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Finding a voice: themes and discussions

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PUBLISHER

UNESCO (The United Nations Educational Scientific & Cultural Organization)

VERSION

VoR (Version of Record)

PUBLISHER STATEMENT

This publication may be produced in any media appropriately acknowledging UNESCO and the authors.
Please send in comments about this publication to newdelhi@unesco.org

LICENCE

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REPOSITORY RECORD

Tacchi, Jo, and MS Kiran. 2020. "Finding a Voice: Themes and Discussions". Loughborough University.
<https://hdl.handle.net/2134/13203659.v1>.



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Finding a Voice

Themes and Discussions

voice participation Internet literacy
television radio learning ICT research
gender facilitation employment
sustainability migration narrowcast
community context digital stories
creative engagement broadcast
poverty language culture inclusion
education media mobile society

Finding a Voice

Themes and Discussions

Research from the
Finding a Voice Project

Edited by
Jo Tacchi and MS Kiran

March 2008

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ISBN- 978-81-89218-24-9

This publication may be produced in any media appropriately
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newdelhi@unesco.org

Design, Typesetting & Graphics: Nikhil Offset Printers, New Delhi

Published by:

The United Nations Educational Scientific & Cultural Organization
UNESCO House

B-5/29, Safdarjung Enclave

New Delhi - 110019

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Acknowledgements

Finding a Voice: Making Technological Change Socially Effective and Culturally Empowering is a research project funded by an Australian Research Council Linkage Grant (LP0561848) and UNESCO and UNDP.

We thank the project's EAR researchers who provided vital contributions to this book through their hard work and dedication. We are grateful to Jessica Larsen for her assistance in collating and summarising EAR research data which greatly assisted in the preparation of this book. We also thank Jaz Choi who prepared the illustration of the communicative ecology diagram in Chapter 2. Some of the research inputs from Atul Kumar Sharma are also a part of the formative research being undertaken for the New Voices Safe Migration project implemented by Ideosync Media Combine with funding support from Equal Access and Ford Foundation. *Finding a Voice* would not have happened without the foresight, encouragement and backing of UNESCO. As a complex collaborative process it took a lot of effort from within the Organisation to launch and bring it to fruition. This is largely due to the efforts of Ian Pringle and Seema Nair with the crucial support from Tarja Virtanen, Jocelyne Josiah and Wijayananda Jayaweera. Their efforts and commitment and those of their colleagues at UNESCO is greatly appreciated.

Foreword

Finding a Voice is a cross-cutting project of UNESCO whose main objective has been to make technological change socially effective and culturally empowering by experimenting with local, participatory content creation for new media. *Finding a Voice* consisted of 15 initiatives in Nepal, Indonesia, India and Sri Lanka, each addressing and challenged by the specificity of its socio-cultural, economic and political context, where the rapid pace of change in the fields of communication and information technology signal an opportunity for inclusion or confinement to exclusion.

Applied research projects such as *Finding a Voice* are an important contribution to the understanding of change at both macro and micro levels, ranging from the impact of policy at the grassroots to the manner in which traditional barriers like caste and class influence the use of new media and communication technologies.

The research and content production activities undertaken in this project have highlighted the need for an expanded understanding of poverty that includes aspects such as social exclusion, as well as the difficulties faced by poor communities in expressing their own understandings of poverty and development.

The activities underlined the need to look at content production beyond conventional models for dissemination of information. Creativity, sustainable participation and a bottom-up approach to research and action are key aspects that have shown themselves to improve the impact and sustainability of these initiatives.

It is only through harnessing the capacities of local communities to express their plight but also their joy and creativity that they - collectively and individually, become the contributors and beneficiaries of the knowledge society that marks the world today.

I would like to congratulate Queensland University of Technology for their consistent support and commitment to the *Finding a Voice* project, and express my gratitude to all those who invested time and energy for this project. The shared hopes and commitment that these initiatives engendered within the communities concerned, strengthened by the technical know-how imparted through this project, I hope, will lead to many more queries, debates, analyses, articulation - quest for knowledge through information, and the communication of that knowledge for empowerment.



Minja Yang
Representative and Director
UNESCO New Delhi Office

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Introduction

Jo Tacchi and MS Kiran

Finding a Voice is a research project that consists of a cast of characters spread across five countries, and one with a relatively short lifespan¹. The project has generated a mass of data and many rich discussions, a sense of which this book aims to communicate. To undertake the project, university-based researchers from Australia collaborated with UNESCO colleagues in New Delhi and Kathmandu and UNDP-supported staff in Jakarta. At the beginning of the project, we went through a process of inviting applications from community-based initiatives with an interest in exploring local content creation². As a result, we collaborated with a range of local NGOs and Government Departments through our work with community-based ICT centres, multimedia centres, radio and television initiatives, libraries and telecentres. These local initiatives are located in Indonesia, India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. At the core of the *Finding a Voice* research network, located in the local ICT and media initiatives, were a team of 12 local researchers³ trained in ethnographic action research. Their job was to feed their research into their local initiatives, and share it with the research network. This has given us unique insights into the trials and tribulations of attempts to use ICT and media for development, with a particular interest in local and participatory content creation.

¹ The field activities for *Finding a Voice* were carried out between early 2006 and the end of December 2007.

² The telecentres in Indonesia did not take part in this process.

