across the country, reflect an over-the-counter transactions model even in their physical structure, with no direct access to the Internet for an information seeker, and no offer by the operator for assisted information delivery. We found that, in practice, most rural ICT-enabled information and service centre initiatives have almost an exclusive service delivery model, with some limited scope for inquiries about the serviced offered. But this kind of information would be provided by any commercial vendor as well. Apparently, information delivery functions only remain on the brochures of these initiatives, and are not really executed. However, tall claims and assertions by these initiatives about doing comprehensive ICT-assisted public information delivery have blocked development of other initiatives using an ICT-enabled infrastructure focussed on ILK needs of the communities. Clearly, meeting the ILK needs of communities requires a specialised approach, very different in orientation from transactional, business model based, service delivery approaches.

Even in the case of non-specialised delivery models dedicated to a clear vertical, as in the case of *Raita Samparka Kendras which* we have discussed in Part 1 of the report, we find that mixing service delivery with ILK activity can be quite detrimental to the latter, to the extent of its complete neglect.

Firstly, there is the 'the central institutional focus' and mission creep issue, since the competencies for service delivery are quite different from that of information delivery, not to speak of the larger ILK set of functions and activities. Service delivery gets seen as, relatively, a much more important 'hard' task, with a here-and-now impact and benefit. It also entails considerable reporting responsibilities due to the implications of 'actual' resources that need to be accounted for. This often becomes an excuse for not fulfilling informational responsibilities. (For example, in our field research we found that *Raita Samparka Kendra* employees often point to the heavy demands of their accounting and reporting work when asked about their lack of focus on informational imperatives.) On the other hand, dealing with material and cash resources also brings in perverse motives and incentives that further skew the institutional working away from pure informational functions. Increasingly, the State exhibits a propensity for outsourcing many elements of service delivery to private sector partners, with the result that the informational functions become even more sidelined.

Information delivery is simply not yet another transaction to be monetised, and delivered using business models.

It is therefore suggested that if the governments have to take their informational responsibilities seriously, especially in the new context of an emerging knowledge society, they will have to develop specialised models of information delivery de-coupled from service delivery. Such a separation may have been impractical in times when information and service delivery needed to take place within specific verticals of government's activity. However, in the current context, with many new models of convergence - most of which at present have a service delivery focus, a convergent model dedicated to public information and development information delivery is quite feasible, and needs be to explored in earnest. Such a convergent model should focus on building a specialised system of community centred information delivery, and for this purpose develop expertise related to informational activities at the community level. Decoupling information delivery functions from service delivery, wherever it is feasible and useful to do so, it should seek their convergence with community level learning and knowledge processes. There are many more common elements and greater homogeneity of characteristics across the various facets of the whole ILK space than between information and service delivery.

At our consultation workshops with development workers in Mysore and Koppal[58], as also during interviews with key informants[59] who work closely with communities, within minutes of starting a discussion on whether service delivery and informational functions should be kept together or separated, there was a clear agreement that they should be separate. This shows both the value that people put on good information delivery systems (which is a very encouraging sign), and the problems they can instinctively and by experience discern in attempts to link information delivery with service delivery.

In an earlier part of this section, it was proposed that the SJKs should have the character of a community agent interacting with government departments, and not of a government agent interacting with the community. This is both conceptually and practically very important. In most convergent service delivery initiatives, the centre operators take on the character of a government

58 See Section 1A for more details.
59 The key informant interviews were conducted with a few persons with expertise in the ILK area, and they are mentioned in the Acknowledgments section of the Report.

agent in the community (in case of Common Service Centres in Chhattisgarh, the centre operators are officially designated as such). Assuming this 'government agent' character and role is imperative for effectively performing the public service delivery function. However, as discussed in the previous section, the same is detrimental to effective ILK activity. This itself is an important justification for keeping the informational and service delivery activities separate.

The SJK and its institutional support system should focus on the ILK functions and activities, responding dynamically to community needs in this regard. The foremost imperative of a viable and successful institution is an inner coherence of purpose and functions. In the context of SJKs, this requires them to have a single-minded focus on the community level ILK functions and activities in the context where new ICTs have and can considerably transform the ILK landscape.

4. SJK as a learning space – The expert-community interaction

An important development communication activity is of experts providing information and guidance to different groups in the community on specific matters like agriculture, health, livelihood etc. This activity is understood to be more than just providing information and is meant to be oriented towards relatively clear and specific outcomes. It could be in the form of one-to-one guidance, lecture to a group of people(which may also involve responding to specific questions) or relatively rarely, a demonstration-cum-lecture. Such a process of learning by community members under expert guidance is an important ILK function, and a very large number of government programmes attempt it. It does lead to some amount of education and learning. People may pick up a useful thing or two from these efforts, especially as a consequence of the subsequent informal discussions among themselves. However, such an attempted delivery of ILK mostly takes place in a very top-down manner, along a steep hierarchy between the 'learned' expert and the 'ignorant' community member.

With a focus on the content of 'lectures' rather than the process, learning is made to look like a 'product' that can hastily be unburdened onto the community in a mechanical process. There is little attempt to systematically look at the conditions under which the required leaning among adult community members can take place, and to provide such a suitable environment. In fact, the failure of development communication is largely due to the lack of such conditions than the lack of resources to develop and 'transport' content, including through human means. Nevertheless, governments and other development agencies continue to be concerned mostly with content and its

transport. This may be because of the simple reason that these factors are easier to manage remotely, through standardisation and monitoring. Developing appropriate conditions at the community level for purposeful expert-community interactions appear to be too specialised and context-rich a process to try. It may indeed be too ambitious for each department to separately try to build these conditions at the community level for its development communication activities. However, today, the possibilities for convergence mean that appropriate common learning, or expert-community interaction, platforms can be developed at the community level which can service all departments and development agencies. The institution of *Samudaya Jnana Kendras* should serve as such a common platform at the community level.

During our community level ILK assessment[60] , a farmers' group in Mandya reported how some people from the agriculture department will come and tell them about pursuing organic farming and later some others from the same department will come and tell them why and how to use more pesticides and fertilizers, and also sell these to them. Either the interaction space is simply not made conducive for farmers to ask the obvious questions about the apparent paradox, or farmers know from experience that they will be summarily told by the experts that this other thing is not part of their mandate, to discuss. Either way, the 'experts' do not earn the required credibility for their message to be taken seriously.

Some organisations do try participatory methods for such collective learning processes. However, these are mostly agency- or even person-dependent with little or no sustained institutional norms and support for such methods either at the community level or at the back-end level. In this regard, it is important to note that not only the expert-agency but also the community members should be trained and be steeped in such participatory methods. This can be done by consciously developing the norms as well as actual characteristics and processes of SJKs to perform this function of inculcating participatory processes in a sustained manner. SJKs then become an institution 'on behalf of the community' facilitating its interactions with the experts, rather than an 'official' place for experts to come and lecture. Such a change in the method and orientation of the expert-community interaction can fundamentally transform the effectiveness of

60 See Section 1A for further details on the community level ILK assessment

development communication in India. For that reason alone, the new SJK system can be considered to be very cost effective.

Box 9. Experts need to listen more - Can they be made to?

The group of self-employed men at Mandya that we interacted with for this study found too much competition (in areas of their respective businesses) as their single biggest problem. Next in line was the non availability of bank loans, forcing them to borrow at very high interests from money lenders. How can these problems of this group be addressed? What are the ILK (information, learning, knowledge) angles to these problems? Let's take the 'competition' issue. It is of little use to these men , if one were to tell them that competition is a natural condition of a mature business environment. Is their statement of the problem itself, then, wrong? One could tell them that they should constantly innovate, but is that enough? Maybe, one could tell them that they should constantly do business forecasts, make provisions for contingencies etc. First of all, there is no agency offering such 'information' for small businesses. Even if there were one, it looks very unlikely that it will be effective, given the experience with other 'expert advice' agencies of the government.

Chances are that experts from any such agency will blandly tell this group that they should innovate, assess business opportunities and forecasts, register their businesses to obtain bank loans etc. They may inform them of the new schemes that are available. This group of self employed men may have very good reasons or facts to show how each of these pieces of advice is incomplete if not simply irrelevant. *This is the knowledge that this group has, and the expert does not have.* If there indeed were a possibility for the two sides to sit together, on equal terms, and share their respective knowledges, it is very likely that they would together progress towards addressing the genuine problems of this group. This may require a sustained engagement, along with appropriate processes for enabling and facilitating such an engagement. But the conditions and processes of the existing ILK paradigm in these situations is such that it does not encourage and facilitate knowledge sharing on equal terms. On the contrary, it seem to actively suppress all such possibilities.

Therefore, the key challenge in this context, which is a generic challenge for similar ILK situations in the development arena, is to shape the space of interaction between the outside experts and local community members in a manner that makes it possible to share knowledge equitably for the creation of new knowledges, while continuing to value locally embedded knowledges. The proposed *Samudaya Jnana Kendra* has to provide and function as such a space. This must be one of its primary institutional design principles.

Expert-community interactions at SJKs will also extend to individual counselling on specific issues, like geriatric care and job opportunities in specific areas, that community members may require. Such

individual counselling must also follow a process respectful of the contextual needs and knowledges of the person who is counselled, in an open and participatory spirit. As long such an approach is maintained, individual and group counselling may also get down over phone and video conferencing.

5. Skill trainings and distance learning at SJKs

A specialised form of expert-community interaction is skill training. Skill training requirements should initially be decided at the community level – both in terms of their substance and their basic process outline, and then agencies that can cater to such trainings may be approached. It is best to conduct trainings in a participatory and learner-centric manner which will greatly enhance their effectiveness. There is a huge demand for the right kinds of skill training among village youths. SJKs should take up an important role in this regard as an intermediary between community members and training agencies. Appropriate follow up to face-to-face trainings can be done through online means, and here SJKs again have an important role, including providing a space where trainees can access computers.

Similarly, distance learning courses now increasingly involve online processes. SJKs should encourage enrolments and continued engagement with such courses, and local study help groups can also be formed at SJKs for this purpose.

Skill training courses at the SJK can help enhance the local camaraderie and the social capital required, especially among young people, for many other community ILK activities that are discussed later in this section. At the Gender Resource Centres constituted under the Mission Convergence programme of the Government of Delhi, skill acquisition was seen as a legitimate reason for women to go outside their homes. Conversely,this new door to public spaces can thus potentially unlock the desire for even more learning, and possible engagement with a larger range of ILK activities.

6. SJK as a self-learning space – The library function

Interestingly, the idea of an SJK emerged in the deliberation of Karnataka Knowledge Commission while considering the issue of reviving or establishing a libraries movement, in rural Karnataka. Libraries as an institution epitomise what is perhaps the highest in a society's ILK conception. They

are a space where anyone can access books of one's choice, books that represent civilisational knowledge and wisdom. Such knowledge is mostly not accessed for any immediately instrumental purpose but for the inherent value of knowledge. Further, libraries, in their ideal-type conception, are also considered as spaces for local information, for preserving knowledge for posterity and as a place for supporting a learner-centric learning experience, different from the structured learning spaces of schools and colleges. They are also a community meeting place, seeking to help in solving community problems and assisting in organising local community activities.

Rural libraries in Karnataka, though, are far removed from this ideal picture, as we have discussed in Section 1B of the Report. They are not properly used even for borrowing books. Most serve just as newspaper reading rooms. At some places, books are allowed to be read only within the library premises and not lent because of lack of trust that these will ever be retuned. In general, there is no sense of community ownership and involvement with these libraries. They are seen as a rather limited utility provided by the government by the few who may have some interest in books and manage to find books of their interest in the library. Very often, the most sought after books are those relating to competitive examinations. In essence, though there may be a library, even if with questionable functionality, there is just no 'library culture' in rural communities. A library culture is a crucial part of, and also a contributing element to, a wider knowledge culture, or to use the terminology applied in this report, an ILK culture in the community.

It is of course possible to suggest measures to improve rural libraries in Karnataka. For instance, procurement of books should be user-demand driven; locally relevant information should be an important part of the libraries; the librarians need training not only in the science of maintaining a library but also in the art of effectively performing the required community animator and facilitator roles. Regular activities like collective book reading, discussion around books and key community issues should be organised; and the libraries should be more closely connected to literacy and adult education initiatives, as well as with larger development communication activities. An effective implementation of these supply side measures will go a long way in invigorating rural libraries. However, key demand side problems remain. Developing an ILK culture is a complex task that cannot be addressed from the supply side angle alone. It is important to organically connect the library to the community life and

the local social eco-system, and integrate the various ILK activities of the community in a community-centric and community-driven way.

In the West, at many places, where community libraries have been an important and valued community resource in the knowledge as well as democratic life of local communities, there is much concern about the fate of libraries in light of the ICT revolution whereby much more information than can ever be made available in a library is instantly available on the digital screen of a computer, e-reader or even a mobile phone. On one hand, there are concerns about how libraries need to redefine themselves in this new context, while, on the other hand, neo-liberal policies (which focus on withdrawing State responsibility from as many aspects of a nation's social life as possible) close down community libraries, citing the argument of their irrelevance in a digital world. There have been popular protests in many communities against such moves. A report by an US NGO, Public Voice, titled 'Long Overdue', found that: *"A strong majority says that if their public library was to shut down, they would feel that something essential and important has been lost, affecting the whole community'"* Also, "*in an age of deep cynicism about the performance of all sorts of public services, public libraries are rated 'A' more often than any other public service..."*(Public Agenda, 2006).

Right now, community libraries in developing countries still do not face the 'ICT challenge' to the same extent as in the West; even if ICT based service and information centres, most without any clear ILK related norms, structures and demonstrated community traction and achievements, do often get touted as something that can replace all traditional ILK related community based activities. It is obvious that community libraries in India have failed to make anything close to the kind of impact on community life as has been seen in many western societies. Apart from the possible correctives to bring rural libraries closer to the local community life mentioned earlier, ICTs can and should be integrated into the library system. This can be in the form of making available digital resources like CDs etc., providing Internet connected computers for public access and employing audio-visual resources to engage groups of people in the library. More innovative processes like online catalogues linking libraries across a local geography with processes of borrowing between libraries can be very useful to increase the extent of books available to the community, and hence their likely relevance. Digital means also allow inexpensive publication, whereby locally relevant development and other information can be digitally published and accessed at the libraries.

E-readers are growing in popularity, and their costs are decreasing rapidly. A few e-readers in a library can greatly transform the extent of access to books for the community. However, for this to happen, government and other involved agencies need to work on getting more and more content that is relevant and interesting for the local communities in a digital and e-reader accessible form. The e-reader format itself is today locked-in to specific publishers, device makers and sometimes also to telecom providers. Such commercial locked-in models are not the most conducive for serving low paying-capacity consumers as rural public libraries or in general, the rural Indian public. On the other hand, just accounting for the actual costs involved in the process, a digital distribution of books and other kinds of content is by far cheaper than printing, and thus can easily be used to complement printed material. This brings us to the issue of the nature of technology systems involved in community ILK functions/ activities and the role of public agencies in this area, which will be dealt with in a later section.

Libraries should also work as free connectivity ('such as providing open wifi') space for people to use their own access devices apart from the connected computers that should be available. ICTs are being integrated into school and college education, and cheap access devices for students are on the anvil. Tamil Nadu government recently distributed laptops to all students pursuing higher education. A demonstration initiative in the Kutch district, which aims at getting *panchayat* members to start using ICTs, runs a netbook library, whereby wireless connected netbooks are lent out to *panchayat* members. The project managers found that taking the netbook home and being able to use it by oneself had a tremendous effect on pulling *panchayat* members into a relatively regular ICT habit.

