4.4 Building Learning Communities of L3 farmers
-2004-
Presentation based on

Approaches and Programs undertake in

Maharashtra (India) with the initiative of MKCL and NETRA for

Building *Techno-Social Network* suitable for Information Age

Abstract

The danger of extinction of the small farmer in the face of free unrestricted trade is real. A new 'Information Age' model of production and marketing should be developed to replace the industrial model. The progress in India in IT field has raised our confidence to be able to mobilize people and their enterprises better to achieve sustainable development. The experience in creating MKCL and its activities is shared here as an example of mobilization of groups and communities. Networking for productivity, quality, profitability and sustainability is a challenging task and its success lies in the (uplift) of the (poorest) from the rural communities. (By: LA)

(Source: Paper and Presentation at PCT 3:2004)

1. Issues identified by the COL:

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The COL has undertaken a Project of agricultural development for smallholding farmers and agricultural communities. The Project has identified that smallholder farmers in developing countries are facing a long-term crisis; and the most important reason of it is not being able to participate equitably in the world markets (the Exclusion Crisis), and inadequacy and slow death of the extension systems needed to give farmers knowledge and skills necessary to respond to this crisis. The crisis would be still bigger if free unrestricted trade with low cost products is allowed to flow in local markets. The small holding farmers and farm laborers would not only be excluded from markets but would not be left with livelihood opportunities for living and surviving.

In India, nearly 70 % work and livelihood opportunities are dependent on agriculture. The model of developing countries in which hardly a few percent farmers produce enough for the country and also for exports is not likely to help developing countries. A new informational age model has to be developed that would replace the industrial production and marketing paradigm.

On the whole major issues and concerns are:

- Problems of poverty, illiteracy and ignorance, not solved so far.
- Disparities and divides such as rich-poor, rural-urban, developed-undeveloped, literate-illiterate, etc., besides the digital divide.
- Exclusion Crisis being faced by many due to competitive globalization, liberalization and privatization.
- Indian problems of *quantity, quality and equity* and resolving them with justice – social, economic and political.

During the last decade, the country has found a new confidence created due to successes in IT and other industries. Democratic rule during the last 50 years has simultaneously been unleashing high expectations from common people; and has also resulted in many initiatives, participatory processes and programs such as self-help groups, cooperatives etc.. Extensive application of ICT, ODL and networking may help better to mobilize people and their enterprise so as to achieve participative and sustainable development.

2. MKCL Programs:

2.1 MKCL: The Organisation:

Maharashtra Knowledge Corporation Ltd. (MKCL) is a public limited company established with a mandate to use IT for education in Maharashtra, create new paradigms in education and avoid digital divide between rural and urban Maharashtra. MKCL has started its activities in July 2001 and created state–wide network with 3500 access centers covering almost all the blocs of Maharashtra and enrolling 0.75 million students so far. The network uses e-

governance, partnership with public and private institutions at the 'central' and 'local' levels; and is currently the biggest single network for education and training in India.