³ Short biographies of 9 of these local researchers are included at the end of this book

The focus of *Finding a Voice* is on exploring how technological change can be made socially effective and culturally empowering. This is explored through experimenting with local and participatory content creation. Despite this clear focus, it's hard to be conclusive when reporting the research findings. This, we believe, is because communication itself and certainly communication for development and social change is a process rather than an object; dynamic rather than static. It cannot easily be dissected into its component parts. In order to give those parts meaning, they need to be related back to their wider context. Communication for development activities need time to embed in ongoing practices, and adapt to changing situations. Add to this the messy realities of everyday life – the context in which *Finding a Voice* activities are enacted - and the task becomes immensely difficult.

Finding a Voice looks at dynamic communication processes in the everyday buzz of community-based media and ICT initiatives. Our perspective is the gaze of the locally embedded researchers working as part of the initiatives with a brief to understand how each fit into the everyday complexities of local communicative ecologies (see chapter 2). They have been asked to uncover what it means to be poor or marginalised in their communities, and think about how their initiative can engage with these people and their issues through local content creation activities.

Despite the difficulties involved in being conclusive about our research, it is a responsibility we keenly feel to share what we have learned so far. An awful lot has been invested in this research endeavour. Huge efforts, personal and professional, by many people and organisations went into making this research project a reality. As a major research project we learned through things that didn't work as much as through things that did work. We will be discussing and writing about the research data, and following up with further research for some time to come.

What we present in this book is an overview of the research project and key findings at this point in time, following a 17 month period of intensive field work by 12 local researchers across 15 locations. We take a comparative look at research data supplied by those local researchers. We began work on the research themes for this publication when we came together in India for a final research workshop hosted by the Sarojini Naidu School of Performing Arts, Fine Arts and Communication, University of Hyderabad at the end of October 2007. We shared and discussed research data and ideas, and brainstormed a number of research themes, including participation, gender and sustainability. These themes are reflected in

the chapters of this book. We would have liked to have included discussions of other important themes such as education and learning, livelihoods, and more about what we have learned about ICTs and poverty. Due to time and space constraints, these topics will be explored in more detail in other publications.

Audience for this book

Research findings and other outputs from this project are being produced in a range of formats and publication genres from DVDs to CD ROMS to academic journal articles. We list the outputs available to date at the end of this book. Each is likely to reach different audiences, and we hope that this work will, through these various means, reach a range of interested people and organisations.

This book has a particular audience in mind: it is aimed primarily at program-side policy strategists and decision-makers. We hope that those who are implementing similar projects or work in the ICT and communication for development fields will find it useful. We believe this work should also be accessible and prove to be of interest to donor organisations and other researchers interested in communication for development. We write this book in the hope that on the one hand it will reinforce the need for horizontal and participatory approaches to communication. On the other hand we hope it will help to explain just why this is at the same time important and challenging, through the glimpses the book gives of participatory development communication in action.

For those who want to know more about the processes and practices of local content creation that we engaged with in this project, you might be better satisfied by a companion piece to this book *Participatory Content Creation for Development: Principles and Practices* which can be downloaded (along with this book) from <http://www.findingavoice.org/publications>.

While there are many exciting and innovative communication for development activities taking place around the world at this time, we feel a particular responsibility to report on what we have found since we are perhaps unique in the way in which we have mixed – not always easily or successfully – embedded research with communication applications, activities and experiments on the ground. Somewhat distanced from this, a team of academic researchers provided another layer of observing and thinking about what was happening, guiding the local researchers and encouraging them to ‘dig deeper’. We aim to share some of the insights gained through this approach in this book, and in other publications over the coming months.

It is our hope that such insights will be of use or interest to other communication for development activities – looking only at India for a moment we can think of the current exciting expansion of community radio and the possibilities that holds. Widening our lens we can look at major scale-up efforts like the UNESCO-supported CMC programmes in Mali, Mozambique and Senegal and telecentre scale-up initiatives such as those in India, Jamaica, Indonesia, other Caribbean countries and Rwanda – to name just a few. The purpose of this book and all of our outputs is to disseminate what we have found to date so that it is available to anyone with an interest in this kind of work. We are also keen that our further work can be informed by feedback and hearing about the experiences of others.



Capacity Building of the EAR researchers to use the methodology effectively. Here a former EAR researcher shares his experience.

Finding a Voice

Finding a Voice worked with a network of 15 local media and ICT initiatives ranging from telecentres to community radio stations, including community libraries, community multimedia centres and community television. The goal was to increase understanding of how ICT can be both effective and empowering in each local context. To identify effective ways of articulating information and communication networks (both social and technological) that empowers poor people to communicate their 'voices' within and beyond marginalised communities. Thus, *Finding a Voice* had two main activities and outcomes:

1. Ethnographic Action Research (EAR) - a research and development methodology for improving the effectiveness of community-based media and ICT centres (see Chapter 2).

2. Participatory local content creation - a variety of content creation activities and a transferable set of principles and processes.

Twelve local researchers were embedded in the 15 community initiatives. The idea was to build the capacity of these centres by giving them the skills to conduct ongoing action research that will help them become more effective. At the same time, we were encouraging experimentation in participatory content creation across the sites. The embedded researchers both fed into and reported and reflected on these content creation processes. These researchers were not operating in academic roles – the ethnographic action research is only useful and relevant if it is applicable locally, if it can help local initiatives improve their practices. Unsurprisingly, views of the usefulness of EAR across the research network are patchy and inconsistent but this in itself is helping us to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the approach and the need to fully account for local contexts.