Therefore, while myriad new possibilities have opened up to improve our rural library system, its present state does not inspire confidence that it will be able to effectively take on such additions and improvements. Without suggesting that this is the necessary way to go for all kinds of libraries, in the context of rural libraries in Karnataka (or, generally, in India), it may be useful to completely revisit the rural library paradigm, exploring the possibility of a new institution that proceeds from the norms and functions of a library, but goes much beyond. It connects the community library functions in a fundamental way to two of the most important social processes currently under way in our rural societies – that of local

development and local democracy. The proposal is to situate the rural library within a larger paradigm of community knowledge or *'samudaya jnana'* where the needs and activities of pure ILK functions like that of libraries and adult education are combined with those of local development and local democracy, in the specific context of the rural communities in Karnataka. Communities will seek both knowledge, for its inherent value, as well as 'solutions' to community problems from this new institution of SJKs.

The idea of a 'public library' remains central to the new conception of SJKs in that its basic norms of (free) public service, equality of access to all, serving as knowledge commons and single-minded focus on personal and community development will define the fundamental values and practices of the institution of SJK. This conceptual and normative basis of SJKs will be developed in the the next section on 'institutional structure of SJKs'.

In the conception of SJKs, the library will remain a distinct part of this proposed new institution. The practical issues around such an arrangement will be discussed in the next section. It is however important to mention that the proposal here is not to eliminate the very institution of public library, but pertains only to exploring new possibilities vis-a-vis rural public libraries in Karnataka. We have no doubt that other forms of public libraries, like school libraries, academic libraries, reference libraries and even general public libraries, remain very relevant. They will follow their own trajectory in meeting the needs, and taking up the opportunities, of an emerging ICT-enabled knowledge society. As for rural libraries in Karnataka too, it is possible that at some later stage of development of our country, as well as other changes in our ILK eco-system, a time comes when a separate rural community institution can serve the non-instrumental (and thus, higher) knowledge needs of the society, which would be the new avatar of the library, and another institution is dedicated to serving the ILK needs of development and democratic life of the community. But at present, both to save rural libraries and to ensure the proper meeting of ILK needs of local development and local democracy, a convergent institution of SJK appears to be the best way forward.

Box 10. Community Libraries: A Vision to work towards

We have great expectations from our libraries in Louisville, where half of our city's residents hold library cards and 10,000 people visit a library branch each day. We rely on library for books of course...But that's not all. We count on our libraries to ride the cutting edge with new technology and materials-music CDs and

instructional DVDs, downloadable books, tools to train and re-train our workforce,services for our growing immigrant population and free access to dozens of online subscription databases. We also use libraries as civic and cultural centres, places where neighbourhood groups hold meetings and residents gather for special events, from gallery shows to speakers to free musical performances. And if we believe that education and lifelong learning are keys to opportunities for individuals and our local community, no local government institution serves all those needs better than the public library.

- Quoting Jerry E Abramson, the Mayor of the 16th largest town in the United States- Louisville,Kentucky

7. SJKs as the local public sphere – Accommodating 'the argumentative Indian'[61]

We discussed above in the sub-section on 'expert-community interaction' how learning among adults, especially pertaining to issues that are part of their daily experience and in which they have a deep interest, requires more equality based facilitative processes of learning. This is true even in cases when an external 'expert' for knowledge that is scarce locally may be needed. How much ever the individual genius may be celebrated in the knowledge realm, knowledge is most of all a product of social interactions. Local community spaces are needed not only to facilitate fruitful expert-community interactions but also to attract, enable and facilitate discussions among community members on issues of interest to them. People discuss issues of interest informally among themselves all the time. Indian culture also has a tradition of formal debates at the community level. Can this pervasive social habit be pulled into formal forms and practices that serve ILK functions of the community? This involves valuing people's tacit experiential knowledge , a subject which will be discussed at greater length under the sub-section on the local and traditional knowledge related functions of the proposed SJKs. Unless forums are developed and supported to enable people to voice their views and discuss them on terms of equality, it is neither possible to develop a knowledge community that is the purpose of the proposal of *Samudaya Jnana Kendras*; nor is it possible to have an active and engaged citizenry, a basic democratic requirement.

Let us go back to the example of organic versus green revolution based agriculture practices mentioned in the previous sub-section- this issue really attracts the interest of farmers and everyone seems to have something valuable to say on it. It could be quite useful to organise a local discussion on this subject in an SJK. The discussion could be made more attractive by employing different kinds

61 The phrase "argumentative Indian" is taken from Sen,A. 2005. The argumentative Indian: writings on Indian history,culture and identity. New York : Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005.

of debate formats. Political debates on TV are quite popular. If well facilitated, and if initial inhibitions are overcome, village communities can surely be expected to enjoy having some such discussions among themselves. Later, larger discussions can be organised using community media, or even video conferencing, across neighbouring villages. DHAN foundation has been using such video conferencing in rural areas of Tamil Nadu since 2003 (IT for Change 2008). The problem is not that people are not motivated and do not value such local ILK processes; the problem is that there is no normative and institutional support for such practices. Providing such support should be the intention while building the SJK model.

SJKs will also serve as the local public spheres, that can shape an active citizenry and enable it to influence the policies and actions of the governments. It is not that immediately all people and groups in the local village community irrespective of caste, gender and class based differentials will become a part of this public sphere as equals. Just as in the case of democracy, equalising ILK processes are more a goal than a given. However, setting the right norms and practices in the institutional structure and space of SJK in these directions has obvious important advantages, of both instrumental and inherent value.

Box 11. Re-thinking the Public Sphere

Jurgen Habermas, in his seminal book, Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, conceptualizes the public sphere as an intermediary sphere between civil society and state, which supports critical public discussions on matters of general interest. As Thomas Mc.Carthy's introduction to Habermas' book points out, *"the liberal public sphere took shape in the specific historical circumstances of a developing market economy. In its clash with the arcane and bureaucratic practices of the absolutist state, the emergent bourgeoisie gradually replaced a public sphere in which the ruler's power was merely represented before the people with a sphere in which state authority was publicly monitored through informed and critical discourse by the people "*(Habermas 1989)

For Habermas, the institutions of the public sphere emerged out of urbane living - "The 'town' was the life centre of civil society not only economically; in cultural-political contrast to the court, it designated exactly an early public sphere in the world of letters whose institutions were the coffee houses, the salons, and the Tischgesellschaften (table societies)" (Habermas 1989). For Habermas, the coffee houses and the like "preserved a kind of social intercourse that, far from presupposing the equality of status, disregarded status altogether" (Habermas 1989). Social standing, political and economic power inequalities were all abolished from the public sphere, which was a pure discursive space, at least normatively. However, other authors (most famously Nancy Fraser) have critiqued the Habermasian model for its assumption that

power inequalities can be bracketed away to create a discursive space of equals, in conditions where social inequality issues have not been addressed. For Nancy Fraser, the only way to create effective discursive spaces in conditions where social inequality issues have not been addressed is to encourage multiple public spheres, very often fragmented, where the voices of numerous subaltern counterpublics find a place(Fraser,1991).

In times when the highly corporatised mainstream media seems to be failing to provide a really democratic national public sphere, that represent the voices of all section of people equally, it is important to help create local community based public spheres in order to support both local and national democracy. These face to face spaces can very effectively be technically enhanced through use of community radio, video and digital networking possibilities, to develop really vibrant and effective local public spheres. Such new ICT based possibilities will be discussed later in this section.

What is important is to give people a sense of value in what they know and what they think, both as individuals and as members of various community groups; to make them believe that their views are important. This may seem idealistic, but institutional norms are built on ideals. On the other hand, the practical opportunity is in the fact that building institutions around ILK is process intensive, and oriented to the intellect, rather than resource intensive, there being no material resources to dispense from the proposed SJKs. This makes SJKs a good candidate for investing in ideational and normative resources of the community; and fostering a sense of democratic equality in all senses of the term, is an important norm.

Very often, in evaluating ILK related activities of governments, one comes across this judgement, that the 'community shows no motivation to learn and gain'. To say this is ironic. Rather than blame marginalised communities for this, it may be more worthwhile to try and figure out what would interest a particular group, and under what conditions would the group be ready to learn about what is likely to be valuable to it. It may be of little meaning to rue the lack of motivation of, say, a 35 year old woman, who is a daily wage labourer, with a family to look after, for attending adult education classes with a structured curriculum about things quite alien to her. Is it too difficult to find out and take up for discussion that one issue which will certainly attract this woman's interest? Perhaps not. However, it will certainly require some effort by the facilitating agency to help her overcome initial

inhibitions, the blame for which cannot entirely be laid at her door-step, and possibly some degree of collectivisation among community members closest to her in social location.

The SJK has to work on the community's side as a local institution for encouraging, enabling and facilitating locally determined ILK processes, which of course would link up to higher level meso-level and macro-level ILK processes. In this way, the dominant ILK model is reversed, from being top-down to bottom-up, without compromising the need and value of external information to the community. In fact, this model prepares the ground for a proper reception and use of such outside information and expertise. As discussed earlier, and as demonstrated from our field research and literature reviews, top-down standardised models are simply not working well enough. Responses to their dysfunctionality in either retracting to administrative levels further away from the community (as we see in the case of adult education and agricultural extension) or attempts at commoditising knowledge and monetising its delivery (Common Service Centres and similar initiatives) may not be the best ones. Our considered assessment is that such approaches are likely to have an opposite effect on the desired goal of invigorating the ILK functions in village communities.

8. Traditional knowledge and local knowledge – The value of 'one's own'

What is considered and valued as knowledge is something very political. In post-colonial societies, the mainstream knowledge system is firmly the western, modern or scientific one. Correspondingly, this has led to devaluing if not de-recognition of knowledges that exist in traditional and folk practices of communities. At the same time, the enterprise of recognising alternative types of knowledges can be a tricky task, itself affected by new power structures. For instance, it is likely that the knowledge practices of some dominant castes will get new recognition as traditional knowledge while those of others may escape even such a categorisation. While gathering traditional agriculture related knowledge, it is very likely that the knowledge possessed by land-owning farmers will get recognised over that of landless labourers who may be spending more time in the field. Similarly, in many artisanal practices, which are household enterprises, what gets categorised as valuable even as traditional knowledge may have strong gender biases; aspects of the work done by women may not be judged to be as valuable as that of men who are seen as representing a particular craft.

It may therefore be more appropriate to use broader terms like local knowledge or people's knowledge than the term traditional knowledge for the present purpose of capturing the living ILK landscape of rural communities. This said, there indeed are traditional knowledges long associated with communities that requires protection and encouragement. The Indian government has helped develop a 'Traditional Knowledge Digital Library' as a digital repository of traditional knowledge. This repository has been used to counter efforts at bio-piracy and unethical patents. Kerala recently came out with a different approach to protect traditional knowledges by employing the concept of 'knowledge commons' and community ownership rather than putting traditional knowledge in the public domain. Another interesting initiative of the Government of Kerala, that attempts to harness the potential of ICTs to validate and valorise local knowledge held by communities, is outlined in the text box below.

Box 12. *Ente gramam*: Using ICTs to build community pride in local knowledge

Ente gramam (which means "My Village") is a UNESCO funded project of the Kerala State IT Mission which aims at creating local digital content in the local language for reducing the digital divide, and was introduced through *Akshaya*[62] centres. *Ente gramam* project aims at developing a community web portal with localised content in Malayalam, the local language. *Ente gramam* websites have been uploaded for nine villages and one municipality in Kannur district. It is planned to extend this to other *panchayats* in the district, as well as to Kollam and Malappuram districts. The *panchayat* level portals contain anything and everything related to the local area- information about history, culture, art forms, institutions, etc. It also has information about local resources,as well as information on government and public services. Some of the information resources on the portal include: details of agricultural resources, health resources, educational institutions, labour resources, industries, tourism, etc. Apart from this, locally relevant news and announcements are also displayed on the portal. Moreover, there is space for providing comments, feedback, and even blogging, in an attempt to make the portal a vibrant and interactive online space. Thus, the portal aims at preparing communities to move towards a more participative, empowered, democratic knowledge society of the future.

The content creation for the *Ente Gramam* project is through a participatory process with the involvement of community members as well as VLEs running the Akshaya centres in the local area. As one of the VLEs we interviewed in Kannur observed, *"When Ente Gramam was launched, there were initially facilitators at the panchayat levels appointed by Akshaya to collect content. They would attend regular panchayat meetings, speak to Kudumbashree members, speak to older members of the community and then generate*

62 See Section 1C for further details about the Akshaya centres of Kerala

the content. This would be then sent to Akshaya district offices where content editors would edit it and put it online. Nowadays, it is a little different. If they want anything published on the portal, panchayat /Kudumbashree members come with announcements that I send to the district level Akshaya office where the content editing and publishing happens. Not all sections are updated regularly, though. But I think Ente Gramam is a very interesting project for we get to know a lot of things about our own village that we otherwise would not have known". The Ente Gramam project is clearly an interesting attempt to spark off a knowledge culture that builds upon local knowledges, but it remains to be seen how the initial enthusiasm can be sustained.

Source : Retrieved from http://www.i4donline.net/articles/current-article.asp?Title=Entegramam,%20Kerala%20State%20IT%20Mission,%20India&articleid=2270&typ=Features August 24 2011 and primary field research in Kannur July 2011

Local communities should be able to value their local knowledges and explore possibilities of supporting and encouraging such knowledges along with those that are imported from outside. Again, the distinctions between indigenous and imported knowledge, as between traditional and scientific knowledges, may be facile. Knowledge is really meaningful only in its actual usability and use, and people use different kinds of knowledges together in a contextually situated way. Rather than define and dictate new forms of knowledge that 'should' be valued, the concept of local or people's knowledge merely underlines the role of relative social power in valuing different kinds of knowledges associated with different people, groups and 'social systems'. Real useful knowledge is inscribed in people's practices, choices and values. The necessary intervention that may therefore be required to foster local knowledges is to facilitate people in expressing and articulating their choices and values, and act as per them.

Box 13. Local, traditional and indigenous knowledge

Local knowledge is a collection of facts that relates to the entire system of concepts, beliefs and perceptions that people hold about the world around them. This includes the way people observe and measure their surroundings, how they solve problems and validate new information. It includes the processes whereby knowledge is generated, stored, applied and transmitted to others.

The concept of **traditional knowledge** implies that people living in rural areas are isolated from the rest of the world and that their knowledge systems are static and do not interact with other knowledge systems.

Indigenous knowledge systems are often associated with indigenous people thus rather limiting the scope for policies, projects and programmes seeking to work with rural farmers in general. Furthermore, in

some countries, the term *indigenous* has a negative connotation, as it is associated with backwardness or has an ethnic and political connotation.

Sources: Warburton and Martin (1999) and FAO Web site for Gender, Agrobiodiversity and Local Knowledge

In terms of the role of SJKs in the area of local knowledges, they need to provide ways for people to value and have pride in themselves, their history and their community systems and practices, while being able to engage with its shortcomings. Here, the social power differentials within the rural communities needs to be kept in mind, whether based on caste, gender or class; along with corresponding identities, histories and knowledges. Also, identity, history and knowledges are to be seen as collective, if also internally contested ideas that are contemporary in their social-psychological location, while however always including a strong sense of past and of the future.