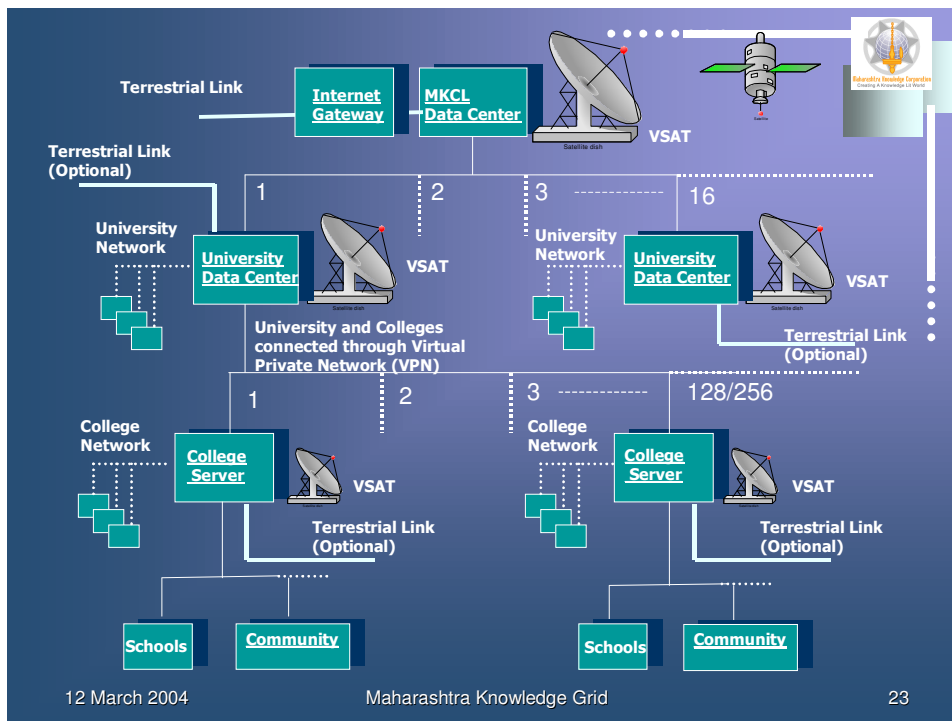MKCL is developing network infrastructure with five components identified as essential for e-education:

1. Maharashtra Knowledge Network (MKN) with latest hardware and software technologies.
2. Software tools, techniques and appliances development.
3. Content in e-formats on a knowledge grid.
4. Educational delivery system
5. Quality Assurance and Certification Mechanism.

The Maharashtra Knowledge Network (MKN) is being developed in two sub nets for;
      (a) Education and
      (b) Learning Communities mainly rooted in rural areas.

The Education Network can function at three tiers; first with MKCL at state level, second with universities and third with college level networks. The college network can be extended to nearby schools and Community Learning and Information Centers (CLIC) to extend educational extension program to the people around.

Figure – 1: Three - tier State-level Network of MKCL

The L-Community Network (www.mkcl.org and www.parivartan.net in Marathi language) is being created at a 'locality' on the basis of hub and spokes model for creating local info-based community; and is linked with the MKCL 'central' network linking with all agencies and partner organisations. MKCL has a program of launching distributed classroom of multi-casting type, developing knowledge grid and using connectivity and facilities offered by EDUSAT, an DECU-ISRO satellite for education whose services would be made available from September 2004.

MKCL has a big program of software development for extending use of ICT to students, teachers, farmers, villagers and their institutions. The basic approach is to create all the necessary facilitation and network services essential for outsourcing educational processes so that any educational institution can offer its educational program services to learners by using the MKCL facilitation and networking.

MKCL proposes to create content and delivery systems by mobilizing educational and developmental services provided by institutions- Non-Governmental as well as Governmental Organisations. It has created quality assurance and certification mechanism and offers instant certification at 300 Exam Centers spread all over Maharashtra.

The development of L-Community Network has just begun; and the paper would concentrate on the L-Community development programs and activities. We give here briefly the components of the L-C Network being developed in Maharashtra.

2.2 Maharashtra Knowledge Network (MKN)

The L-Community Network (www.mkcl.org and www.parivartan.net in Marathi language) is being created at 'Central' and 'local' levels. At central level it connects all the providers and agencies that offer various services to farmers and villagers. The local level network is built on the basis of hub and spokes model for creating local info-based community. The Local Lead Centers 42 in number, located in each district of Maharashtra would be developed as hubs of locality, and would be increased as per the requirement of the size, population and essential facilities required for self-sustainability of the locality.