A lot of the data produced by the local researchers is rich and specific – it is locally collected and contextualised data. Local researchers had to challenge their own preconceptions and think about things from the perspectives of people unlike themselves. This produced interesting discussions about what can happen when you listen to different voices. In many cases such insights informed local content creation activities, engaging with alternative perspectives and challenging notions of the appropriate relationships between ICTs and poor communities. *Finding a Voice* presents a combination of participatory approaches to research on the one hand and local content creation for development on the other.

Each research location presented different challenges and opportunities to the local researchers. Not only were the ICT and media initiatives different, incorporating different technologies and approaches but the organisational structures varied. Organisational differences had a great impact on the local researchers. In some cases EAR was fully incorporated into the initiative and seen as an integral part of the development of the initiative. In other cases there is no doubt that qualitative and participatory approaches to research were viewed as the inferior relation to survey-style quantitative work, and the researcher had trouble finding a voice within their initiative. This happened far more with the larger and more hierarchical organisations.

There were fewer stark contrasts in the research between countries as such, except for the notable exception of Indonesia. We discuss the way that the wider political situation, and the way that development has been operating in Indonesia impacts strongly on

local experiences and expectations in chapter 3 on participation. Another big difference between the research sites in Indonesia and those in South Asia was the lack of willingness to work with other local development initiatives, exploring how telecentre facilities could be shared and information and communication could be used to cross fertilise development activities.

Additionally, although there is a reasonably strong community media movement in Indonesia, none of the telecentres we worked with had links to this. This contrasts strongly with the Community Multimedia Centre (CMC) model in South Asia which many of the initiatives followed, and others aspired to. Our research confirms that the combination of traditional and new media, and embedding it into a community seems to offer great promise for establishing a relevance for new technologies. The strong presence of community media and the CMC approach was a major help in developing participatory content creation activities. What this tells us is that the community media approach adds something special to ICT and communication for development initiatives.

This thing called 'poverty'

Causes of poverty, in general, are well known: low gross domestic product (GDP), inequitable distribution of economic growth, illiteracy, poor education levels, gender inequality, unemployment, inequitable health care, geographic isolation, corruption, lack of technological innovation, lack of opportunities, inadequate infrastructure, and so on. The concept of poverty is widely understood to be relative.⁴ The Chronic Poverty Research Centre report 2004-05⁵ refers to 'poverty dynamics'; the changes that individuals and households experience over time in relation to wellbeing. Nevertheless there are many and disputed measures, concepts and definitions of poverty.

The easiest way to measure poverty is to be able to count it. Measurement is largely quantitative and excludes wider meanings and understandings of poverty. Concepts of poverty, on the other hand, tend to recognise that poverty is more than material; it is qualitative, and generally based on understandings that are difficult to measure or count in surveys⁶. Poverty is not simply about

⁴ Peter Townsend (Ed.) 1970. *The Concept of Poverty*. London. Heinemann Educational Books

⁵ CPRC (2004). *The Chronic Poverty Report 2004-05*. Manchester, Chronic Poverty Research Centre: 140.

⁶ Ruth Lister (2004). *Poverty*. Cambridge. Polity Press.

economic insecurity. Participatory approaches, such as in the Voices of the Poor study⁷, have highlighted the non-material which includes 'lack of voice, shame and stigma; powerlessness; denial of rights and diminished citizenship' which Ruth Lister calls 'relational/symbolic' aspects of poverty⁸. They come about as a consequence of social interactions - the way poor people are talked about and treated by those around them, those in positions of power, influential bodies and the media. The idea that poverty and development more broadly should shift its focus from economic constraints to denials of choice and opportunity has gained ground in the international development context, partly due to the work of Amartya Sen⁹.

According to Sen, development should be seen as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. While growth of GDP and the raising of incomes can be important, he sees these as a *means* to expand freedoms rather than the ends of development. Poverty is a source of "unfreedoms", and there are very good reasons for seeing poverty as the deprivation of basic capabilities rather than simply or only as low income. Indeed, while income deprivations can be correlated with capability deprivations (low income can for example lead to poor education or health), income deprivation provides an exclusive definition of poverty while capability deprivation provides an inclusive definition. The two deprivations are not straightforwardly linked. We need to shift our focus to individual substantive freedoms as our overarching objective, rather than concentrating on the means which include but are not limited to low income.

Finding a Voice and its ethnographic approach tries to understand poverty as experienced by the poor themselves at the local level, within the local context. This understanding can then be fed into the design of locally specific communication interventions. Specific and locally contextualised poverty related issues can be tackled which in turn address community and society level meta-issues (such as gender inequality) to form manageable and 'treatable' focal issues (such as women and illiteracy, violence against women, and so on) and corresponding causes.

Focussing in on the specificities and peculiarities of such issues can make ICT interventions more relevant and effective. In

⁷ <http://go.worldbank.org/H1N8746X10>

⁸ Lister 2004 page 7. Op. cit.

⁹ Amartya Sen (2000). *Development as Freedom*. New York. Anchor Books.

principle, this is similar to Jeffrey Sachs'¹⁰ approach to poverty, and his notion of 'differential diagnosis' that reflects the process of a doctor probing an ailment through a series of questions: "Are you taking medications?" "Do you have allergies?" "Have you been operated on recently?" "Do you have a family history of the following diseases?"¹¹. For a doctor, there could be numerous reasons for a fever, many different kinds of fever, and different treatments. The same holds true for poverty. 'Differential diagnosis' finds the focal issue and understands it in relation to these people, in this place, at this time. As a result of such an analysis, appropriate responses can be developed. *Finding a Voice* starts with the premise that we need to identify the focal issues and respond appropriately with tailored communication activities. *Finding a Voice* operates at the community level both for probing the issues and developing appropriate interventions. Furthermore, *Finding a Voice*, by



Volunteers of Ankuram Community Television in Andhra Pradesh make a film on a local community member who has not let his disability come in the way of his aspirations.

attempting to facilitate 'voice' for the poor and marginalised, seeks to tackle aspects of poverty that are more about 'capabilities' and 'freedoms', than they are about income.