If indeed, as has been sought in the previous sub-sections to be a central normative element of the SJK's design, there is a strong accent on equality of people and equality of different kinds of knowledges that should enter into a constructive dialogue, it looks very likely that local knowledges will start getting valued, and formally engaged with. Conversely, specific interventions for highlighting and supporting the expression of local knowledges will contribute to the proposed 'dialogue as equals' nature of the space of the SJKs, which is necessary for its earlier discussed functions. It is such strong synergies between different elements of an ILK landscape as conceptualised in the proposed model of SJKs that can give it the necessary 'critical mass' to be a viable proposition, which discussion will be taken up in the next section.

Coming to the issue of devising specific activities at SJKs to support local knowledges, it is important to recognise that there are some important methodological differences (which indeed is perhaps the main distinguishing factor) between modern or scientific knowledge and traditional knowledge. These differences include means of recording and transmitting knowledge. Almost all *methods* used to articulate, describe, record and transmit knowledge used in development interventions, including of the ILK kind, are of the modern or scientific kind. The print based ILK paradigm effectively excludes the oral and person-embedded methodology of most traditional knowledges, which also often follow relatively strict social systems, often with selective inclusion/ exclusion. ICTs have also got formed within the modern scientific paradigm. However,

there are some early indications that, to some extent, there may be greater flexibilities around new ICTs for supporting different kinds of knowledge methodologies. However, this will still require local knowledges to evolve to effectively leverage new opportunities, and at the same time shape ICTs in their own image, to the extent it is possible. This latter issue will be touched upon in the sub-section on ICT-enablement.

Many recent initiatives such as documenting local histories and local information have started to give people a different feel about their local environs, both social and natural. Formal recording of information has this property of creating a new value for its subject. People seeing their village in pictures and video films or finding it mentioned in community radio programmes can begin to look at it with new eyes.

Box 14. Life imitates art – Looking at oneself from technology eyes

In a village in Mysore, a UNICEF supported initiative was trying out a new photo- and video- based pedagogy for out-of-school adolescent girls. These technologies allowed the girls to start asking questions of their social and natural environments; and asking questions is the right start for a proper educational process. After a few months of the project, the project team arranged an exhibition of photographs of the village taken by the girls. The purpose of this exhibition was to seek a buy-in of the community for the project because there were some misconceptions about whether the girls were following any useful pursuit at all, in attending these activities. What happened at the exhibition was a surprise even for the project team. Villagers for the first time saw their village streets, its petty shops, its trees, its fields and its people in natural surroundings in pictures. Pictures had hitherto only been used to capture things with obvious 'value' like a wedding or for instrumental purposes like in applying for admissions and entitlements. Now, some very familiar and mundane things and realities suddenly looked so much better and with some intrinsic 'value'. In their self-indulgent enthusiasm they heartily endorsed the project and the work of the girls. This small story may carry a very powerful message about what ICTs can do to help communities gain self-pride with a sense of their own value.

Source: Kasinathan G., Kalley A., Arakali C., Thimmaiah K., Jha M. (2011), *Responding to the learning and developmental needs of out-of-school adolescents*, Bengaluru: IT for Change.

Local histories captured over printed paper, digital text, community radio and video have a powerful influence on local collective consciousness. Putting out information and data about the village on these formats, and perhaps on a giant screen through digital projection, can help build a sense of place, people and community that did not exist earlier, at least not in the same way, which can be very empowering and self-asserting. It is ironical how few people have even an approximate idea of

their village's population, while some of them may even be able to tell the country's and world's population fairly accurately. Prof Anil Gupta of IIM Ahmedabad, a crusader for valuing people's knowledges, describes the impact a simple competition among village women for arranging utensils on their kitchen shelves had on the women[63] themselves. It was so rewarding for them just to be recognised for their 'art' of arranging utensils beautifully, and for it to be seen as worthy knowledge.

Systematic support for similar promotional activities, which really are not resource intensive, will create the platform for a more sustained engagement with local knowledges, their articulation, recording and use. It is for the community to decide, helped by a gentle facilitative process from the SJK, to choose which kinds of local knowledge will be supported and encouraged. Though we have been stressing a general openness about knowledge seeking, it is possible that some kinds of traditional knowledge practices may legitimately be linked to specific groups and may be useful to be propagated from within existing social systems. It is possible in such cases for SJKs to provide many different kinds of support to these groups for such a purpose. There should be enough local level flexibility in this regard because different communities have different kinds of local knowledges with different social systems about them. However, these flexibilities have to be exercised within larger democratic values that are basic to SJKs.

9. SJK as the space for co-creating knowledge

The issue of local knowledges already brings in the idea of co-creating knowledge. The real meaning of knowledge is in its applicability and application. People relate to knowledge not in distinct categories of yours and mine, or local and modern, but integrally, as one embedded knowledge in the form that exists within a person, group or community. Traditional/ folk knowledges thus do keep combining with 'outside' knowledges to create local knowledges as they get specifically applied. However, there is not enough formalisation of local knowledges to be available for higher level use as disembodied and generalised knowledge, across geographies and social groups. This is both a methodology issue vis-à-vis most forms of local knowledge, as well as a social power issue. Claiming local knowledges and actively co-creating valuable knowledge is thus indeed underpinned by a process of empowerment, and also contributes further to it.

63 Interactions with Prof. Anil Gupta 2010-2011.

At present, even data collected about a village, that ought to be first shared locally, travels from state capitals to the village, and is often inaccurate. There is no easy way to correct this information with what is locally known to all. Such local knowledge continues to remain 'tacit' at the community level and is not made 'explicit' to the community and the outer world. New ICTs provide many ways to codify such tacit knowledge, whereby it can become a valuable community resource. It can be powerfully used not only to forge internal solidarity and undertake community level action, but also to obtain due claims and entitlements from external agencies and actors. Using ICT based opportunities, SJKs can become spaces for formalising local tacit knowledges through codification. Simple things like local household surveys, local resource mapping which could be GIS based, and documentation of local facts and histories can easily be digitised and presented to the whole world. For a community to start creating knowledge in a formalised manner, it requires both self belief and an appropriate technology opportunity. The various functions and activities at SJKs are aimed at providing both.

Box 15. Gilded by technology, simple facts take on huge value

In a village in Haryana, one activist did the simple thing of putting the village sex ratio on a blackboard near the bus stop, and changed it every time there was a birth in the village. This simple information updated in real time, now formalised on a community blackboard, galvanised the community to do an awareness campaign against female foeticide. In a village in the Kutch district of Gujarat, the community prepared detailed data about their village which was then analysed along many parameters. When shown the statistics, higher caste groups were embarrassed to see it formulated in tables and graphs that girls from their caste had lower educational attainments than those of disadvantaged castes. While among these higher castes there were strong taboos against girls' mobility, once such an uncomfortable fact was out in the open and 'formalised', caste leaders decided to take action , and started encouraging their community to send their girls to school. In another instance, in a village in Mysore, marginalised women of *Mahila Samakhya sanghas* undertook a household survey and recorded it over digital spreadsheets. From this survey, they drew up a list of widows in the village. They took this list to the officials of the Social Welfare Department and claimed that the official list was inaccurate, and that their lists was the authentic list. Officials agreed to make widow pension payment as per the locally generated list.

10. Local community media - Harnessing the strength of the audio visual at SJKs

It is instructive how we in India look at information needs of communities from a development communication and public information point of view, whereas a recent report by the US based Knight Commission on 'Information Needs of Communities' takes a largely media centric view (Knight Commission 2010). One of the strongest recommendations of the Knight Commission is to strengthen community media. Local and non-profit control of media is important from the point of view of people's knowledge and information rights. The ethics and practices of local community media may be even more important to stress at a time when even development communication and public information are sought to be driven by business models, and are being managed more and more remotely from the community.

The recent community radio policy of the Government of India has opened up some new possibilities but these are yet to be systematically exploited to meet the ILK needs of communities. The main reason for this is that there is no government agency steeped in values and requirements of community information and knowledge that is in-charge of supporting this and other community media opportunities. The SJK system is the one to incorporate community media into the overall ILK strategies of the communities, in an appropriate way which is community-centric and community owned. A very large number of licensed 'community radios' today are simply not 'community-owned' radio. In fact, there is considerable hesitation by the government to allow any agency other than those with very solid institutional strength and credibility to run community radios. Paradoxically, but as can be expected, such large agencies are mostly not close to communities, much less, being from within local communities. A strong SJK system with common values and good credibility, ensured through an appropriate governance system discussed in the next section, can help communities actually own and run community radios. It can also be run as a shared resource among a number of adjacent communities, which may be the most cost-effective way to use community radio resources. Each local community can have specified broadcasting time slots, and also share production equipment.

Developing audio clips at SJKs and uploading or sending it to the community radio centre is an useful activity for both local content creation and development of local public spheres. Collective listening to community radio programmes can also be organised at SJKs which can be followed by discussions

on issues of interest that may have been broadcasted.. Phone-ins to the community radio programme can also be arranged from SJKs.

Community videos, made in a participatory manner using SJK resources, can be a powerful site of local development communication, community debates, and awareness creation. They can help in bringing neglected local issues to the centre-stage of the community's attention. These videos, like community radio programmes, can be made in an iterative manner keeping alive an ongoing media space that can support processes of development and democracy in the local community. In fact, community radio and video are merely a technology enabled extension of the SJK discussion space. In the following section, we will discuss how video-conferencing can enable simultaneous discussions in a few villages on subjects of common interest. Altogether, the SJK model enables a really vibrant local public sphere, as well as a learning and knowledge space for the local community.

11. SJK as the public ICTs centre

A knowledge paradigm centred on print media, because of its structural qualities,sidelines and devalorises most local knowledges, and along with it, the people associated with such knowledges. While ICTs can provide new opportunities of participation for everyone, they also potentially create new exclusions. The impact of new technologies therefore needs to be seen in such larger structural contexts, rather than with a simple-minded fascination for its marvels, and its supposedly universal problem-solving capacities. At the same time, pessimism about their relevance to the ILK paradigm of rural India is also rampant.

In the library sub-section above, we discussed the relevance of inexpensive e-readers in fundamentally transforming the extent of access to books for rural communities. However, while technology has made this possible, business models for the use of this technology are such that we are more trapped than ever before to depend on a few content providers who have propertised e-readers as captive systems. If this trend continues, (and increasingly some of the best books are only e-published) without affordable access to a good e-reader service, many books will be out of reach of most people and other text based content. In a recent e-group discussion, a Canadian author lamented how the US publisher of his own book decided only to e-publish it, whereby he is not able to get his book to community libraries in Canada. Public agencies will need to come out with both

institutional and technology solutions that enable e-reader technology to cater to all people, and become a vehicle for extensive access to books and other content. Similarly, technology mediated interactions between citizens and the state increasingly use proprietary applications like Facebook, with even officially mandated public consultations at times held in the private spaces of such applications. As we become an increasingly technology mediated society, and these kinds of interactions become mainstream and also more complex, the issue of public or community ownership of the very means of political interactions shall become very important. A new public ICTs' approach for democratising the use of all forms of ICTs, especially those that become basic to normal social, political and cultural interactions, will need to be devised, and reached down to the community levels.

Inherently, new ICTs are remarkably flexible and can be socially constructed in so many different ways to serve different purposes. Right now, the technology development model is driven by the global market, and follows its geo-political and class-based power differential. In the early period of a new technology paradigm taking shape, as currently in the case of ICTs, the benefits of technology appear so extra-ordinarily good and useful to practically everyone that one tends overlook issues of power relations and politics that inform technology development. However, as technology evolution gets more and more mature, and differentiated in its application and impact, it is likely to be found that technologies serve some and exclude others in very important ways.

Without going into details of the current trajectories of how ICTs are being shaped, it suffices to say that public interest initiatives are required at many levels to ensure that ICTs do serve the best interests of marginalised people, providing them the kind of opportunities that market-based models alone may not have the incentive to develop and deliver. Local language search engines, social networking sites that are built on local social ethos and requirements, and local knowledge depositories like *Kanaja* Portal being developed with the support of *Karnataka Jnana Aayoga*, are just a few more immediately evident examples. Appropriate technology solutions for the marginalised, which include the rural communities of *Karnataka,* will consist in using an appropriate mix of global services and applications with those developed by local entrepreneurs as per Indian market situations and applications and services developed through public support. The required public ICT applications and services can be developed by communities with some public sector support, as well as directly by public institutions.

SJKs would have a cardinal role to play, both in enabling local contributions to the development of ICTs, and production of ICT based local content.These have to be made available to the local community as a public resource. A truly inclusive social construction of ICTs can only take place when there are public ICT centres that are not only open to all, but also actively facilitative of the process of social co-construction of technology, and of technology based services and content. Only then can ICTs be said to effectively enhance participation and inclusiveness.

At present, ICTs are mostly seen in an individual consumption mode. As ICTs become more pervasive in people's lives, and at the same time they become more complex, a public library mode of access to various forms of ICTs will be required. A simple example is; as video become a mainstream form of 'documentation' and expression, community members should be able to edit their videos at the SJKs. Similarly, many more kinds of applications and services will need to be provided on a library model. With an 'application store' model we may fast be moving into a situation where every, or most, ICT functionalities will have to be bought on an ongoing basis. In such a scenario, it will be even more important an imperative to provide some basic digital functionalities as a public resource in SJKs. These may include resources bought from the market for collective sharing purposes, but also those which are specially developed through community and public efforts for the needs that markets may not cater to.

The Public Information Infrastructure initiative of the Prime Minister's Office recently announced that optic fibre will soon be extended to all villages in India. A few such initiatives have also been tried earlier in some states (Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan). They failed not because it is difficult to so connect all villages, but because there was an absence of imagination about what the connectivity could really be used for. As a result, while there is fibre optic passing within 20-30 kilometres of most villages in India, and more than 90 percent of this fibre capacity is not used, we still do not have good rural connectivity. Those who can provide connectivity are worried about business models - which represents a perfect chicken and egg situation. If fibre based broadband connectivity is simply provided free at the SJK, as a public resource essential for the community's ILK functions and activities, the stage will be set for a possible ICT enabled rural transformation.

The horizontal networking capabilities opened up by ICTs is an important area in terms of the possibilities of building 'community knowledge'. India has a National Knowledge Network connecting

institutions of higher education. India also needs a rural knowledge network, in the form of horizontal networks across its villages; among geographically closer villages, which have more shared issues, but then also escalating selectively, issue-wise or otherwise, over larger geographical and political spaces. Video conferencing among villages can have an important knowledge building and democratic function, complementing other community media.

Mobile based networks are an important activity that SJKs should organise. Local community members can register their mobiles for information and alerts on all general topics or some specific ones. SJKs may also categorise people by certain parameters and send information as per such profiling. Of course, anyone can call or walk into the centre and de-register from any or all calling-lists. Such mass SMSes can be sent free through applications on the Internet. This kind of networking through mobiles, which are increasingly quite common, helps the SJK to keep in regular live touch with the community members, and vice versa. Alerts on mobiles about topical discussions, expert centred discussions, video shows etc. at the SJKs can greatly enhance the overall activity and engagement level of SJKs with the community. Chances are that people would not mind SMSes that are from a local place they know and can identify with, and which carry a flavour of 'localness', even if all of them may not be always relevant.

