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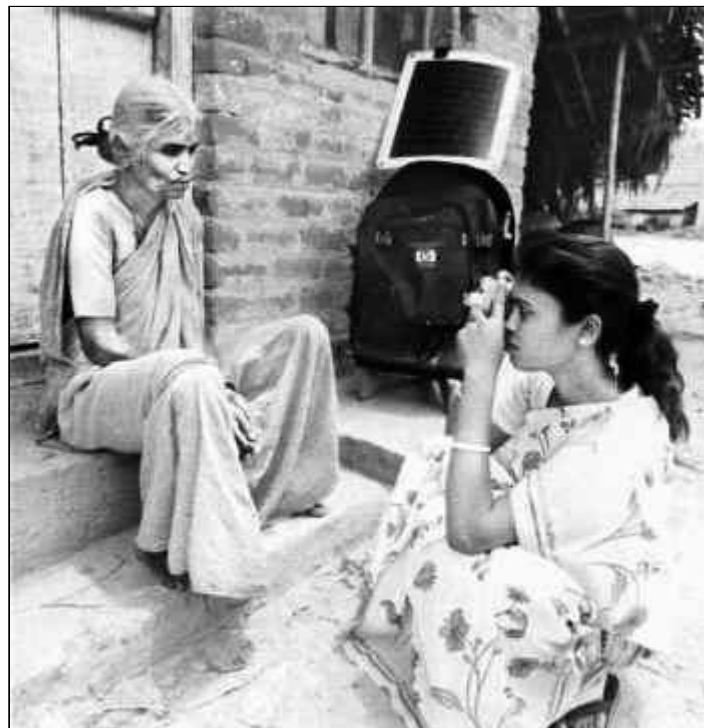
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Taking tech to rural communities

Vishwanath Kulkarni



Neelamma at work in Kuppam

Kuppam , Aug. 24

TILL a year ago Neelamma was a non-descript middle-aged housewife like many others in her village Yamanur near Kuppam. Today she is known as the village photographer, not only in her hamlet but also in several neighbouring ones.

Courtesy: Hewlett Packard's i-community initiative that aims to transform lives of ordinary rural citizens using technology.

Neelamma, a local self-help group member, was randomly picked up by HP for its village photographer initiative. HP provided her with a specially designed, self-contained photography kit that included a digital camera, portable printer,

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Armed with the kit, Neelamma has been clicking photographs of the villagers and providing printouts on the spot. She earns a net of Rs 500-Rs 1,000 a month, after paying HP a rent of Rs 400, depending on the demand.

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Like Neelamma, there are 15 other women who have been providing photographic services in the remote areas of the Kuppam constituency. In another instance, students at the Mamdipudi Nagarjuna Welfare Residential School for Girls at Bharamasamudram have got access to work on HP's multi-user 441desktop, the latest solution for the emerging markets.

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The model 441 is unique as four users can access the desktop at a time, which has only one central processing unit. There is separate keyboard, monitor, mouse, audio capability for each of the four users, who can independently use the PC to either browse the Internet or to run applications such as word processing simultaneously.

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It's here in this school, run for the dropouts and those rescued from child labour, HP is working with agencies such as the America India Foundation and Azim Premji Foundation to implement ICT-enabled education programmes for rural students.

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These two instances are part of the 25 initiatives implemented by HP in tie-up with partners as part of inclusive-community (i-community) programme in Kuppam since February 2002. The solutions developed for the i-community could soon be replicated elsewhere in the world as HP has received several expression of interest from the Chinese and Brazilian governments, said Mr Anand Tawker, the company's General Manager, Emerging Market Solutions (EMS), Asia Pacific.

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"Several State governments in India such as Gujarat, Assam, Meghalaya, Karnataka and Uttaranchal have also evinced a keen interest in replicating some of the solutions deployed at Kuppam," he said.

Explaining HP's i-community, Mr Tawker said it was a business initiative for sustainable development and not a philanthropic service to be rendered to the under-served populace of the society. The solutions are designed and developed in collaboration to be sustainable and replicable, based on the extensive research among the representatives of the community, the Government, domain partners, NGOs and public and private sector organisations and HP, Mr Tawker said.

HP has invested close to \$2 million in the i-community initiative, said Ms Maureen Conway, HP's Vice-President, e-

inclusion and EMS. "We expect the pay-back to happen within two years," she said adding the project would provide tremendous business opportunity. For the time being, the Kuppam project would remain as a social laboratory and innovative hub for HP for developing local economies, she said.

Other solutions developed at the project included `Yojanalu', an interface that creates awareness about government schemes for citizens.

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