

Inaugural Speech

by

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We in India, today aspires to remain ahead as front-runners among knowledge-based societies. Appropriate education and training are the key components in the process. The opportunities and tools provided by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are revolutionizing the paradigm of addressing developmental issues. IT and telecommunications in tandem have become powerful instrument for dissemination of knowledge and skills and for providing services to citizens. Our vision is to incorporate this ICT revolution in our mission in providing education and training of desired quality.

Education is a powerful tool towards empowerment of society and its people. It builds the foundation for increased participation of citizens in democratic life and for their contribution to the country's prosperity and progress. To begin with, you must be aware that in India that elementary education is the fundamental right for all children in the 6 – 14 age group. Our first focus has been thus to provide universal access and equity and ensure provision of quality elementary education. universalisation of access has nearly been achieved, our investment.

Our investment in the elementary education sector has resulted in satisfactory outcomes. 94% of our rural population has now an access to schools within 1km distance. We have registered an increase in the gross enrollment percentage and our drop-out rates have also been significantly been reduced across all level of education. 2.2 million children with special needs have also been enrolled in our elementary school process. Multi-pronged strategies ranging from provisional incentives such as text books, mid day meals, residential school for girls to sensitizing parents and communities to become partners in this endeavor has yielded good dividends. Teachers recruitment and training has also received equal priority to improve quality. A million teachers have sanctioned under *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan* (SSA) which our education for all scheme. Use of technology particularly ICT in classroom transactions has gained impetus in the form of computer-aided learning in many states. I should also add interactive radios in this context. Credible NGOs have joined as partners in this effort and their experience spread across several states. While we have made impressive strides in the elementary education sector, the challenge ahead is also to provide universal access, equity and quality at the secondary stage. It is a critical stage in the educational hierarchy, as it this stage that prepares students for higher education and also for the world of work. Educational indicators are not very encouraging at the moment thus our responsibility now is to ensure substantial investment to improve the current state of affairs at the earliest. For this, a major programme to universalize secondary education is on the anvil. In fact that will be the main thrust of 11th five year plan.

In addition to the states own efforts, the government of India will provide support, to provide improved classroom ratios, pupil-teacher ratios, provision of laboratories, learning resources, incentives in the form of scholarships etc. Use of technology by students at the secondary stage presupposes their inbuilt capacities in term of knowledge and development. As the Internet becomes more and more accessible students today get greater and greater exposure to world of information and knowledge.

India recognized the importance of ICT in education as early as 1984-85 with the launch of Computer Literacy And Studies in Schools (CLASS) Project. Today we are have India's exclusive Educational Television channel Gyan Darshan, launched on January 26, 2000, to provide satellite based Educational channels across the country. We also decided to integrate the radio interactive schemes in Education via an Educational FM radio channel Gyan Vani, alongwith Interactive Radio Counsellings (IRC) run by IGNOU, which is probably today is one the biggest open universities in the world. In December 2004, the ICT for Schools scheme was launched and a window of oppurtunity for secondary stage schools students across the country in partnerships with states and union territories. While the emphasis has been on computer literacy programme, the advantage now is realised by use of IT tools for development of e-content in computer-aided learning activities. The scheme thus aims to act as a learning and teaching aid for classrooms making learning more interesting and interactive. The emphasis is also being laid on the self learning aspect. We have a proposal to expand this programme to all

secondary and higher secondary schools by next 3-4 years to break the existing digital divide that exists between government and private institutions. Convergence has also been attempted with Ministry of Power for provision of electricity and Ministry of Telecommunication for broadband connectivity. Teachers would continue to be at the center of computer education programmes thus their training and capacity building activities are most critical. Many private partners are already engaged in this process.

We are now looking towards creating an National ICT policy in school education. The policy is expected provide goals, framework and minimum set of standards essential for integrating the use of ICT in education. We also need to monitor the programme through external agencies and ensure that the impact assessment studies are conducted regularly so as to gauge the progress made and lead the way forward.

We are also greatly concerned about what our students are learning in classrooms. Particularly in the crucial areas of mathematics and science. ICT will have an enormous role to play in equipping teachers to explain hard spots and in facilitation conceptual knowledge. The other example can be use of ICTs in running fast track literacy programmes. During the coming years we have the formidable task of providing literacy to more than 300 million people.

I would like to once again congratulate CSDMS (Centre for Science, Development and Media Studies) for organising this premier ICT4D event and I am sure the deliberation during the conference will provide better understanding on how we go forward and hold our own in the knowledge society of the 21st century. I wish the conference all success.