Box 16. Mobiles for lifelong learning

Vidiyal is a NGO based in Theni district of Tamil Nadu which seeks to harness the potential of mobile phone technologies for community development. *Vidiyal* has adopted as its aim, to work towards "helping people to help themselves". In that respect, women's self help groups were constituted with the rationale that learning could only be successful if people are collectively involved in the learning process. Vidiyal also launched a programme for Lifelong Learning, together with the Commonwealth of Learning, which mainly focused on developing entrepreneurship skills of women in local communities, to further strengthen the women belonging to the SHGs it had formed. Mobile phones were used as a tool for this learning.

One of the women benefiting from *Vidiyal's* intervention has this to share:

"I grew up as an illiterate. I have three female and two male children. One of my sons has a physical disability. The interaction with VIDIYAL, SHGs and the Lifelong Learning initiative made me realize the importance of education. When my son was ten years old, I admitted him in the first standard. I also admitted my other children in schools and encouraged them to learn computers. My eldest son passed the tenth grade with first class marks. My children were motivated when they saw me regularly learning about various aspects of livelihood concerns. I watch television to learn something about agriculture and goat

rearing. Whenever I come across any expert, I discuss with him about the various aspects of agriculture and animal husbandry. I use my mobile phones mostly for talking to experts, SHG members and listening to the audio messages. This type of lifelong learning has helped me to improve my goat rearing abilities particularly in buying good breed, better feed, and health management etc."

Source: Interactions with Mr. Kamaraj, Founder, Vidiyal at the Workshop in July 2011 and Presentation by Mrs. Peria Jakkamal Chinnapottipuram village, Tamil Nadu, India, at 17th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers Stakeholders Forum, Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre, July 2009.

12. SJK as spaces for community building and voluntarism

A good deal of what has been written here on the possible functions and activities at SJKs may be viewed by some as unpragmatic idealism. We must admit that there is a great deal of idealism in the concept of the SJKs. This is perhaps necessary to counteract the all pervasive cynicism that is eating into the vitals of our community lives and of our larger society. There is indeed a good amount of voluntarism and even idealism, in Indian villages, especially among the young, but there is no institutional support to harness this. Initiatives like *Nehru Yuva Kendras* may have been designed with this purpose in mind but, over decades, these have largely petrified into top-down systems without wider community support or enthusiasm. SJKs should seek to harness the spirit of voluntarism and idealism for their various activities. It may be time to try a new, more community-driven, experiment which converges community learning, development communication, right to information, library, local knowledges and ICT-enabled functions, with motivating youth for community voluntarism. There is something inherently seductive in new ICTs that can serve as a good starting point for this purpose. However, ICT uses have to be linked to various community purposes, in the ILK space, but perhaps also beyond. Mapping local resources on a digital platform, making local videos, arranging debates and discussions on important issues, or even planning community drives on cleanliness, health, education etc. can be explored. However, such an extension of the SJK mandate has to be done in a careful manner that does not bring in local politics into the SJK system. These boundaries will have to be cautiously negotiated in a contextual manner. If the norms and processes of the SJK system are built in an appropriate manner, it is possible to harness community voluntarism without inviting local politics. In fact, it may be nigh impossible to rejuvenate our rural communities if the means to institutionalise and provide opportunities for operationalising such norms are not found. SJKs

are also an attempt to situate community ILK functions in their own sources of idealist voluntarism.

13. SJKs for facilitating community monitoring and social audits

It is increasingly the trend to make community monitoring and social audits mandatory for new large scale programmes, such as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) and National Rural Health Mission. Doing social audits however requires both considerable skills and resources. Communities by themselves cannot be expected to have these skills and resources. Today, most social audits and community monitoring have involved a large role of external civil society bodies from outside the local community, and are often done in a campaign style, with facilitator persons or groups moving from place to place. This first wave of social audits has made considerable contribution to raising awareness of communities regarding their rights vis-à-vis government services and entitlements, and familiarised them with avenues for asserting and claiming these rights. However, such high dependence on outside agencies means that many of these exercises are hit and miss activities that may at random target some elements of government's work. What is needed is a systematic ongoing process of social audit of 'all' processes of governance by the people. Also, vested interests have been able to question the legitimacy of the central role of outside agencies in social audits using the argument that social audits are a statutory responsibility of the local communities (*gram sabha*). Such opposition, for instance , was expressed by the *Sarpanch's (Panchayat Adhyaksha)* Association, against the very successful campaign for social audit of the NREGA accounts in the *panchayats* of the entire district of Bhilwara in 2009. They challenged the central role played by 'outside' civil society bodies in the social audits, claiming that these audits should only be done by the concerned *gram sabhas*. Consequent to these protests, the social audit process, which was proposed to be taken to other districts of Rajasthan, was stopped.

This presents a paradox. Communities are unlikely to be able to do social audits without considerable skill-building and resource support. At least in two states, Directorates of Social Audits have been set up, which partner with NGOs to support community based volunteers, who in turn help communities conduct social audits. Such community based volunteers are paid a honorarium. While a very useful practice, it still is a stop-gap kind of arrangement. The SJK as a permanent village level ILK institution can provide the needed skill-building and

resource support for continuous community monitoring and social audit of all governance activities, which is obviously the model that we need to finally achieve. Such a function fits in very well with other functions of SJK, like compiling all public information, using technology as a means to making information more meaningful and understandable, providing open discussion spaces to take up important community issues, etc.

14. SJKs as *gram sabha* resource centre

In the sub-section on the library function of SJKs, we discussed the imperative for the relatively apolitical ILK functions to be converged with the more political development and democracy related ILK functions and activities of the communities. We consider this as necessary if we are to achieve the critical mass in terms of the extent of community involvement that is required for the success of the ambitious proposal of the new community institution of SJK. The Indian rural scene is caught up in strong development and democratic currents, and insulating these from community knowledge areas will not serve either side. However, ILK functions and community voluntarism cannot be sustained appropriately if SJKs get embroiled in village politics. This will lead to divisiveness, creating difficulties in carrying out most of the ILK functions that we have discussed. It would be obvious from the discussion of various SJK functions that they depend on a certain collaborative community spirit, which will require sufficient insulation from the divisiveness of village politics. Unlike physical resources (the competition over which largely underlies village politics, though it does achieve collaborative goals as well) which reduce when divided, knowledge resources multiply manifold as more people get engaged. This is the crux of the argument that calls for a special kind of community spirit and orientation to be the foundation on which the institution of SJKs must be built. This is not to devalue democratic processes and formal political organisations and processes at the local level. They remain of central importance to community life. Here we are only articulating the logic for appropriate institutional separations, in the same way as such separations exist at the higher government levels at the state and centre, albeit in a different form, like between the executive, legislature and judiciary, and also other constitutional bodies like the Election Commission, the office of the Comptroller and Auditor General etc. Significantly, at the public consultations on *Samudaya Jnana Kendra* in Mysore and Koppal[64], when asked to imagine the institutional set-up of

64 See Section 1A for further details on the public consultations.

SJKs, participants spoke of it being an autonomous body resembling the Election Commission and *Lokayukta*.

Correspondingly, It must also be mentioned that we are under no illusion about the political nature of information or knowledge. At their core, few things are more political than information and knowledge, in the sense that they do lead to power shifts vis-a-vis external actors as well as within the community. However this deeper political nature of knowledge is somewhat different from the political activities of formal power contestations in the village. In meeting after meeting during our field consultations, we were told in unmistakable terms that, to be effective, the SJK will need to be insulated from village politics.

This means that SJKs are required to walk a political tightrope. SJKs are political in their orientation to knowledge and social change, which is not something that can be sacrificed. If this aspect is taken away, it is not possible for SJKs to become the vibrant political institutions that we want them to be. However, they also need to insulate themselves from village politics. This can be done through laying down appropriate norms about SJKs, which will be similar to the norms that exist about schools, which are normatively considered out of bounds for politics. Appropriate processes and systems will need to be developed to ensure that this norm is upheld, about which we will discuss in greater detail the next section.

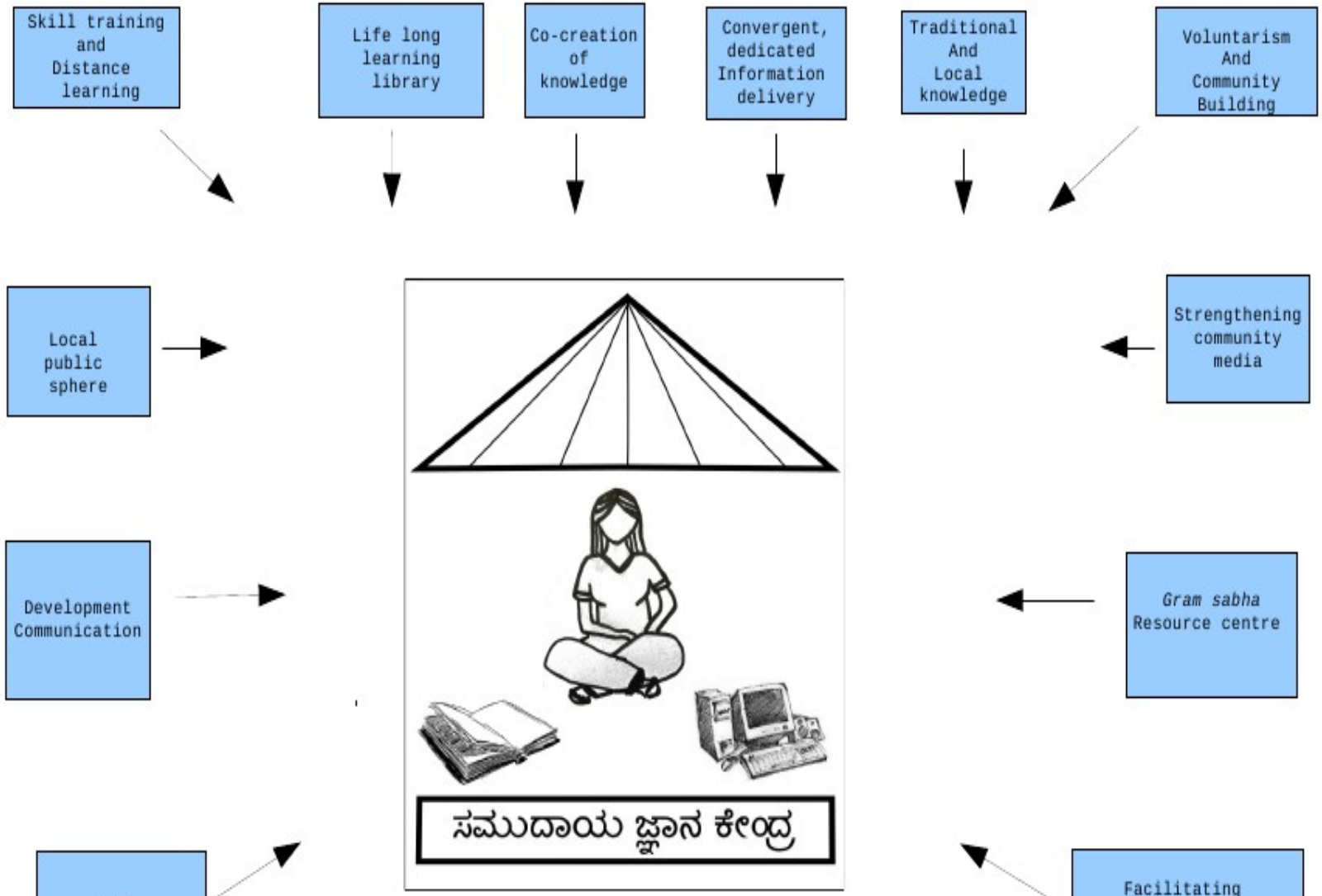
SJKs should indeed provide appropriate resources for the political life of the community. Since the *gram sabha* is the political manifestation of the local village community, SJKs should act as *gram sabha* resource centres. *Gram sabhas* are largely defunct as institutions of village direct democracy, and in most people's minds, it is at best a fuzzy concept. An upfront agency named, or at least with the publicised function of being a resource centre for the *gram sabha*, can help in building this institution of *gram sabha*. SJKs will have all resources and support for people to fulfil their *gram sabha* responsibilities. This could be in the form of background material and information on issues likely to be discussed at the *gram sabha* meeting. However, SJKs will not get into direct political activity, staying firmly away from factionalism.

Such clear separation of institutional responsibilities is a hallmark of any mature democratic systems. It may be felt by some that people at large may not be able to appreciate such subtleties of institutional boundaries. As mentioned earlier, our interactions with community members and development workers revealed that they not only understood the distinctions but insisted that such distinctions have to be maintained and carefully nurtured. As mentioned earlier, most could appreciate the various ILK functions of SJKs listed here as very important, and forming a continuum. At the same time, they were seen to be different from service delivery as well as village politics, and requiring institutional separation from them .

Takeaways for the Samudaya Jnana Kendra model

A review of the various categories of ILK functions, and the appropriate ways to perform them, reveals that while there are numerous ILK needs of the community, all very important, there is a community level synergy among them. For instance, a library will work best if it is embedded in local development communication and in community activism. The values and process requirements for protecting and promoting local knowledges also provide the right ground for effective expertise based development communication, by conducting it in an environment that emphasises a participatory knowledge culture. A vibrant community media is required to guarantee real bottom-up participation and community ownership of ILK processes, while providing them a 'deliberative space' for refinement and articulation of community views. New ICTs and co-creating opportunities underpin almost all aspects of ILK. It is obvious therefore that community ILK functions should be done in a convergent manner, led by local community processes and initiatives.

We can however recognise three broad categories of ILK functions and activities - core knowledge related areas, such as library functions, and efforts at protecting and promoting traditional/ local knowledge; development related ILK processes, like livelihood information, health information etc; and the more political ILK functions/ activities related to deepening democracy at the local level. These different kinds of functions, although interlinked, also have their specific characteristics. The SJK design will need to take into account these linkages as well, as specific differential requirements in this regard, for a viable new community institution.



Capitalising on the community level synergy between
Different Information, learning and knowledge functions

Section 2.B. A proposed institutional model for SJKs

Section Summary

This section explores an appropriate institutional and organisational model for the SJKs. As we envision SJKs as facilitative bodies for information convergence and as nodes for catalysing processes of local development and local democracy in the communities they are located in, we think it is vital that SJKs be community owned and community managed. On day to day matters, SJKs should be steered by a Managing Committee consisting of representatives from the community including a member of the panchayat. However, the monitoring and overall supervision of the SJK and the Managing Committee should be undertaken by the gram sabha, and not by the panchayat : as this is the only way to create an effective informational counter-power to panchayats and invigorate the local public sphere at the village level. We find the processes of selection and monitoring of facilitators to be crucial in determining the success of SJKs, and hence parameters for these processes have to be developed carefully. We envision the SJKs as functioning autonomously at the community level, but with the guidance and resource-support of a dedicated Sate agency to be set up exclusively for this purpose. In this report inter-alia, we elaborate our ideas on the institutional character and structure of this new agency which we have termed the Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan. Additionally, we also offer our thoughts on the role that NGOs could play vis-a vis the SJKs : we justify our opinion on why NGOs should take up resource support and facilitator training roles rather than be directly responsible for the implementation of the SJK initiative. Finally, we discuss our views on the nature of the funding structure that should be set up, for the SJKs.

The last section undertook an exploration of the new community level opportunities that have opened up in the emerging knowledge society. Through such an exploration, we described the kind of functions that the SJKs should undertake. The list of functions looks ambitious even though we have tried to show the continuity and congruity among all of them. Together they constitute a composite set of ILK activities addressing the knowledge, developmental and democratic needs and aspirations of communities.