Capabilities and human rights are often central to the ways in which poverty and development are now understood.¹² Nevertheless, to date, universal measurements such as income and

¹⁰ Jeffrey Sachs (2005). *The End of Poverty: How We Can Make it Happen in Our Lifetime*. London, Penguin.

¹¹ Ibid. page 83.

¹² UHCHR (2004). Human Rights and Poverty Reduction: A Conceptual Framework. New York and Geneva, UHCHR. <http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu6/2/povertyE.pdf>.

consumption remain as the focus of studies on poverty. These universal measurements gloss over the value of looking to contextual definitions, which reveal the localised processes that contribute to poverty.¹³ This validity of universal, instrumental measurements prevail, even though concepts such as rights, equity, vulnerability, exclusion and underdevelopment are commonly linked to poverty, and despite the fact that it is generally understood that multiple capability deprivations constrain opportunities and choices, and contribute to chronic poverty in particular¹⁴.

A point that recurred in *Finding a Voice* relates to the seemingly intractable way in which poverty is passed on through generations in particular groups. This might be understood as a 'poverty trap' which disempowers people by directing them to use all their energy to manage rather than escape poverty. Its characteristics might include, for example, early marriages, lack of education, poor health and ultimately the lack of capabilities to make choices that would alter this situation. Local researchers regularly observed a lack of awareness and information about the choices available, about rights and about services such as financial assistance, health benefits, education and employment and welfare schemes. Devising ways to communicate such information effectively is core business for community-based ICT and media initiatives. This book, and especially chapters 3-5, present some of the issues that have been identified on the ground and some of the ways initiatives have responded to these issues.

Millennium Development Goals

We believe that *Finding a Voice* research reinforces the importance of thinking about locally appropriate communication in working towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). James Deane points out that nearly all bilateral and multilateral funding agencies along with many NGOs have aligned their strategic priorities to the MDGs, and that communication is widely understood to be central to meeting them.¹⁵ Indeed, many see

¹³Hulme, D. and A. McKay (2005). 'Identifying and Measuring Chronic Poverty: Beyond Monetary Measures'. The Many Dimensions of Poverty International Conference, Carlton Hotel, Brasilia, Brazil, International Poverty Centre

¹⁴CPRC (2004).

¹⁵James Deane (2004). 'The Context of Communication for Development, 2004'. Paper prepared for 9th United Nations Roundtable on Communication for Development, 6-9 September 2004. FAO, Rome, Italy.
<http://www.communicationforsocialchange.org/pdf/roundtable.pdf>

communication as the key to human development¹⁶. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) are the main strategy being used to work towards the highest priority goal of reducing the proportion of people living on less than a dollar a day by 2015. The principle of ownership underlies this strategy – there is a stress on ensuring participation and dialogue in the creation of the PRSPs. Clearly, communication becomes highly relevant for such participation and dialogue and sense of ownership. There is criticism of the level of participation and dialogue so far achieved with the PRSPs and of the lack of public awareness and discourse about the process, yet the World Bank insists that the strategic use of communication tools and concepts is essential to their success.¹⁷

Dialogue, debate, the two-way flow of information and the co-creation of knowledge are regularly put forth as highly important pieces of the development jigsaw. Communication that is not about dialogue and debate – the simple transmission of messages – is, we all know, highly unlikely to help achieve the MDGs. A move is needed away from vertical models of communication and development to horizontal models, where it's not just about sending a message, but about providing an opportunity for people to ask questions, about fitting into and building upon communication networks that already prove effective locally, engaging people in the actual communication and creation of knowledge.

Target 18 of the MDGs suggests making 'available the benefits of new technologies, especially information and communications technologies' via private participation. The target is about increasing telephone lines, cellular subscribers, personal computer and Internet users.¹⁸ Yet simply providing access does not ensure effective engagement, as we see time and time again in *Finding a Voice*. The digital divide has shifted from an issue that is about the gaps between developed and developing nations, to growing differences within countries. At the same time, media pluralism and diversity is not appearing to make any great strides forwards and is perhaps even moving backwards. While communication for development is seen as highly important and relevant to the achievement of the MDGs, the trend is towards the channelling of development support through country institutions and priorities.

¹⁶ Colin Fraser and Jonathan Villet (1994) *Communication: a key to human development*. Rome. FAO. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/t1815e/t1815e00.htm>

¹⁷ <http://go.worldbank.org/5MCV3J87SO>

¹⁸ see <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/goals/gti.htm>

There is no guarantee that communication for development will be understood to mean anything more than the sending and receiving of messages, or that it will become a central pillar of development activities.¹⁹

In *Finding a Voice*, the partnering ICT initiatives demonstrate a range of innovative uses of new technologies, often leveraging their benefits through traditional and more accessible technologies to overcome the low penetration of computers, the Internet and telephones. For example, Tansen's 'TV Browsing' and Kothmale's 'Radio Browsing' demonstrate how viewers/listeners send in queries and the presenters search the real time Internet for answers; later, the presenters translate information that was found in English, provide local context, and broadcast the information to their viewers/listeners. What this demonstrates is that the potential of ICTs (traditional and new) and their effective use goes beyond the mere number of physically present direct users of new technology. For instance, straightforward literacy programmes in some of our Nepal research sites – Jhuwani, Agyauli and Madhawiliya – are animated and enriched by participants making digital stories, which in turn attract more participation. Such participatory content creation, where local people are the creators and designers of the knowledge that is circulated and discussed creates an interesting form of participatory development. It shows how ICT and innovative methods of communication can be used to enhance and enable the initiatives to work towards the achievement of MDGs.