Scientists, innovators, experts, traders, service providers, farmers and communities, IKT

Government departments, State Agriculture Universities, Open Universities, R & D institutions, KVKs

Social NGOs, Crop growers associations, Financial Institutions, Private sector companies

International Agencies
WTO
FAO
CGIAR
COL
ICRISAT
IMO
EUREPGAP

Knowledge Grid

- Online stable & dynamic information resources

National Research and Extension Agencies
ICAR
IMD
NRC
CSIR
ISRO
IGNOU

Primary Learners / Users
- Farmers, women, entrepreneurs and villagers
- Local Organizations and institutions working for agriculture & rural development
- Local climate monitors, Field extension workers, local service providers,

Secondary Learners / Users
- Policy makers, Govt. officials
- Knowledge generators, scientists, experts, university teachers and students
- Print & Electronic Media
- Rural Development Managers.
- Private sector providers
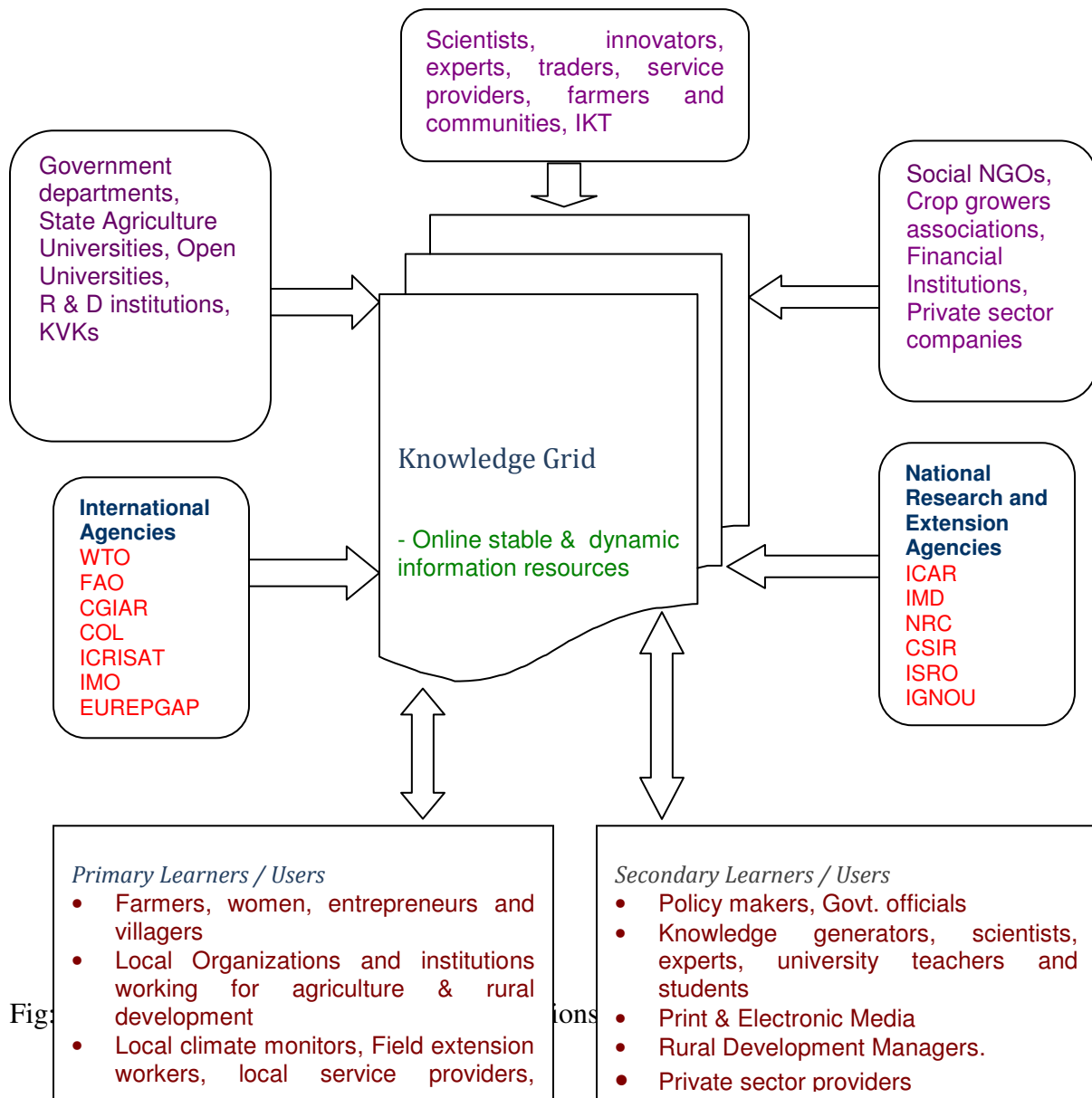
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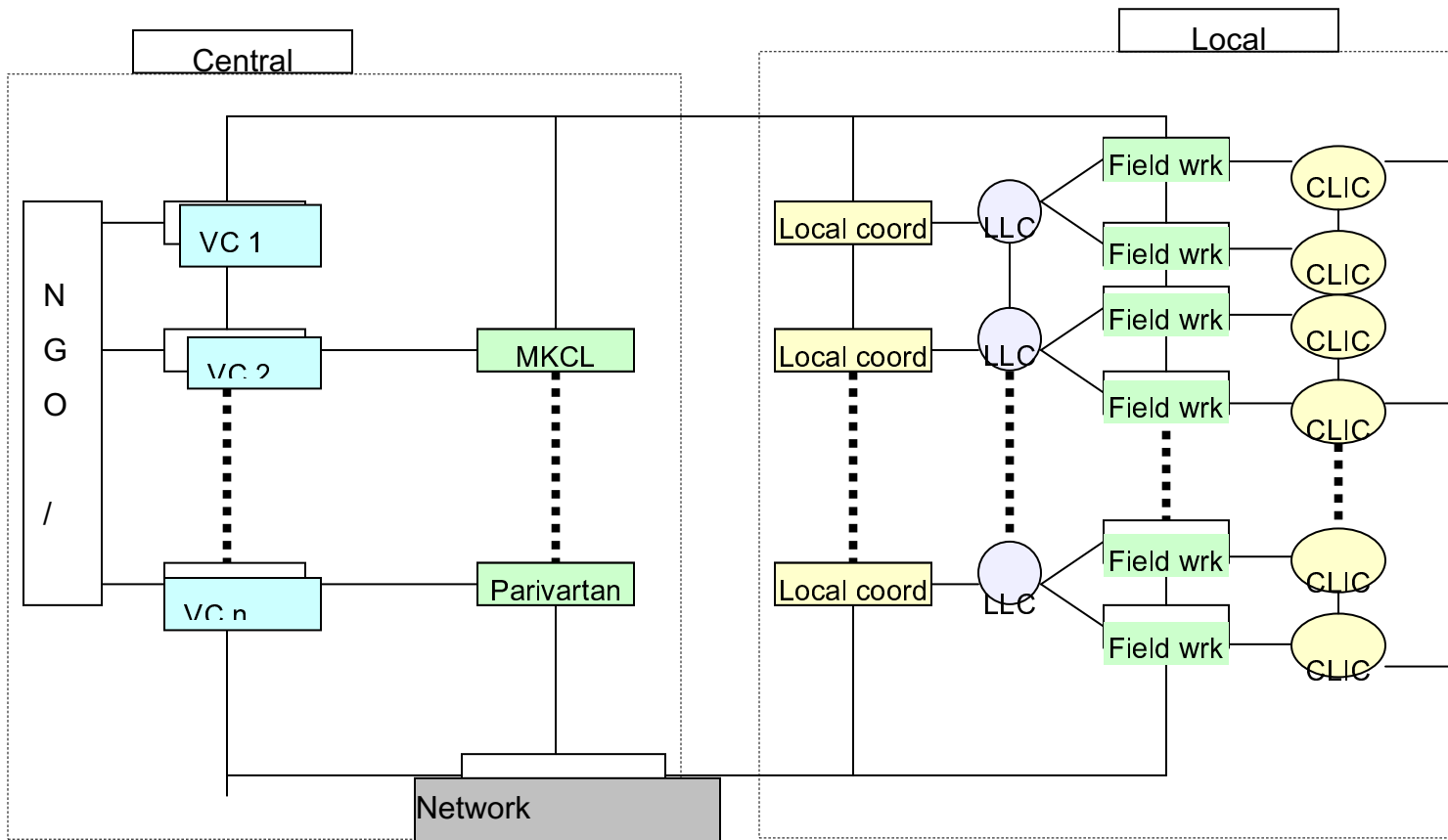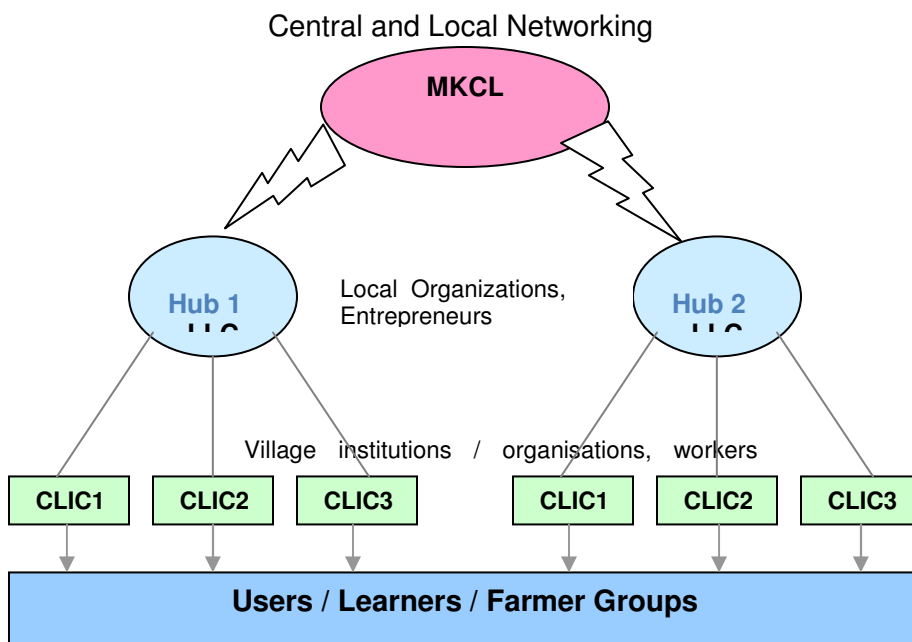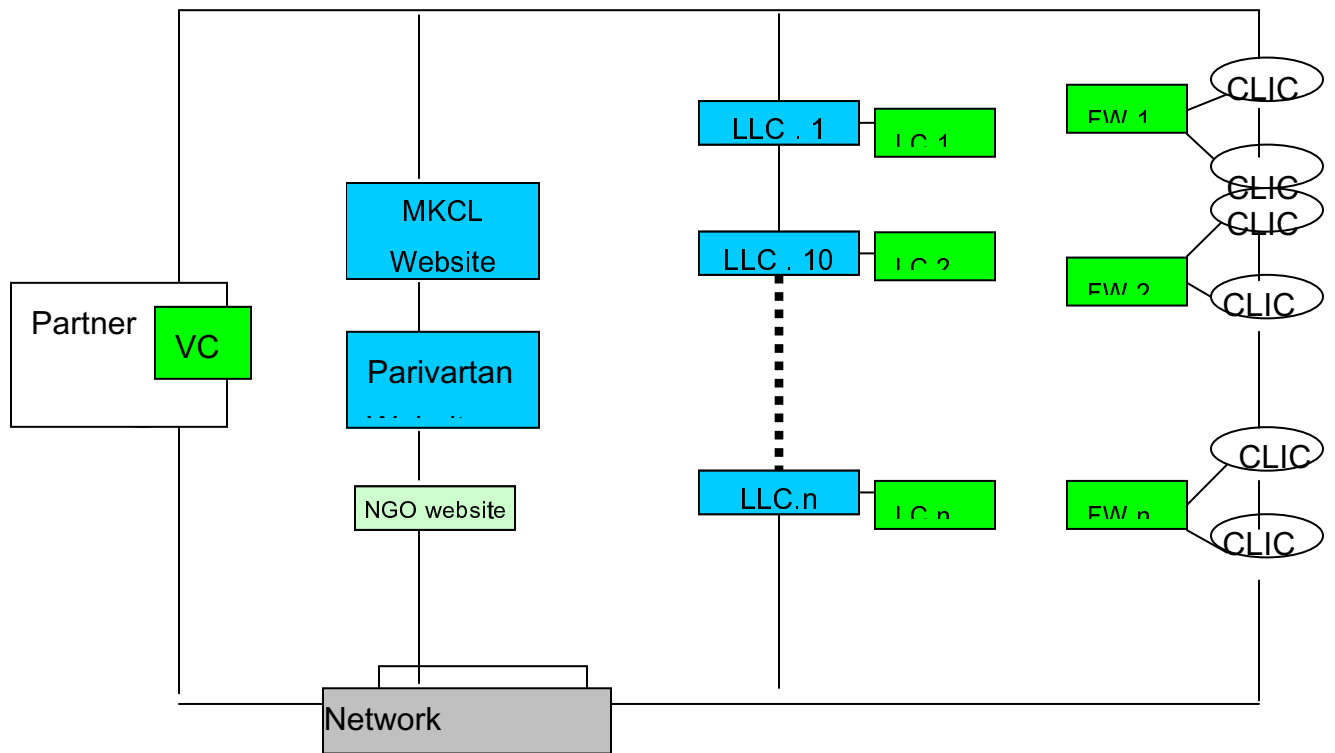
Figure 4: Central – Local Networking reaching to villages, villagers and their institutions.