This section is devoted to examining the following question: would SJKs be able to perform all the functions we may expect from them, and if so, why and how? This exploration leads us to suggest an appropriate institutional and organisational model for setting up SJKs in Karnataka. While trying to fit together all the pieces of one integral institutional model, we do leave different institutional options open in some key areas in order to provide grist to a wider policy discussion on this subject, which we think is an urgent imperative to take up.

1. What is convergence and how relevant is this concept to SJKs?

The first question that arises is this; if community level institutions, such as libraries, agricultural extension systems and Continuing Education Centres have largely been unsuccessful even when they have restricted their scope of work to only one or two of the long list of functions that we now expect SJKs to do, how can we aspire for a new institution that will address all of these? This may appear paradoxical, and look like a case of considerable overreach. In fact, (and this is the logic of institutional convergence on which the concept of SJKs is based), the contention here is precisely this - that these functions are much better undertaken in a convergent manner, rather than individually, employing a common specialised community level agency in appropriate relationships with different departments and agencies who are responsible for these functions. Departments and agencies in charge of different development and knowledge verticals will act as the servicing back-ends for this specialised agency that 'faces' the community.

Two aspects of the proposed specialised agency are most important to note, and are at the core of its institutional competence. Firstly, this agency is primarily a community institution, of and for the community, and will need to potray this character quite explicitly. Secondly, its specialisation is in community-end processes of delivery, or rather engagement, and not necessarily in any particular area or subject of ILK. Thus, it is a facilitating agency for any and all community oriented ILK related efforts.

Convergence is such a buzzword today, that it is perhaps rendered bereft of a clear and precise meaning. Its currently popularity of course comes from the new ICTs phenomenon. The new ICT paradigm is itself convergent, with almost all informational and communication activity converged over the twin technological phenomena of digitisation and the Internet Protocol. Also, ICT based

platforms, allowing dynamic, real-time access to information and communication, enable many organisational activities, earlier done in silos, to now be done in an across-the-organisation convergent manner. For instance, many global corporates have reorganised their internal divisions from being determined by the logic of production – the major kind of products and services they produced – to the logic of categories of consumers they cater to, like corporate consumers, home-users, small companies etc.

The new concept of technology-enabled convergence has mostly been employed in Indian governance systems in a technology-centric, without paying due regard to the corresponding institutional issues. As can be seen in the many ICT-enabled service delivery initiatives in India, it is often simplistically assumed that the delivery aspect of any activity, can be converged with that of any other, since all it needs is a computer at the delivery end, perhaps with a human agent to provide assistance. The convergence of the human, social and instituional part of the delivery is taken for granted in such a logic, which is the major design flaw of the existing ICT- enabled convergence initiatives for service delivery.

While some kinds of services and some kinds of information can be delivered directly through a technology interface, the delivery of most developmental services is not simply an issue of just an appropriate technology interface, human assisted or otherwise. We will not go into details concerning the service delivery question since we are concerned here mainly with ILK functions. It should be evident that the rich human / social interactivity that most ILK functions involve, as discussed in the previous section, means that their 'delivery' is not just an issue of developing an appropriate technology interface.

What needs to be focused on is not technology convergence, with an enabling organisational system being its appendage, as is the case of most large-scale ICT-based delivery systems in India today. The focus has to be institutional convergence, made possible by appropriate use of ICTs. When we take an institution-centric convergence view, the main issue is not about whether a common technology platform for different set of activities can be built or not. It is whether a single institution can perform a particular set of diverse functions, while maintaining sufficient coherence of competencies, approach and outlook; meaning,overall, whether it can be effective. For an institution to be viable, it must appear internally coherent in its vision, mission, functions and activities to its

own workers, as well as to outside stakeholders. It is only then that its own workers can develop relevant competencies and orientations, and outside stakeholders, the right kind of expectations and engagements, with it.

The domiant current approach of community level convergence in the Indian governance system is the Common Service Centres (CSC) model described in Part 1 of this report. Our main finding in studying its operation across five states of India has been that there is a complete confusion among different stakeholders about what the CSC really is. Such a confusion is not only between the perspectives of different stakeholders; each of them individually also has only a fuzzy idea about what the CSC system stands for. This incoherence extends, rather fatally for the whole system, to the centre operator himself. Little surprise then that the local community itself is not able to form a clear idea about the CSCs. Views seem to be equally divided between whether the CSC is more or less just another 'shop' or whether it is a new kind of government outpost. The third view that it is equally both, is even more problematic. Normally, in the minds of people, and in our general social institutional thinking as well, few things can be as conceptually and practically far apart as a shop and a government office. We do acknowledge the power of new ICTs for institutional innovations, going beyond existing institutional and even conceptual boundaries. However, this does not mean that we can fore-go exploring and finding new forms of internal and external coherence, which alone can provide the basis of viable new institutions. Technology changes merely provide a new context- that enables institutional innovation, which still has to be thought through in terms of fundamental institutional principles; maintaining a coherent internal logic and the external face of the proposed new institution,. This will provide and limit the set of functions, processes and activities that it can best perform.

Interestingly, almost none of the new-age ICT-based public service delivery systems tried out in India have a clear set of policies and core principles backing them. Convergence is being seen largely as a technology and 'implementation' issue rather than an issue of serious institutional redesign. The two states that have had the longest experience with ICT-based community initiatives, Kerala (*Akshaya* programme) and Gujarat (*eGram VishvGram* programme), have realised that the simplistic conflation of a shop and government office is unworkable, and have put in place alternative strategies with a core public interest focus. However, here too, there has not been an attempt to lay out basic principles and build an institutional design and road map for community based centres. The

technology- and implementation-centric thinking still remains, despite positive adjustments to the basic CSC model.

2. The basic institutional design of SJKs

In developing the institutional design of SJKs, one must first assess the requirements that it seeks to address; viz. undertaking the ILK functionalities at the community level, and the ILK roles of the state. It must also scope out the possible new set of opportunities (new ICTs, and the social and organisational possibilities enabled by them) that enable institutional innovation. The design must lay out a bounded vision and mission, and the set of core principles that will inform the new institution. From these will emerge the clear set of core competencies that it will need to develop, and the set of functions and activities that it will undertake.

The boundaries of institutional competence for any new institution should stress both the areas that are to be addressed by the institution, and those that are to be excluded. Unbounded aspirations make for non-viable institutions. We have already discussed this problem in the context of many new-age ICT-based convergent delivery systems. These systems took on a one point principle – they will deliver anything and everything to the community, 'generalised delivery' to the community being their core competence. No distinctions have been made between commercial goods and public goods, or between services, on the one hand and information, learning and knowledge on the other. Consequently, public goods have been manipulated to resemble commercial goods, and community ILK, into merely being a set of productisable services. Such far-reaching redefinition of the basic nature of core concepts and activities of society is largely unexplained and unjustified. There is also a complete lack of demonstrated evidence of the usefulness of such redefinitions/ re-articulations.

Our inspection of the nature of the core concepts involved, as well as the empirical evidence, strongly suggests that the informal ILK activities in the community, and the corresponding obligations of the governments and other development agencies, should be treated as public goods. It is also advisable to the extent possible, that ILK functions and activities be separated from service delivery related functions and activities.

We further find that the new technology enabled possibilities of institutional convergence allow a wide range of important ILK functions and activities, to be converged in a single community-based and community-driven institution, as described in the last section. Apart from enabling across-

function and across-organisation convergence, another important generic institutional redesign possibility that ICTs offer is to give more power to the points of external interfaces of a system. In the UK, one important objective of ICT-enabled governance system redesign is to empower the front-line worker. This is possible because the front-line worker can now access information in real time from across the organisation and outside, something which was previously possible to collate only at higher administrative levels. This enables the front-line worker to take decisions without escalating them upwards each time. At the same time, supervisors can watch in real time for any inappropriate deviation from the accepted norms in making such decentralized decisions. Such an ICT-enabled possibility of giving greater power and flexibility to the community-end aspects of governance sytems is very meaningful in helping build the proposed SJK. It enables the required local decision making power and context-based flexibility of approach which is important to the new institutional design.

While the more apolitical ILK functions such as library facilities and continuing education may be relatively easier to converge, their congruity with development related ILK functions and with local democracy related ILK functions requires greater caution, and further thought. The relatively more political functions have some overhangs that can vitiate the possibilities of building a viable new community institution across all these ILK functions. Developmental ILK functions range from rather apolitical kinds that a normal library can easily handle, to more complex ones, involving political elements, requiring specialised approaches.

First of all, as argued earlier, it may be best to separate developmental ILK functions from service delivery, and only these separated ILK functions should be handled by the new institution of SJKs. This removes the possible perverse economic motivations that service delivery is prone to(corruption,misappropriation), for the various agents involved with the functioning of SJKs. Correspondingly, it can also reduce perverse political interest in SJK functioning.

Local democracy related ILK functions are by definition very political, and require an even more cautious approach. One may propose with good justification , that the scope of the proposed new institution be limited to the apolitical kind of ILK functions and activities alone, which will ensure that it does not get pulled down by fractious local politics. This is indeed a possible fault-line in the

institutional structure of SJKs that we propose. However, our field observations, including close interactions with community members and development workers, lead us to firmly believe that without making necessary linkages to the powerful winds of social change involving both development and local democracy that are blowing across the rural social-scape of India, a vibrant community based ILK system may not be possible to build. On the other hand, institutions of development and local democracy themselves have strong ILK needs that are not fulfilled adequately at present, in default of which these institutions are not able to develop and function properly at the community level. SJKs must contribute to this very important imperative. It is possible, however, that at a higher level of development, and institutional maturity, a separate institution devoted specifically to the more political ILK functions in support of democracy and social change may be required, and considered viable. Equally likely, institutional maturity may grow in the direction of communities making an even clearer distinction between ILK functions that merely support and enable local democratic activity, without getting directly involved in it, and the essentially political functions and activities of democracy. In such a case, the proposed institution of SJK will take an even more prominent role in relation to the local democracy, and become a permanent part of its institutional ecology.

In any case, while including ILK related aspects of development and local democracy in the SJK's ambit, it remains centrally important to insulate it from the divisiveness of local politics. This came up in almost all the community-level discussions that we had about the institutional set-up of SJKs. It was felt that information itself is an important source of power, and SJKs should enable the community to seek transparency and accountability from all those who exercise power and authority, including the village panchayat. It should therefore be kept distinct from existing institutions of power in the village. SJKs should act as a counter-power to the formal political institutions in the village, as a kind of centre for local civil society. It is in this role and function that the SJK has been suggested to also be the village *gram sabha* resource centre, in the previous section of this report on the SJK's functions.

While the *panchayat* should of course have an appropriate engagement with the SJK, and a *panchayat* representative should be a part of its local community ownership structure, SJKs should not be directly under the *panchayats*. And, their funding and other resource support should not be dependent on the *panchayat*. This may look like going against the principle of decentralisation and local self-governance principle. However, quite the opposite is the intent. SJKs are designed to strengthen the *panchayati raj* system. It is often forgotten that the *gram panchayat* is not the only *Panchayati Raj* institution in the village. There is another one, the *gram sabha*, which is supposed to be the highest authority, with the *gram panchayat* as a kind of executive body for it. Building an independent resource support structure for the *gram sabha* and insulating it from the *gram panchayat's* direct influence for the sake of its required independence can only strengthen decentralisation and self-governance. Arguments against such institutional separation can be considered similar to someone proposing that judicial independence is against the principle of the highest democratic authority of elected representatives in state and central legislatures. Such institutional separations are designed to strengthen rather than undermine democracy. Keeping SJK away from direct supervision of *panchayats*, however, does throw up the very important question of how the SJK system would then be governed and supported. We will deal with this all-important issue a little later in this section.

The above analysis presents the broad institutional features of the proposed new community institution of SJKs. Clearly, SJKs should leverage the new institutional convergence opportunity to suitably combine a broad range of informal ILK functions and activities at the community level. This includes core knowledge activities such as library and traditional/ local knowledge activities, development related ILK activities like development communication and interaction with experts, and democracy related ILK activities like RTI facilitation, and providing the space for developing local public spheres, including community media, social audits, and a *gram sabha* resource centre. General learning and skill building needs such as literacy classes, facilitation for open education and community based specialised courses etc. may also be addressed through appropriate partnership, and division of responsibility, with the concerned specialised agencies in the respective areas. Access to ICTs and the larger task of ICTs enablement, through provision of all the needed ICT resources and the required assistance and training, is closely connected with community ILK needs, and must be provided by SJKs. Most of

these functions, have many cross-cutting elements and activities with considerable synergies. This fact forms the institutional logic of SJKs. An integrated approach to these ILK functions and activities is likely to enhance the impact of each of them, through improving both the resource availability for, and community's motivation and engagement with, the required ILK functions.

As discussed, ICTs enable institutional innovations in a manner that can help decentralised decision making and also allow considerable local flexibility. This opportunity should be used to ensure that SJKs are community-centric and community-owned, and act as community agents to organise and facilitate various community-level ILK functions. In this regard, SJKs must appropriately partner and engage with outside agencies. Government departments and other ILK related outside agencies will act as resources available for SJKs to organise/ facilitate community determined ILK activities. Appropriate protocols will have to be institutionalized in this regard, with explicit division of responsibilities and an outlining of respective obligations. This issue will be further developed later in this section.

As for any successful institution, clearly defining what SJKs should not do , and what they should be consciously insulated from, is as important as outlining what they should do. We have discussed two clear areas SJKs must stay away from; (1) service delivery, and (2) direct involvement or association with village politics or being unduly influenced by it. Such separation needs to be at the core of SJK's institutional design, and inform all its processes and activities.

3. What would an SJK look like at the community level?

As a physical space, SJKs need to have at least two separate areas or rooms. One for individual-based ILK activities – like library and access to computers, and another for collective activities like discussions and expert-community interactions. This latter space must be sufficiently large to hold a large enough gathering. This same space, when group activities are not going on, can be used for facilitator centric activities like attending to individuals seeking information, or other kinds of assistance from the SJKs.

During our consultations, women, especially adolescent girls, expressed a strong need for safe spaces for themselves in the SJKs as a condition to be able to use them fruitfully. Such spaces will need to be provided, for women/ girls

to develop self-directed activities and engagements at SJKs, which is one of its key functional principles. It was also asserted that there must be separate toilets for women and men in the SJKs.

While SJKs need to be kept institutionally separate from the *gram panchayat*, this should not be a deterrent to allocating a clearly separated space (like an entire floor) for SJKs, in places where a new building is being constructed for the *gram panchayat.* When SJKs are housed in *panchayat* buildings, it is important to have a separate entrance to this space, to ensure that it is open and freely usable by all for a host of purposes that are often self determined , and not associated with any formal structures of power. Wherever possible, a completely separate building should be used for SJKs.

As the primary ILK institution of the community, SJKs should use open community spaces for larger meetings, which may employ digital projection for videos and other digital material. It is important to note that SJKs need to develop the whole community as a vibrant ILK space. The physical location of SJKs is merely an anchor point for this purpose. SJKs should extend their facilitative activities to house-to-house visits; village group meetings, including meetings with women SHGs, and youth and farmer clubs; holding exhibitions, field demonstrations etc; and also active ongoing interactions with other village institutions like the panchayat, school, health centre etc.