Profiles of the initiatives

Before proceeding to the book's main chapters, it is worth presenting profiles of the 15 initiatives that formed the *Finding a Voice* research network. The remainder of this chapter consist of such profiles.

SRI LANKA

Kothmale Community Multimedia Centre

Background and location

Kothmale Community Radio (KCR) is one of the five community based radios stations in Sri Lanka serving communities in the Kothmale region (the central hill



¹⁹ James Deane (2007). 'The 10th UN Interagency Round Table on Communication for Development; A CFSC Consortium Perspective'.
<http://www.communicationforsocialchange.org/mazi-articles.php?id=332>.

region of Sri Lanka). In 1999 KCR established a Community Multimedia Centre (CMC) with UNESCO's support by integrating radio and internet as a new concept to provide information and communication services and computer based training for local people. KCR is managed by the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC), the government-owned national radio broadcaster. The radio signal reaches a diverse population in rural and semi-urban areas. The majority population are Sinhalese (50%) followed by Tamilian (35%) and Muslims (15%). KCR broadcasts the majority of content in Sinhalese language, and some in Tamil.

Activities

KCR Broadcasts 9.5 hours per day on weekdays and 13 hours on weekends. The morning broadcast starts at 5.00 am and continues until 11.00 am on weekdays. There is an hourly Tamil language broadcast included in the morning beam from 10.00 am to 11.00am. The morning broadcast is driven by commercial considerations. The weekday evening broadcast goes on air from 4.30 pm to 8.00 pm and the programming is mostly community based. The etuktuk is a mobile radio and CMC housed in a three-wheeled auto rickshaw. It is used by program producers to reach out to communities, to enhance possibilities for participatory content creation, and to deliver ICT-based facilities. The CMC offers computer training courses for local youth.



NEPAL

Agyauli Community Library

Background and location

Agyauli Community Library (ACL) was established in 1999 with the support of Rural Education and Development (READ) Nepal. ACL is located in Danda Village, Nawalparasi District. The nearest city (Narayanghat) is 37 kilometres away. The library is positioned beside a main highway which makes it accessible to seven different village development committees (VDC). The main ethnic groups in the area include Tharu (indigenous), Darai, Mushar, Brahmin and Tamang. The main economic activities of the area include agriculture (rice, maize and wheat), manual labour and administrative services.

Activities

The library has 3500 books including non-formal education, school and college books, educational and creative materials, magazines and newspapers. The library services are open to everyone. The children's section of the library has 200 educational toys and 500 story books. The library, in collaboration with the government, runs a pre-nursery class for children. Currently 30 children take part in the pre nursery class free of charge and approximately 150 children utilise the library's facilities each day. The library has a women's section which allows women to meet together and share their views. The library also has different types of magazines, journals and a collection of books about informal education for women and girls. To increase the participation of women in the library activities ACL's women section recently started 14 saving and credit groups which includes approximately 200 women. The library has five PCs, a printer, a television, a video and CDs. In 2004 the library started computer training for community people. In May 2007 the library began providing news and information via the multimedia data casting system with the help of Equal Access Nepal.



Jhuwani Community Library

Background and Location

Jhuwani Community Library (JCL) was established in 2001 by the community people with support from READ Nepal. JCL is located in Bachhauli Village Development Committee (VDC), Chitwan district. The main ethnic groups in the area include Tharu (indigenous), Darai, Mushar, Brahmin and Tamang. The Tharu group is the largest ethnic group (50%) in the community. The main economic activities in the area include agriculture, labor and administrative service.

Activities

JCL has more than 4000 books. The library also has a mobile library facility especially for the community women and children. JCL has a separate women's section to enhance the empowerment of women in the community. This saw the creation of 42 women's groups, based on saving and credit programmes. JCL is involved in health programmes including a free dental camp, family planning and reproductive health programmes, HIV awareness campaigns

and an eye camp. One health camp focused specifically on raising awareness of tuberculosis and now the library offers immunisation for the community. The library has an ambulance service which serves patients of Chitwan in Bachhauli as well as neighboring villages, and generates income for the library. JCL is also involved in the environmental protection of the area. The library has delivered training on floriculture, bee keeping and provided information about its connection with cross pollination. In 2002 JCL started a computer training course for community people. The library offers internet to the community and screens weekly informational video programmes.



Radio Lumbini CMC and Buddhanagar Telecentre

Background and location

Radio Lumbini is an initiative of the Lumbini Information and Communication Cooperative and started broadcasting in 2000. In 2004 UNESCO supported the establishment of the Radio Lumbini Community Multimedia Centre (CMC) by adding a telecentre facility to Radio Lumbini. The CMC is located on a main highway in Manigram, a market area in the Anandavan village development committee (VDC) in Rupandehi District. Rupandehi is an agricultural area in the fertile Gangetic plain at the base of the Himalayan foothills. The main industries of the area include cement, biscuits, iron and steel and these have brought commerce and educational facilities to the area. In 2005 a second (satellite) telecentre - Buddhanagar Telecentre - was set up in Lumbini World Heritage Site as part of the network of Lumbini CMC. Lumbini, also located in Rupandehi district is approximately 40 kilometres from Manigram. Lumbini is the well known birth place of Lord Buddha and in 1997 was listed as a World Heritage Site. Despite being known to national and international visitors alike, prior to August 2005 there was no public access to computer, internet or email facilities in the area.