Concept of a Virtual Corner for Content Development and Delivery:
The partnership of an institution in the network is therefore conceived not by changing and transforming the total institution by making it IT savvy, but by establishing a Virtual Corner in the institution which is responsible for connecting and communicating with others on network on behalf of the institution. This is done by helping the institution to do its front-end operations through e-governance.

Figure –5: Partnership of NGO with its Virtual Corners (VC) linked to MK Network through their Local level coordinators and Field level workers.

2.3 Software and Appliances Development:

2.4 Content in e-formats on a knowledge grid

2.5 Educational delivery system

2.6 Quality Assurance and Certification Mechanism

3. Agriculture Extension and Education System:

4. Partnership Model:

      MKCL has created public private partnership (P3) model with win-win approach and has built business model for operations at 'central' and 'local' levels. Learning Community Network of MKN would be developed with CLICs and NGO / GO participation and the development is in progress. A concept of virtual corner is being developed for participation of institutions and organisations by offering them front-end e-governance over the Maharashtra Knowledge Network. This solves many problems such as relevance, content creation and networking of farmers and villagers; and creates an opportunity to built sound financial model for sustainable development.

Levels	Partners
International / National	VASAT, COL and other national and International organizations
Central / State	VUMAP, MAFSU, State level NGO, GO, institutions such as YCMOU, C-DAC, APTECH, Universities etc.
Local	Local level institutions and organisations- LLCs including colleges, polytechniques, Industrial Training Institutes and others
Village	Community Learning & Information Centers (CLICs) of local public and private institutions and organisations

5. Self-Sustainability

6. Mobilisation of Groups and Communities:

      One of the major issues is of mobilisation of people, particularly disadvantaged rural population for their need based and demand driven development. MKCL approach is to develop group learning methodology, which is successfully used in Maharashtra for the last few decades; and evolve educational system for group and community learning and developing. MKCL proposes to partner with VUMAP and VASAT for this purpose and uses four pillars of productivity, quality, profitability and sustainability proposed by   Dr. M S Swaminathan for agriculture development. The task is to built capabilities and functionalities of rural groups and

communities by using locally successful models of development and empowerment for rural communities by giving them support of network infrastructure and facilitation. A system of offering demand driven courses to L- groups could be developed by developing the P3 approach. In partnership the MKN would offer many farm related services given in detail in the paper; and support a process of development of collaborative marketing with self-sustainability.

Networking for developing is a challenging task and development of a 'locality' needs P3 approach going down to villages. Creation of new paradigms for developing physical, financial, social, cultural and intellectual wealth is a great challenge before the providers of education and development. Development of appropriate models of cooperative and collaborative learning and developing based on sharing and caring would be a great challenge; and the test of its success lies in the upliftment of the lowest (Antyodaya) from the rural communities.