An SJK is foremost about a clear set of norms and principles that are conducive to the communities' ILK functions. It is an institution of soft power, and therefore the subtleties and nuances of its institutional form are most important. Its power as well as viability lies in its 'processes' and not so much in what may be its enabling laws, or even separately in the specific contingent activities that will take place there. Everything about the physical form of SJKs should underline its basic principles and norms. These must also be explicitly expressed all over, visually, inside and outside the SJKs. There should be a plethora of slogans on the lines of - 'everyone is knowledgeable, we must share our knowledges', 'as we share, we co-create knowledge', 'knowledge lies in equality and humility', 'our own local knowledge is most important', 'we will give knowledge to the outside world as we receive from it', 'we are equal in knowledge though we may have different knowledges; 'someone may know how to till the land, someone else how to make tall buildings', 'democratic power lies in knowledge as much as in votes', 'with information and knowledge we must monitor our government' and so on.

Everything about the physical space of SJKs should bespeak its basic principles and norms, from the outer walls and the slogans it carries to the name board, to its internal space organisation. The basic principle of 'equality of all' especially expressed in 'equality of knowledge' should inform the space and process design in SJKs. Such equality does not mean that some may not have more information or knowledge than others in a specific context and on a specific subject, but that in an overall human equality sense, each one has knowledge that is as valuable as that of others. A message of 'equality of, and in, knowledge' is the very condition for effective and sustained knowledge seeking by individuals and the community. Understanding this point is basic to appreciating the proposed model for SJKs.

Given our current ILK orientations, some of these slogans may indeed seem radical. However, our interactions with the community makes us believe that a dis-empowered person most immediately recognises the sources of possible respect and power for her; much more than convoluted educational messages, handed over to her in a patronising manner. Firmly embedding the philosophy or ideology behind SJKs in the minds of the community, SJK workers, all authorities including the *gram panchayat*, and external stakeholder is the foremost requirement for the success of SJKs. It is only over such a firm and mutually shared ideational foundation that the proposed institution of SJKs can be built. No amount of investment in strengthening this foundation of SJKs will be too much. The SJK should not be seen as just a physical space with some useful resources; it should be primarily seen as a village institution embodying a set of knowledge related principles and norms, and corresponding expectations and obligations. We look at institutions like the public school, library and hospital through a strong normative lens. They immediate connote some norms, principles, expectations and obligations. This is necessary to be achieved for SJKs as well, in the area of values around knowledge and communitarianism.

Deciding upon the required technical resources at the SJKs is more a matter of detail, which can be sorted out in the implementation phase. However, SJKs will certainly need enough books, journals, newspapers, local information booklets or pamphlets, enough seating space, chairs and tables, enough space for meetings, , material like white or black boards, brown sheets etc. to facilitate group meetings and discussions, some Internet- connected computers, basic equipment to make audio and video programmes, and screen projection equipment.

4. The SJK Facilitator or *Jnana Sahayaki*

If one issue stands out above all others in the responses of the community members and development workers to our posers about the institutional structure of the proposed SJKs, it is about the nature and qualities of the SJK facilitator. In our field studies of existing large scale ILK initiatives as well the new age ICT based experiments, we found that it was the personal characteristics of the centre operator which often made the 'big difference'. As discussed above, the foundations of SJKs are soft qualities of the institution rather than hard features that can be dictated by statutes and then be monitored remotely through traditional reporting and management systems. Such dependence on 'soft qualities' means that the SJK facilitator has a key, if not 'the cardinal', role in the SJK institutional structure.

During our consultations, almost everyone, said that a government official won't do for the facilitation role. Unlike the widespread middle-class cynicism about public agencies, it is important to note that community members and development workers we spoke to were not averse to government-backed SJKs. In fact, most insisted that these should be government supported centres in order to ensure both accountability, and access to all the needed ILK resources of the governments. Their problem with a government official as SJK facilitator was the mismatch they perceived between the required skills that a good SJK facilitator should possess vis-a-vis the typical top-down patronising attitude of most government officials. The two were considered almost completely antithetical. Everyone said that the SJK facilitator should be a *gram sevak*, not just in name but in her whole personality and outlook; everything depended on this. We have mentioned how norms of equality, mutual respect, humility and idealism are basic to the institution of SJKs. It is obvious that the SJK facilitator will need to be a physical embodiment of these characteristics. Between getting a very smart and knowledgeable person and an humble idealist, if that alone was the choice available, SJK should go for the humble idealist. This is not to say that smartness and knowledgeablity are not desirable characteristics, but that these are relatively secondary to the primary requirement of humble idealism. It is not difficult to find young people of this quality in any community, though it is a different matter that such qualities are increasingly devalued. At the same time, however, the overall effectiveness of the person vis-a-vis the various roles of the SJKs will need to be ascertained for any potential candidate to be an SJK facilitator. There is a need to provide

regular trainings and nurture appropriately the basic qualities of facilitators at a systemic and institutional level.

During our community interactions, there was also a broad agreement, though with a few dissenting voices, that girls or women generally fit into this role much better than men. They were considered to be more 'facilitative' in nature and not 'bossy'. There is of course this crucial consideration that women and girls themselves find it mostly comfortable to interact only with a girl/ woman facilitator. In this respect, it is important to recollect that in the last section we described in detail how most ILK activities involve rich interactions and are not merely of a transactional nature. Overall, it is felt that a girl/ woman SJK facilitator, or *Jnana Sahayaki* is a greatly preferred choice, though not an absolute condition. In any case, one or more supporting staff (*Saha-Sahayak*) should be a woman.

Community members we spoke to insisted that the SJK staff should possess the thinking and orientation of a social worker. Everyone wanted the SJK staff to know the community well and feel at home in the community, and also make the community feel at home at the SJK. Interestingly, in our interactions in Mysore-Mandya we found most people asking for SJK staff to be from the concerned village community itself. In Koppal, however, many were worried that any such person may be too involved with the local social and power relationship to be able to be neutral or unbiased, and therefore preferred someone from a neighbouring community. The difference in responses from the two areas may be due to the relative differences in the dominance of traditional social and power relationships in different communities. What this point underscores is that within the overall needs and priorities, local social variations will need to be kept in mind in designing SJKs. An appropriate balance of an overall model and local specificities will have to be arrived at for the entire SJK institutional structure.

It is one thing to select good SJK staff, but it is perhaps even more difficult to ensure that they evolve positively in the SJK institutional structure to take on the SJK responsibilities effectively and not slip into ineffectiveness and/ or begin to use their SJK position for power- and status-mongering. This often happens with many government programme appointees even when the initial selection is carefully done, and may have been largely appropriate. Adequate processes of continuous training, regular engagement with peers for role strengthening rather than just 'trade-unionism', frequent 360 degree assessment and evaluation, and subsequent actions for re-confirming appointment or

replacement will be required. While, (as is recommended in the next sub-section), the SJK institutional structure should be the core responsibility of a specialised government agency, both the SJK staff and the processes at SJKs should be steeped in a participatory culture more often witnessed among NGOs, especially ones that are peer-recognised for this quality, and their community work. The required and regular ongoing training of SJK staff, should, therefore be outsourced to an appropriate NGO, district wise. SJKs need to also be subject to regular assessment by the community, as well as by other stakeholders. The training and capacity building NGO (or, if found appropriate, another NGO) and the local SJK peer networks should form a part of such evaluations.

Based on a composite assessment index/ matrix that will be specifically laid out, SJK staff will have to be re-confirmed in their position every three years, with every likelihood of being replaced, in case found wanting in effective role performance, by someone more appropriate. While job security is important, the SJK role is too crucial to be filled by someone not enjoying the complete confidence of the community. It may also be considered if it is useful to mandate that no one person will continue in this role for more than 4 or 6 years. Any decision on this issue however will need to look at the downside of losing experienced people. After some experience, based on observing the operations of SJKs undertaking all their mandated functions, we may be better equipped to assess whether keeping new people with energies and their idealist commitments intact is more important or whether we should retain staff with longer experience and knowledge of working at SJKs. We suspect the former, but the option can be kept open. A short term commitment requirement may attract some very appropriate people from the community (or perhaps also outside) to give a couple of their years to this community building task, taking time away from their full time work and responsibilities. However, 'short-termism' should not bring 'adhoc-ism' in selection of SJK staff. It should also not deter people from social groups that have lesser livelihood security from applying to the SJK positions.

It will be appropriate to to have one *Jnana Sahayaki* and two *Jnana Saha-Sahayakas* per SJK, since the SJKs have to deal with a whole lot of community ILK functions. This will be similar to the one *Prerak* and two *Saha-Preraks* model followed in the Continuing Education Centre initiative. Some

degree of internal specialisation vis-a-vis different ILK functions may also be useful among the SJK staff.

5. Governance structure of SJKs - Who supports, supervises and funds them ?

With so much said about SJKs and their effective functioning, one of the most important institutional questions is yet to be addressed. Who will support, supervise and fund this new proposed institutional structure of SJKs?

The immediate required level of supervision is at the community level. We have argued that the *gram panchayat* should not directly supervise SJKs. However a representative of the *gram panchayat* should be on the managing committee. Other members of the managing committee should come from different sections of the community, with due representation of various community based organisations, like self-help groups, youth and farmer clubs etc. Representatives of other village institutions like the school, *anganwadi* etc. may also be included, but without affecting the basic, community membership based character of the management committee. Marginalised groups,like disadvantaged castes and tribes, women etc. will be adequately represented.

This managing committee should meet at least once every month to take stock of the SJK activities, and of any special requirements etc that may need to be communicated to the higher support bodies in the SJK institutional structure. The chairman of the managing committee, a position that should be filled in by members on a rotational basis, should be responsible for all the necessary communication with these higher support bodies. The *gram sabha* will assume overall charge of the SJKs, and the managing committee will act on behalf of the *gram sabha* and be responsible to it. SJKs will also be an agenda item for all *gram sabha* meetings, and community members can bring all issues related to SJKs to the *gram sabha*.

6. Role of NGOs in the SJK structure

Regarding the higher support structures for SJKs, opinions were divided in our various meetings between NGO managed and government department managed structures. We will briefly explore these different options.

Even if NGOs were centrally involved in managing the proposed institutional structure, it is obvious that it will have to be a government funded initiative. In some areas like watershed development, health, etc., large NGOs have taken up a huge geographical area to implement and manage development programmes, with government funding. While the results have been mixed, in many development areas, such NGO mediated management, often with the involvement of CBOs at the community level, has been considered the best model. NGOs are able to engage and, if needed, hand-hold CBOs much more effectively than government departments, who tend to adopt a hierarchical and bureaucratic method more suited to government offices and the so called corridors of power, than to community level participatory processes.

The first issue to be addressed is whether NGOs should directly run the SJKs. There have been some instances, like in the area of health, where NGOs have fully taken over the functioning of a local institution, with continuing government funding. Often, NGOs have a very close relationship with the communities and are the most trusted 'neutral' party. This also came out during our consultations. It is tempting to have such NGOs run SJKs, at least in areas where such a close relationship exists. However, we are not convinced that it may be the best model. It may be appropriate in an area like health for NGOs to have a central role, and even be the face of the local institution. However, in the case of SJKs, everything, or at least a lot, is about the norms and processes, prior to the substance. Two central elements of such norms and processes are:complete neutrality, and strong community-ownership identity. With an NGO run SJK, these central elements may get compromised. NGOs can often be associated' with a specific agenda, which *per se* may not be a bad thing. But SJKs, as an institution of information, learning and knowledge, have to have be seen as being free from partisan agendas, even of the 'generally good' kind. Going back to the example about a village debate on organic and modern farming, the SJK should be able to facilitate such a debate in a neutral manner, which is not always possible for NGOs who often have strong advocacy positions on such things. We are aware that this accent on neutrality cannot be taken too literately. SJKs cannot, for instance, be neutral on an issue like gender equality. The example of responsible media is a good one to use here. Even when media professes to be neutral in many ways, it cannot be neutral on an issue like gender equality. Thus, some level of formal neutrality is important for SJKs, along with a clear community-ownership identity, for which reasons, they should be run by and under the banner of a structure representative of the community.

While as per the institutional model we suggest in this report, SJKs should be owned and run by community based structures, it is possible to also try out some NGO run SJKs to examine the relative advantages and disadvantages of the two models. Our main concern is about NGOs being able to handle the more political functions of SJKs, without the whole system getting into trouble, some possible instances of which are discussed later in this sub-section. About the completely, or largely, apolitical ILK functions, SJKs run directly by NGOs with very good reputation may do rather well. Therefore, for the pilot stage, getting NGOs to run some of the SJKs and establishing the appropriate community processes may be quite useful.

Next, we have to consider if village level representative structures established to run SJKs can be facilitated, supported, and provided training and other resources, and also be supervised, by an appropriate NGO covering one or more districts. This could be done on the pattern of the Mother NGO – Field NGO relationship as employed by the Department of Family Welfare, Government of India, vide the National Population Policy, 2000. Here, Mother NGOs selected appropriate Field NGOs to run community based activities, provided them training and capacity building, as well as handled the routing of funds and supervision of Field NGOs' performance.

We perceive two problems with such an NGO based supervision of the SJK structure. One, is similar to what was discussed while exploring the possibilities of NGOs directly running SJKs. SJKs are, in a sense, political institutions since they are supposed to address questions of social relationships and social change, though not directly involved with politics. As various kinds of activities get organised at the community level, some of them of the activism kind though not overtly political, an NGO managed SJK system can run into perception problems. Agenda and political motives can get ascribed to it. One good example of an activist but not overtly political activity taking place at SJKs is social auditing. We mentioned in the section on SJK functions how when district wide social auditing of panchayat accounts and activities was conducted in Bhilwara district of Rajasthan facilitated by some very reputed NGOs, the *Sarpanch (Gram-mukhiya)* Association of the state challenged the legitimacy of such NGO conducted social audits claiming that social audit was under the purview of *gram sabhas* to conduct and they alone should do it. Collection of local information, including household surveys, that form the basis of entitlement allocation is also another very political activity. We discussed in Part 1 in the Mission Convergence case study, how political representatives objected to NGOs running what they saw as a

core governance function – the collection of household information which formed the basis of inclusion and exclusion of people with respect to various entitlements, and were able to stall the process. While such objections can be questioned for their actual motive, the identity and institutional problem they point to has some real basis. NGOs managing SJKs can soon be expected to run into these kinds of problems. On the other hand, a community body run SJK, under the direct supervision of a state agency would be able to withstand such objections in a much better way.

The second problem with an NGO managed system is that SJKs are supposed to be the hosting and facilitating platforms for the activity of many government departments and agencies. It is expected that all such department/ agencies will integrate SJKs into their mainstream ILK activities. This requires an ongoing and somewhat challenging (at least for a long time initially) task of interfacing with these 'back end' agencies by the SJK management/ or supervising system. An NGO is very unlikely to possess the ability to perform this complex and very demanding function not only because of competency problems but also because the government system is unlikely to be very responsive to an NGO attempting such an important and cardinal community-facing task. Even when a government agency such as *Akshaya* in Kerala attempts to provide front-end for community level service delivery and informational functions to line departments, the latter resist it as they perceive it as losing all important contact with the community. It is extremely unlikely that government agencies will show less resistance, in case of an NGO demanding similar cooperation from them. (The same logic applies, perhaps with much greater justification, in the case of a private agency doing front end community facing functions for these departments, as in the case of the Common Service Centres scheme.)

While it may not be appropriate to put an NGO in a central support and management role for SJKs, we have also discussed earlier how an open, participatory and community sensitive approach is basic to SJKs, without which they cannot be effective. Participants at the consultation meetings we held made this point repeatedly, and generally preferred the NGO mode of working in this respect. Therefore, NGOs must have an important role in the SJK system. We are of the opinion that one NGO should be designated for each district or for a set of 2-3 districts to undertake regular training, capacity building and ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the performance of SJKs. A district level 'Resource NGO' should also be responsible for networking non-

governmental resources from district level and lower levels for various ILK functions at SJKs.