Activities

Both sites offer computer training courses including internet, content production, archiving and editing. Those in the below poverty group (including poor, disabled and marginalised people) can enroll in the computer training course free of charge. Some of the earlier trainees have been offered employment in hotels and others

have secured paid work in schools. The training also means local people can be more actively involved in local content creation activities through the radio and CMC. Radio Lumbini airs 18 hours a day and has over 80 programmes a week. The programmes cover a range of subject matters including; education, gender, politics, agriculture, comedy, religion, business and economics and more. The radio encourages feedback and local interaction. The creation of the CMC and the fusion of the telecentre and radio facilities have seen the emergence of web-based radio programmes, namely radio browsing, where internet based information is incorporated into the radio programme production and design. This has increased local interest in and access to digital media in the local communities. Over 90% of the revenue for the Buddhanagar telecentre is generated from basic computing training courses.



CLC Madhawiliya

Background and Location

The Madhawiliya Community Learning Centre (CLC) was established in October 2006. The center is located at Madhawiliya Village Development Committee (VDC) in Lumbini. The CLC is 8 km south of the Radio Lumbini. The CLC is 300 meters from the national highway which joins the two cities of Butwal and Bhairahawa. The total population of the VDC is 7663 and the literacy rate is 61.6% (Nepal Census 2001 District Development Profile of Nepal 2004). The main source of income in this area is traditional agriculture and factory work. Females usually work in the chocolate factory while males work in the iron or gas factories. The majority of people in the area are Hindus and the largest ethnic group in the area is Tharu (indigenous) group.

Activities

CLC Madhawiliya offers literacy classes. The classes run for six months and are free. The CLC also runs programmes to raise social awareness in the areas of health, income generating activities (including candle-making) off season farming and goat grazing.

While attending the classes the women also have the chance to be involved in the saving and credit programme. The Madhawiliya CLC is supported by UNESCO Kathmandu. The centre is open six days a week from 12pm – 2pm. There are two volunteers and one (paid) social mobiliser. Two volunteers attend Radio Lumbini CMC in Manigram linking the CLC to the Lumbini CMC network.



Tansen CMC

Background and location

Tansen CMC was established in 2003 with UNESCO support. The CMC is an initiative of the local NGO Communication for Development Palpa (CDP) which was established in 1992. The CMC is located in the main street of Tansen, Palpa district. Tansen is a hill town perched on the rim of a fertile valley, approximately 30 km into the Himalayan foothills and 60 km from the border with India. The population of Tansen municipality is approximately 30,000 made up of a mix of ethnic communities and traditional caste groups. People from the rural areas of Palpa and adjacent districts, together with people from the Terai region come to the town to utilize the town's schools and healthcare facilities. The CMC is connected to a local television channel that broadcasts through a cable network.

Activities

The local television channel broadcasts a weekly one hour programme consisting of a variety of different segments including; local news, informative programmes, TV Browsing, health, entertainment and a local issue-based programme. The computer courses offered at the CMC provide local people the opportunity to earn an income from making and selling music videos and producing videos of weddings. The CMC runs free computer training courses for marginalised, ethnic and lower caste youth. The CMC also offers public internet facilities, desktop publication and secretarial services. Community programmes are produced in the CMC and distributed using the local cable television channel. The local programme reaches 3000 households in Tansen (those who have access to cable). Most of the local cable television

programmes produced at Tansen CMC are created, researched, edited and finished by the volunteers. Feedback on local programmes is offered from the audience through word of mouth to staff or volunteers of the CMC.



Madanpokhara CMC

Background and Location

In 2004 the Madanpokhara CMC was established with the support of UNESCO. The CMC consists of Community Radio Madanpokhara (CRM) and a community telecentre. CRM was established by Madanpokhara Village Development Committee (VDC). CRM has been running for 7 years and was the first village community radio in Nepal. Madanpokhara is located in Palpa District and has a population of approximately 8,000. The CMC is situated on the hillside of the large fertile Madi Valley 1.5 kilometres from the main highway that joins Palpa to adjacent districts and the western plains to the central hill region. The main economic activities of the area include subsistence farming of rice, vegetables, coffee and bee keeping. The main languages spoken in the area are Nepali, Magar and Newari. It has relatively high literacy rates, scored above average on development indicators, has strong educational institutions and a history of innovation in fields like agriculture and forestry. Madanpokhara is often referred to by the government as 'a model rural village'.

Activities

CRM has more than 70 weekly programmes covering various topics including agriculture, gender, children, health, disabilities, local news, education, folk songs, current affairs, good governance programme and cultural programmes amongst others. The local community people are an integral part in the creation and production of these programmes. The telecentre provides internet access, basic computing skills and radio programme production training. The CMC aims to increase the involvement of housewives, teachers, people with disabilities and disadvantaged groups in the community by offering the computer course free or at heavily subsidised fees. The addition of the telecentre to the radio station

has meant digital technologies are now communicated via existing radio networks. CRM provides listeners with information from the internet in their local language, with the hope of raising listener ICT awareness, helping listeners comprehend the internet and motivating them to utilise the CMC facilities. The telecentre earns roughly 97% percent of its costs from membership fees, computer course fees, internet access, telephone, fax service and other secretarial services. The remaining 3% is contributed from the radio section.