A few words of caution in using NGOs in such an important role in the SJK system are in order. Involvement of private agencies like NGOs often gets taken as a licence for complete arbitrariness, claiming that one NGO is as good (or bad) as another, and that there are no clear ways of choosing the right ones. This is not so. NGOs can be categorised by their credibility and recognition among peers and other stakeholders. Especially now, in a networked social paradigm, it is not difficult to build systems to assess and select the right NGOs for the job, and do a continuous 360 degree monitoring of their work. Such institutional innovations lie at the heart of the SJK system's design. Proper detailed guidelines will need to be drawn out for selection of NGOs and the training that they will provide to SJK staff on a regular basis.

7. A networked governance model for a knowledge network institution

The question of who undertakes the direct supervision and upstream management functions for SJKs, still remains unresolved. The requirements of the SJK system are complex. Going back to the perceptions of the community, participants in our consultations greatly preferred the NGO culture in describing how the 'face' of the centre should be, and, in this regard, completely rejected the government culture. But, at the same time, when they discussed about the overall accountability aspects, they had doubts about the NGO model and had much more faith in a government run model. We need to capture both these requirements in the institutional structure for SJKs. In Part 1 of the report we discussed the very interesting, networked governance model of Gender Resource Centre cum *Suvidha Kendras* (literally, Convenience Centres) of Mission Convergence, a specialised agency of the Government of Delhi. Here NGOs and government bodies perform different management functions using their respective competencies, while the overall responsibility and authority lies with Mission Convergence.

Such a mixed model may be the best one to adopt for SJKs, under an apex public agency, which can be called as *Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan.* At the state level, this body will develop policy and undertake overall planning work. This body or agency will also have a direct implementation role, and will thus

require district and block level presence. The district units of *Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan* will be the key nodal implementation agencies for SJKs. However, it is important to clarify at this stage that SJKs are not to be seen as community platforms available to push all kinds of government programmes – as is typically done for any 'generic' resource of this kind available at the community level. The local community autonomy is a principal tenet of the institution of SJK. In any case, observing the important principle of keeping service delivery beyond the mandate of SJKs, should ensure that SJKs do not get used simply as a vehicle to deliver all kinds of government programmes. SJKs have only an ILK functions and activities mandate. And even the ILK processes at SJKs should be self-determined by the community, with external bodies, including the SJK support structure, only acting as a resource for SJKs.

Even if in practice, what actually happens at SJKs is determined through negotiations between community demand and the availability, and to some extent the priorities of external resource agencies, community self determination remains the key operational principle, both at individual SJK level, as well as with the collective representative and facilitative *Samudaya Jnana* bodies at the block and district levels,. Such decentralisation, and inversion of power and decision-making process is something that goes completely against the grain of the governmental set-up. It may be naïve to expect that the SJK space at the community level will be equal, open and fully participative, and that the *Jnana Sahayaki* will have the corresponding facilitative qualities, if the upstream management structure bears a very different work and organisational culture. The principles and norms that we spoke of as being basic to SJKs need to be as fundamental to the higher facilitative and management bodies. Since SJKs are a more process-intensive system, not to ensure this imperative of building a different organisational culture will simply mean a still birth for the proposed new institution.

It is thus obvious that simply putting any existing government department in charge of the institutional system of SJKs, or even setting up a new government agency in the image of existing government machinery will not do for the purpose at hand. This new agency, *Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan,* will require committed knowledge and community development professionals to run it, and this should start from the top. It is important to seek the adequate professional competence in both the areas – of knowledge and of community development. A higher education or knowledge processes professional without demonstrated engagement with community level issues or demonstrated commitment to participatory and equality based approaches will not be appropriate. Neither will someone involved with community development but with no sharp accent on ILK kind of

activities, again from a participatory knowledge culture, be well suited. A suitable set of people should be carefully picked up as the top management if this new state level public agency is to succeed in running the ambitious SJK system. Once again, a participatory management culture is important for this institution, unlike the person-centred work and organisational culture of the government machinery today.

These points are being stressed here because it is impossible to have the kind of SJKs that we have proposed for setting up without getting the dynamics of this new public agency right. The insulation of this agency from day to day political and bureaucratic activities should be ensured in the same way as in the case of institutions of higher education – autonomous institutions, universities, etc. The imperatives in both the cases are the same. The principle of keeping service delivery away from SJK's ambit helps in this regard; whereby day-to-day supervision by the government as required for regular programmes becomes unneccessary. It is enough to set up the higher level policy framework and then,largely, allow the ILK functions of the SJK system to be managed autonomously.

The requirements of neutrality and quality for the informal ILK processes of the more disadvantaged communities cannot be taken to be any lower than those ensured for the formal ILK needs of the upper classes. Neither would it be be appropriate to adopt a patronising attitude that these 'higher level' institutional issues are not that important in this case. In our understanding, if indeed a decision is made to undertake a serious effort to address informal ILK needs of communities in the new context of an emerging information society, we need to start by getting two things right, and this will be half the work done. One, get the right structure and people for the state level new public agency with the key *Samudaya Jnana* norms and principles (discussed earlier) driving this agency. Secondly, provide it with all the necessary funds that are required to achieve such fundamental community level ILK transformation, which no doubt would be much more cost effective than the many uncoordinated, and not quite effective, ILK efforts of so many different agencies.

There will also be some rather technical functions that the *Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan* should perform. Since after all, the Right to Information is about the community's ILK, this agency can also

act as the overall RTI agency for the government. In the digital age, almost all information covered under RTI is available in digital form and thus can, and indeed needs to be disclosed pro-actively. However, various government departments and offices need training, hand-holding and also facilitative platforms for making such proactive disclosures in a regular manner. The *Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan* should take up this role, including providing and maintaining a government wide common RTI portal. It should have an obvious consultative role in all ILK functions and activities of the government that have a community impact. This includes areas like skill development policies and programmes, community radio policy, village ICT infrastructure policies and programmes, etc.

The internal glue that keeps the *Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan* together and ensures its effective functioning is the specific norms and principles of a new knowledge culture of equality, participation and co-creation that needs to be clearly laid out and stressed in every process and activity of the SJK system. It is not at all easy to try and set up such an idealistic agency in the current public institutional landscape in India. Therefore, it needs to keep the purity of core principles always ahead with every organisational activity informed by them. An example of a specialised public agency that has been able to do credible work is *Mahila Samakhya*, a program of the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, while many special purpose agencies set up by governments quickly decline into typical government offices and officialdom. The reasons for this may be relevant to examine. *Mahila Samakhya* was born with a strong ideology of women's empowerment at its core. A lot of care was taken that women's empowerment does not get cast merely in instrumental terms, as has been the dominant development thinking. An NGO like participatory culture was sought to be maintained at the state, district and lower levels. It helped that being a fully central government scheme, though there were state government linkages in the governance structure, the 'governmental interference' was lesser than usual. However, the most important element in the relative success of *Mahila Samakhya*, in our opinion, is that from the National Resource Group to the State Director to the village or cluster level resource persons, there has been a sufficiently strong shared ideology of women's empowerment and gender equality. The staff, including the State Director, and also the National Resource Group, is chosen with demonstrated gender equality related commitment as a primary requirement. And since, all of them (except some positions in the programme administration like accounts) are women, it is not an

insignificant issue that, being also trained in gender issues, *Mahila Samakhya* staff have an inherent strong feeling for what has been the core ideology of *Mahila Samakhya*. This case is being mentioned here in order to stress that the kind of new agency and institution that is being proposed here will require to primarily stand on its ideology – in terms of core norms and principles related to community knowledge. These need to be visible and reaffirmed in all its activities. Such a normative approach is basic to the success of the SJK proposal. *Mahila Samakhya* has as a state level body registered as a society and with district offices, and with a resource person based outreach, right up to village cluster level, which overall model can be followed by *Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan.*

The main reason for looking at *Mahila Samakhya* as a reference model to take some lessons for the SJK system is that (1) as an 'education for empowerment' program, it has the closest fit to a core ILK kind of mission of SJKs, and (2) as discussed, one of the strongest points of organisational cohesiveness and effectiveness of *Mahila Samakhya* is a strong and clear ideology, which is something also centrally required for the success of an ILK initiative like SJK. The *Mahila Samakhya* programme does face challenges, but the main reason for it is that the programme, being oriented to the knowledge and empowerment needs of the most marginalised women lacks enough mainstream political appeal and programmatic support. It runs on a meagre budget, since marginalised women's socio-political and knowledge interests remain on the periphery of mainstream development and governance priorities. However, an SJK kind of system addressing ILK needs across the development and democratic space is expected to draw much greater mainstream appeal and support, and hence also attract resources including funding. This is not to say that such a mainstream programme should subsume empowerment programmes addressed to the needs of specific marginalised groups. The latter remain important and necessary. In fact, SJKs should provide resources and other kinds of support to such sectoral community level programmes, and also attempt to give them a larger involvement in the mainstream community ILK activities.

From the model of Mission Convergence, we proposed to take the idea of NGO involvement within the SJK system that is primarily directed by the proposed new public agency, *Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan*. Some other new specialised government agencies addressing the needs of convergent service delivery at the community level are also relevant to our exploration of the appropriate institutional model for SJKs. IT Mission of Kerala and *Egram VishvGram* Society of Gujarat are two examples to look at, in this regard. However, they

are primarily technology oriented, though the *Akshaya* division of IT Mission has developed a good orientation as well as the competencies required for community based service and information delivery. The *EGram VishvGram* Society of Gujarat is still struggling to chart its role beyond technology support and some monitoring functions vis-a-vis *Egram* community service centres. However, it is interesting that it is anchored in the Department of Rural Development and not with the Department of Information Technology, thus moving towards a greater developmental focus from a technology focus. These initiatives, and a few more across the country, do evidence strong tendencies of structural changes in our governance system towards new convergent community facing institutions. However, none of these emerging models look at a separation of ILK activities from service delivery, and focussing on the great potential of ILK convergence alone. The proposed institutional design of SJKs needs to address the serious issues arising in efforts at converging ILK functions with service delivery functions.

Another important institutional innovation in Indian governance systems is the setting up of Directorates of Social Audit by two states, Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh. Such a directorate is an interesting organ of the government which is supposed to be facilitating and siding with the community to keep an eye on the governance machinery. These directorates work closely with NGOs in this regard. The Comptroller and Auditor General of India has recently recommended that all states set up such Directorates of social audit to train auditors from civil society. Its Task Force on Social Audits has also recommended how social audits and statutory audits should develop synergistic complementarity, including through sharing of information and findings. The connection to such a far-reaching institutional innovation with the proposed new community ILK agency should be obvious.

It is the large-scale systemic change tendencies already being witnessed around us that give us the confidence to attempt thinking big and from a higher, government-wide institutional restructuring level as we try to look at the best way to address the informal ILK needs of communities in Karnataka. Significant structural change tendencies are not only being witnessed in the new large-scale convergent models we mentioned above, but also in some sector specific efforts for new ICT enabled community presence, like the NREGA *Sewa Kendras* (for NREGA related information), Workers Facilitation Centres (to enable registration and providing social security information and services to un-organized workers), proposed public information centres of the Public Information

Infrastructure initiative government of India, and the many NGO led initiatives for community information centres often in partnership with some government programmes. These multiple uncoordinated efforts do not appear to be sustainable. This strongly suggests that a well-designed convergent system at the community level devoted to ILK needs and functions is an idea whose time has come. In the emergent conditions, the model of a single agency which can develop core community ILK competencies, but with enough community specific flexibility, and service the various ILK needs of different agencies, deserves to be given a serious consideration.

8. Who funds *Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan* – Role of other departments and development agencies

The moment any proposal for a new public agency is made, the question of funding becomes foremost. In this regard, we will briefly revisit the logic and opportunity of convergence, discussed in the opening part of this section. Undoubtedly, if the proposed new institutional structure of SJKs is developed in a proper manner, it will not only greatly enhance the ILK functions at the community level, and the ILK activities of governments, it will also save considerable money that gets spent today over poorly planned and targeted ILK efforts of the numerous agencies. This is true for the traditional development communication activities of government agencies as well as for the more recent accent on transparency and accountability related activities seen in many large government programmes. Development communication will succeed best if done through means of local media, and in a participatory culture of an SJK like setting. All the agencies that do development communication can contribute specified funds to the SJK structure, against commitments from it to engage communities on issues under their respective purview. With SJKs taking the primary role in organising community level ILK activities, these agencies become a resource support for the SJK structure. This kind of a relationship can have a transformative impact on the effectiveness of development communication for all the concerned agencies. Appropriate structures of monitoring and evaluation can be set up so that all these partner agencies can track the impact of the development communication made in the areas of their interest. Such a relationship, while providing funds to the SJK system, should makes it accountable to its partner agencies. We understand that any organisation finds it difficult to shed or even dilute its community interaction role. However, with the current ineffectiveness of much of community-targeted ILK activities, it is necessary to explore a new paradigm of development communication. Importantly,

SJKs will not seek to take up an exclusive community interaction role on behalf of these agencies. As mentioned earlier, these line agencies will still do some direct outreach efforts on their own. SJKs merely make their task both more convenient and effective.

Similarly, the transparency and accountability (through social audit) requirements of many new programmes like NREGA can be met through SJKs. At a recent civil society consultation on implementation of proactive disclosure related provisions of the Right to Information Act, it was proposed that if every large government programme committed one percent of its budget for transparency related work whereby huge leakages of funds can be checked,. Enabling the right to information and facilitating social audits by the local community (*gram sabha*) has been mentioned as a key function of SJKs. Large scale development programmes that are exploring various possibilities for community level ILK activities and/ or facilitation of transparency and accountability aspects of their programmes can thus suitably co-fund the SJK machinery. Such a relationship will cast corresponding performance obligations on the SJK system, outcomes regarding which can be tracked using ICT and other means.

For the kind of activities that SJKs will be able to perform, and the outcomes that will be produced, funding the SJK system should not be a real issue. However, getting these diverse agencies to accept the idea of co-funding against clear accountability tracking of outcomes may take some effort, and some focussed planning. For this purpose, the viability not only of individual SJKs but of the whole SJK system has to demonstrated to them. It is also important to mention that the systems set up to ensure accountability of the SJK system to these partner organisation are not expected to become a remote 'command and control' kind of mechanism of the typical government machinery. Since IT enables easy tracking, there is a tendency to use IT based systems for micro-managing, which defeats the purpose of using ICTs for increasing local level flexibility. Monitoring and evaluation systems should therefore be carefully devised, keeping in mind the bottom-up and participatory ideology of the SJK system. Often 360 degree openness and transparency of working is a much better monitoring mechanism than a closed reporting system, tending towards maximalism. Such a new open paradigm of monitoring and evaluation should be applied to the SJK system, in conjunction with a light touch, but effective, more typical hierarchical management processes.

The decisions to take up specific ILK activities in partnership with various agencies will be decided at taken at the block and district level SJK representative bodies along with the corresponding *Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan* governance bodies. This process will be preceded by community meetings at SJKs to get community views. Normally, there is much less difference of views about what ILK functions and activities are important to do in a community rather than about how to do them effectively. The partnerships with outside agencies should therefore not require inflexible, quantitative targets-based performance monitoring and should be based on co-assessment with communities and the SJK system of qualitative outcomes. This does require fundamentally different attitudes and approaches to ILK functions and activities than are prevalent today. But that indeed is the purpose of the SJK system to achieve, and thus their current lack cannot be taken as a reason for not setting out towards this goal of a participatory knowledge or ILK culture.

Different departments and agencies funding the SJK system in a dynamic manner against commitment to do their development communication and / or transparency and accountability functions does have a significant downside. This will leave the SJK system always looking upwards to ensure regular flow of funds, rather than focus downwards on the community, which is the way SJKs are supposed to form their agenda and perform their functions. How do the SJKs decide whether to prioritise activities for which they have to report to the funding partners, or those which the community demands be taken up? We are of the opinion that co-funding by different agencies should only be an option for the initial period when the SJK system is getting established and proving itself. Finally, it has to move towards a stable and regular funding for its structure and activities, even as its core networked nature, and thus accountability to all stakeholders including different department and development agencies, is maintained. These accountabilities are beyond their primary accountability to the community. However, such accountabilities will be ensured, because the SJK system is thus mandated, and is subjected to internal monitoring and supervision systems, and not on the pains of withdrawal of funds by different client agencies.

Indeed, the *Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan* will not be a passive agency merely facilitating partnerships with development and other agencies for their ILK functions to be conducted through SJKs. It will have a much larger role of building a participatory knowledge culture, both at the top, and at

the bottom, the community level. Such a culture cannot be shaped at one level without it being shaped at the other. *Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan* will organise trainings and capacity building of different development and other government agencies on participatory knowledge concepts, culture and methodology. This kind of a role requires a staff that possesses certain qualities different from the 'hard management' orientation and style of typical government bodies. It will be important for this agency to keep a close relationship with such NGOs, as have a good reputation of community presence and a participatory culture. The *Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan* will partner with such NGOs at the state and district levels for helping it with program design, resource networking and monitoring and evaluation.

9. *Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan* at the district and block levels

The district level body of the *Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan* will be the key implementation node of the system. Headed by a community knowledge professional on a five year contract, it should have a District Coordination Committee to help her in managing the district level SJK program. The District Coordination Committee will have 3-5 representatives from government departments, with membership to be rotated among different departments at the district level. About 8-12 members of this committee should be people who are key public figures in the district, and who can contribute to shaping and help managing an agency devoted to community ILK functions. It is the ILK related orientation and experience that should be the primary criterion for choosing these members and not their economic or political standing. Of these non-government members, a good number should be from local NGOs. This Coordination committee, while supervising district level administration and plans of the SJK systems, will also help network resources for SJKs. The *Abhiyan* collective of NGOs in the Kutch District of Gujarat, runs one of the most successful community information centres initiative in the country. The district level management is done by a coordination committee which has representatives from the NGOs that are a part of the *Abhiyan* collective. Each member of the committee serves three years on the committee is compulsorily replaced. This collective ownership model of the community information centres initiative has been working very well. Such a model also has the benefit of these centres being able to easily access resources as required from all the participating organisations. The *Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan's* District Coordination Committee should similarly be made of people actively involved in public interest activities, but in a non-political role.

As the Internet becomes more commonly used, the District Coordination Committee should work through an open e-list, so that issues get openly and thoroughly discussed. It is said that transparency is the best disinfectant, and an institution like SJK requires such an open and deliberative governance system. *Samudaya Jnana Sahayakis* should also be able to form a district level network, that interacts with the District Coordination Committee on an ongoing basis. Such networks of Community Information and Service Centre operators have played important roles in most places where such centres are working to help shape new processes for community based convergent systems; like in the Common Service Centres in Raipur city of Chhattisgarh, *Abhiyan* centres in Kutch, Mission Convergence centres in Delhi, and *Akshaya* centres in Kerala. The entrepreneurs who are a part of the *Akshaya* project in Kerala have a State wide network where they discuss the implications for new directions in State policy and try to use the network for collective bargaining with the State. Our primary field research in July 2011 with *Akshaya* entrepreneurs revealed that while the *Akshaya* project was proposed to be subsumed under the CSC scheme, some of the entrepreneurs had lobbied against the SCA structure (involving corporate intermediaries) and has strongly recommended that the existing structure, with Kerala IT Mission as the key nodal body be retained. *Akshaya* entrepreneurs also use their networks to discuss innovations at the local governance level that they can work towards (such as sharing learnings from attempts to set up help desks in panchayats and the office of the District Collector).

It is possible however that the Coordination Committee may need to do some online deliberations that are not open. However, this must be the exception rather than the rule. Twice a year, an open session should be arranged as a social audit of the working of the District *Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan*. This event should be publicised sufficiently in advance through the press and other media, including through SJKs. An open and participatory culture where questioning is encouraged is very basic to SJK thinking and design. Such a culture will only be possible to be established and sustained if the SJK governance system itself proactively shows such qualities.

The block level *Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan* would primarily have a resources coordination function, because it is at this level that, in practical day-to-day implementation terms, most of the work around connecting to different resource and partner agencies for SJK activities, pulling the necessary information and providing it to SJKs etc, will take place. It is also possible to have a light

community members based advisory structure at the block level. The *Jnana Sahayaki* network should be really effective at the block level with a sufficient number of face to face meetings.This network should play an important role in block level *Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan* activities.

10. Next steps – Policy level consultations, and piloting SJKs

Doing some pilot projects first is mostly the best way forward for instituting such kind of new structures and processes as are recommended by this report. Even if the immediate step may be to test out some pilots of SJKs in a few locations in the state, this should happen within a larger institutional thinking about the community ILK landscape and the systemic changes that may both be required and have become possible today due to knowledge society developments. It is for this reason that this report attempts an exploration of the larger structural and institutional issues around SJK, and also provide far-reaching recommendations regarding them. We believe that the kind of SJKs that the Karnataka Knowledge Commission has been envisaging are only possible within a larger institutional redesigning, which may be taken up in steps, as long as its broad overall directions are always kept in mind. Even with enough evidence from the many current institutional shifts in the governance set-up of India, which has created a favourable climate for exploring the setting up of SJKs in grassroots communities in Karnataka, the relative novelty and the very broad sweep of the overall proposal seems to call for proceeding in gradual steps.

In order to ensure that the steps that are taken towards establishing a 'knowledge society for all' in Karnataka are informed by the broad vision and principles that have been laid out in this report, it is important to establish at the earliest a new independent public body, the *Karnataka Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan*. This body will shape and lead the new initiative. As a practical step, however, the rural public libraries as the institution that comes closest to the envisaged SJKs may be leveraged, but with a completely new approach as outlined in this report. The name *Samudaya Jnana Kendra* would be used for the new composite institution, which will also have a library function, among many others.

It will also be useful to pilot SJKs in some communities for two years. It is important to recognise that SJKs, though a community organisation, are fundamentally a network institution. The effectiveness of the SJKs, perhaps its very survival as a viable institution, depends on the extent and 'thickness' of the network in which it is sought to be embedded. Pilots typically become stand alone activities, and this will not work for SJKs.

Therefore, the proposed pilots should be conducted in an environment where the larger institutional structure of SJKs is already being discussed, and being given serious consideration. There needs to be a basic political understanding and commitment towards making the required institutional innovations, through consulting all stakeholders, and reflect upon the emerging learning from the pilots. Secondly, the pilots should be conducted in a manner that a sufficient scope and intensity/'thickness' of its required resource support network is built, and made available. This will require bunching enough number of SJK pilots in specific administrative units, with a clear buy-in of, and instructions to, local government offices to partner with the SJKs in their community ILK activities, in a manner that is in keeping with the SJK's ILK philosophy. This can of course only be a gradual task, and will require much training and capacity building. However, even with all the training and hand-holding, these requirements of running SJKs successfully can only be met if all the involved stakeholders recognise that SJKs are a serious, long term policy agenda, and represent the likely direction in which ILK functions and activities in the community, and of the State, shall move towards.

We suggest that SJKs be set up in ten villages each in three blocks of three districts in different parts of Karnataka. Alternatively, for even greater coherence and better resource support network building, a single district with 25-30 pilot SJKs may be tried out for two years. A project agency will be required to closely coordinate and supervise these pilots, partnering with local NGOs to run the SJKs with community involvement. Necessary community entry processes, as often used by community level NGOs should precede setting up SJKs. Community based management committees should also be set up from the start of the pilot itself. Importantly, such a process intensive pilot, cutting across a very broad range of community and government activities, will require investment of sufficient resources. A good degree of experimentation and investing in new community processes will be

involved. It will not be possible to do the pilots with the final upscaled 'cost per SJK' thinking as the basis of cost calculation for the pilot. This will be an intensive experimenting and incubation phase, and will need to be supported as such. On the other hand, the SJK model that finally emerges should be cost-effective to more or less fit into existing ILK funding, even as converging of ILK resources from different agencies have to be achieved for this purpose.

Salient features of the proposed *Samudaya Jnana Kendra* model

1. A community level convergence is possible and must be sought among all information, learning and knowledge (ILK) functions. Such a model is more efficient and cost effective and also enables context specific ILK activities with substantive community ownership.

2. Community ILK is not amenable to commercial models; neither is it a practical possibility, nor does it correspond to how the community looks at ILK. Community ILK activities must be treated as a public good.

3. Converging ILK functions with core service delivery functions is not very effective. It does not enable the required coherence of core institutional principles and processes that is required for any effective and viable institutional system. A convergent community ILK institution should therefore be built separate from, and parallel to, convergent service delivery initiatives.

4. Many ILK functions are political in nature, concerning deepening democracy and empowerment of marginalised sections. It will be wrong to shirk from these functions, as some initiatives tend to do, with the fear that this would invite politics into the functioning of community ILK centres. These more political ILK functions have great value and appeal to people. At the same time, the design of the SJKs should insulate them from the typical divisiveness of local politics.

5. ICTs enable the empowerment of front-end workers of any organisational system. This possibility has to be utilised to make SJKs, and its staff, as the primary element of ILK systems, with upstream bodies, departments etc. providing resource support to this 'primary element' of the ILK systems. Such bottom-up reorganisation of public systems is a key knowledge society opportunity.

6. The same set of ICT-based possibilities also enable complete community ownership and control of SJK activities. SJKs will work with considerable local flexibility, but within larger policy guidelines, with a good ICT based mechanism of monitoring and evaluation in place.

7. ILK activities are 'soft' activities, about which it is very difficult to set targets, and track proper implementation and outputs. It may not even be easy to decide what activities to do on a day-to-day basis, and what not to do. ILK work is highly subjective and norms 'related', in fact, it is norms-centric, like any knowledge and educational work. The SJK system therefore must foremost set out its cardinal institutional principles and norms, and specific processes through which these norms will be affirmed and fulfilled throughout the SJK's ILK system.

8. It is necessary to set up a specialized public agency, Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan, responsible for the new community knowledge initiative of SJKs. Setting up such a new, independent body, is important to ensure that community ILK activities evolve and are sustained in a manner outlined above, which is essential if the new effort has to avoid going down the same path as the existing ILK initiatives, which, as described in the report, can be considered to be quite ineffective.

9. Apart from the obvious aspects of programme implementation, the principal role of the Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan will be of developing community ILK related norms and principles, and ensuring that these are followed in the entire ILK ecology, from top to the bottom. The role of the resource support providing departments and agencies has also to be steeped in these norms and principles, as that of the community-end institution of SJK.

10. The SJK system has to considered as a 'people's university' and it has to be developed and sustained with the same kind of special care as our university systems. This is the main reason for setting up the specialised agency, Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan, for this purpose. Like the university system, the SJK system should be insulated from day-to-day political and bureaucratic interferences, and corresponding organisational processes instituted in this regard. The Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan should be headed by a knowledge and community development professional, as also most of its staff.

11. The central vision and institutional principle of the SJK system is to foster a 'participatory knowledge culture'. Our analysis indicates that such a culture is imperative for effectively performing most ILK functions. If significant progress can be made in shaping such a culture, the rest is not a difficult task at all. Supply side issues for feeding community ILK activities are relatively easy to address, especially in the present circumstances of what is called a knowledge society.

12. The SJK should be a space in the community which is pro-actively welcoming to all. Women and girls should be provided the safe spaces they will need. Its design, including the wall posters etc, should express the value of 'participatory knowledge culture' which is the basic tenet of SJKs.

13. The SJK should be run by a Jnana Sahayaki, with two Saha-Sahayaks. The qualities, involvement and dynamism of the SJK staff is the key success factor. It should therefore be institutionally ensured that they are able to act as humble and yet self-confident and energetic, as well as a non-partisan, facilitator of community ILK processes. They should be recruited from the community on a 3 year contract, with an annual community evaluation and renewal of the contract.

14. As mentioned, various government departments and agencies with ILK outreach requirements should act as resource providers to SJKs, and use them for their ILK objectives. This will enable much more effective ILK outreach. The corresponding savings from the ILK and communication budgets of these departments and agencies can be put into a corpus that should fund SJKs and the activities of the Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan.

15. These 'client' departments and agencies will be able to extract accountability from the SJK system with regard to meeting of their various SJK objectives. Appropriate measures and indicators for this purpose should be developed by these departments/ agencies together with the Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan and other expert agencies, with a sensitivity to the principles of functioning of the SJKs. An elaborate monitoring and reporting system will be developed in this regard, which will employ ICT-based systems, as appropriate. NGOs will be involved in regular evaluation and monitoring.

16. SJKs are not to be seen as government agents in the community, as most government's ILK related community-presence gets seen. They must be seen as community's agents, interacting with governmental and other support agencies on the behalf of the community to fulfill its ILK needs.

17. The SJKs should be considered a body of the gram sabha (in any case, they have a role as gram sabha resource centres). On behalf of the gram sabha, an SJK management committee, with representatives from all sections of the community, should manage the SJKs. The panchayat must also be represented in the management committee.

18. The SJKs should be supported by district and block level bodies of Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan, , which will have their own participatory management committees. The district units of the Abhiyan will be the key implementation unit of the SJK system.

19. District-wise NGOs are to be selected to provide continuous training and other resource support to the SJK staff. As mentioned, the community ILK activities are highly norms-oriented and process-intensive. Regular training therefore is key. Every month, a few days of training at block or district level has to be ensured.

20. For a start, the existing rural public libraries can be converted to SJKs, since in any case the library function is included and subsumed under SJK functions. The Department of Libraries would therefore have a corresponding nodal role, in conjunction with the new agency, the Samudaya Jnana Kendra.

Institutional Convergence with GP libraries at Community level

A specialised government agency, the *Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan* to be responsible For SJKs

Samudaya Jnana Abhiyan to develop norms and principles for SJKs, and coordinate with other departments for effective use of SJKs

SJKs to be run by one *Jnana Sahayaki* and two *Jnana Saha Sahayakis*

Management Committee of community members

Government departments to be resource providers for SJKs

Gram sabhas to assume overall Charge of SJKs

Different Departments co-fund SJKs from their ILK and communication budgets

NGOs to do training, capacity building, Monitoring and Evaluation of SJKs

SJK: Institutional Design

Core principles of Samudaya Jnana Kendras:

a)Supporting a participatory knowledge culture, converging all or most ILK functions

b) Respect for community autonomy and ownership of local level ILK processes

c) SJK as the primary anchor and centre of government's ILK activity, with back-end departments/ agencies as resource providers

d)Clear separation of service delivery and ILK functions

e) Deepening democracy at the village level, but distancing from divisive local politics

f) Firm commitment to inclusion of marginalised groups

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KARNATAKA JNANA AAYOGA

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