INDIA

Akshaya Centres

Background and location

Akshaya project, which comprises a large group of Akshaya e-Kendras or Akshaya centres across the state, is an initiative of Kerala State Information Technology Mission. It was first inaugurated in Malappuram district in late 2002, when it began as a pilot study. Later, it was rolled-out to several other districts in the state including Kannur, where eleven e-Kendras are participating in *Finding a Voice*. Akshaya e-Kendras act as decentralised information access hubs and service delivery points, catering to both rural and urban populations. Every e-Kendra is run by an entrepreneur. In Kannur, eleven local governments – including a district panchayat, a municipality and nine local self-governments – are piloting a community web-portal initiative that would have locally relevant content in the local language. The web-portals' services are rendered via Akshaya e-Kendras. The district is known as 'land of looms' as there are numerous loom-houses. The majority of people who are poor in this area are from tribal groups, and are daily wage workers.

Activities

In its early stages, Akshaya focused on e-literacy, where at least one person from every household would become e-literate through learning basic computer skills. e-Kendras also offer other services like rural Internet banking, e-krishi (agriculture), computer education, payment of utility bills and so on. The community web-portals

include all local government services and the option to download and electronically submit many application forms. The web-portals include information about the local area and local administrative and government organisations. It includes information on the ecology, areas of tourism, educational status, health problems, agricultural developments, infrastructure facilities and so on. There are interaction forums for people to ask questions, request information, discuss issues, share news. The web-portal also serves as a 'labour bank' linking those seeking employment with potential employers.



Ankuram TV

Background and location

Ankuram TV is a community television initiative of Byrraju Foundation that is linked to another of its projects – Project Ashwini. Ankuram TV was started in the summer 2006. It combines a TV studio set up with a local cable TV network. The idea is to empower the communities to become producers of local content, not just consumers. The Foundation is currently working in 185 villages across six districts (West Godavari, East Godavari, Krishna, Guntur, Rangareddy and Vizag) of Andhra Pradesh. Ankuram TV is being piloted in 3 villages – Juvvalapalem, Cherukumilli, I-Bhimavaram – in West Godavari district. The Ashwini Project works in 32 villages and provides broadband connectivity through the use of Wi-Fi technology.

Activities

The Ashwini platform enables the delivery of high quality services in e-Learning, e-Governance, e-Medicine, e-Health and e-Education to rural areas. The services presently being delivered by Ashwini include mathematics and spoken English classes for 8th-10th grades, computer literacy classes, telemedicine services, livelihood skills like embroidery and sari painting,



and crop advisory services. Primary activities of the community TV project are research, content development, dissemination and collecting feedback from the viewers. The content development entails identifying themes for programs, discussions for script writing, script writing, video shooting, conducting interviews, anchoring, and post production support. TV programs are telecast through a cable channel to all the community households (where a TV with cable connection exists) for 30 min a day for 3 days a week. Community televisions are set up in two locations. Programmes can also be viewed in the Ashwini Project Centres.

Gender Resource Centre

Background and location

Gender Resource Centres (GRCs) are a Government of Delhi initiative. GRCs are set-up by grassroots NGOs targeting women in marginalized groups. The centres mainly focus on health, legal counseling and aid, non-formal education, and vocational training. All the services are offered free of charge and the centres are monitored by the Department of Social Welfare, Government of Delhi. The GRC in Seelampur, in the north-eastern part of Delhi is operated by Datamation Foundation and is a part of the *Finding a Voice* network. This GRC was established in early-2007. Seelampur is a predominantly Muslim area, with many of the characteristics of urban poverty, including slum clusters. The GRC developed an ICT initiative – the Media Development Course (MDC) – to offer creative ICT skills training to the women in the community.



Activities

The MDC provides training in desktop publishing, multimedia and website design, free of charge. Students learn fifteen different PC applications that enhance their skill-sets for entering the job market. The MDC varies from other programs in its overt aim to achieve social change as well as a sense of community responsibility in participants. As part of their assignment workload, students select a relevant local issue based on which they create content, such as digital stories, cartoons, posters, or illustrations or text for the community newspaper Ek Duniya Gyan Patrika (which is itself designed by students). Content created is disseminated via

community screenings (digital stories), posters and through *Ek Duniya Gyan Patrika*.

Hevalvaani Samudayik Radio

Background and location

Hevalvaani Samudayik Radio (The voice of Heval) was originally formed as part of a PANOS' oral testimonies project, and was managed by the Dehradun-based Himalaya Trust. Since 2005, Ideosync Media Combine – with support from UNESCO, Equal Access and the FORD foundation – has been working with Hevalvaani by training local volunteers in radio production and helping them to build radio studios and develop community listening groups and multimedia centres. Hevalvani Samudayik Radio is based in a small town – Chamba – in the foothills of the Himalayas in Tehri Garhwal district, Uttarakhand state. As the area is hilly and many villages are not reachable by car, mobility is an issue in the area. Though the area is rich in natural resources, lack of transport and high dependence on seasons-dependent farming is a prominent reason for poverty.



Activities

Hevalvaani is currently partnering with Ideosync Media Combine on the Ford Foundation supported New Voices programme to develop two radio programmes: Hamara Gaon (Our Village) and Yuva Manch (Youth Forum). Hevalvaani is also working with Ideosync to produce two 52-episode radio programmes on Safe Migration and AIDS. In addition to these programmes Hevalvaani is active in 15 villages. Each village has a volunteer who is involved in identifying local issues of concern or interest. Community reporters make programs on the identified issues or problems and record them on a cassette in the radio studio and distribute it either through the WorldSpace satellite service, to communal receivers in the 15 villages, or they carry it to the village – mostly by foot and/or by public transport. This cassette is then played on the radio receiver in the village. Listening is followed by discussions where the community reporters record feedback for follow-up programming.

Mandaakini Ki Awaaz Samudayik Radio

Background and location

Mandaakini Ki Awaaz Samudayik Radio (Mandakini's voice community radio) was, like Hevalvaani, originally formed as part of a PANOS' oral testimonies project and was managed by the Dehradun-based Himalaya Trust. Since 2005, Ideosync Media Combine – with support from UNESCO, Equal Access and the FORD Foundation – has been working with the Mandaakini group by training them in radio production, helping them to build radio studios, and to develop community listening groups and a multimedia centre. Mandaakini Ki Awaaz Samudayik Radio is based in a remote village – Bhanaj - in the foothills of the Himalayas in Rudrahprayag district, Uttarakhand state. The region is prone to landslides during heavy rains, a common occurrence in rainy season, which hampers mobility/transport of the villagers. As the villages are remote, the region also suffers from lack of health care and only very rarely enjoys electricity supply.



Activities

Mandaakini, along with Hevalvaani is currently partnering with Ideosync Media Combine on the Ford Foundation supported New Voices programmes and the series on Safe Migration and AIDS. In addition, Mandaakini is active in 7 villages and two schools. Each village has a volunteer who is involved in identifying local issues of concern/interest. In the same process as Hevalvaani, community reporters make programs on locally identified issues or problems and record them on a cassette in the radio studio and narrowcast either through WorldSpace or by physically taking it to the villages. Group discussions allow the community reporters to record feedback for follow-up programming.

INDONESIA

Partnerships for e-Prosperity for the Poor

Background and location

ICT4pr is a UNDP funded project which is implemented through the National Planning Board (a Ministry), Bappenas, under the name of the PePP (Partnerships for e-Prosperity for the Poor) program. In Pabelan in 2004 and in five places in Java and Sulawesi in 2005, PePP established telecenters which aimed to alleviate poverty by

offering internet access and computer training. Villages were selected on the basis of their capacities to host the telecenter and poverty levels: only villages with 30% or more of the population below the national poverty line could have telecenters. PePP comprises partnerships with provincial agencies that help fund the telecenters and village-level 'host' organisations that donate the telecenter building and help to raise awareness among locals about the telecenter program. After a year, it was initially envisaged, overheads and staff costs should be funded locally or provincially with a view to becoming self sustaining. *Finding a Voice* works with three of PePP's eight telecenters. Through PePP, in each telecenter three staff positions (an infomobiliser, a manager and a technical support officer) were funded for a year, each telecenter was furnished with five PCs, a modem, television, LCD projector and a digital camera. The infomobilisers had community development roles, and conducted the EAR research for *Finding a Voice* in these telecentres.

Pabelan

The Pabelan telecenter is PePP's pilot project, and was established in 2005. It is located in Central Java, about a half hour drive from Yogyakarta. The local poor are predominantly rice farmers who work as sharecroppers and labourers on other peoples' land, and many of whom seek additional income by selling souvenirs to tourists at the nearby Borobudur temple. Pabelan also accommodates a substantial migrant community, the members of which are better endowed than local rice farmers. They are young men and women who come to study and teach and the nationally famous Islamic boarding school that hosts the telecenter. All the adults in Pabelan are literate, but most poor people only have primary school education.

Muneng

Muneng is located in East Java, about three hours south of the city of Surabaya. As in Pabelan, the local poor are rice farmers who labour on other peoples' land. They seek additional income by weaving bamboo baskets and selling these to a wholesaler. Since the advent of the green revolution in the mid 1970s, the quality of rice farming land in Muneng has seriously deteriorated, forcing local farmers to use ever increasing amounts of chemical inputs in order to maintain yields. This has played an important part in keeping people poor. As in Pabelan, most poor people in Muneng only have primary school education.

Lapulu

Lapulu is located in the southwest corner of the island of Sulawesi. It is an outlying part of the city of Kendari, which curves around a bay. Lapulu boasts an ethnically diverse population, made up of Bugis

migrants from the east, Butonese migrants from the southwest, Javanese migrants, the water-dwelling Bajo people and the local Tolaki. All these groups, however, share Islam. The local poor are predominantly fisherpeople, whose former fishing grounds – the bay – is now so polluted that it can no longer be fished. This means that people must go further afield into the open sea to fish, which is more expensive because a larger and stronger boat is required.

Activities

There are similarities in the programs and activities of all the telecenters, as these are spearheaded by the infomobilisers. According to the framework established by PePP, an infomobiliser's job is to establish 'learning groups', through which poor people can engage with the telecenter. These learning groups offer poor people the opportunity to learn new ways of generating income, and make use of the telecenter's ICTs to enhance these new ways. Across the telecenters, the nature and success of these learning groups varies.

In Pabelan, the infomobiliser, Hardi, has worked with ten such learning groups to establish test plots for a variety of agro-fishery ventures, called 'research by farmers', which have been fed with technical information by the telecenter. Some of these venture have succeeded, others not. But all the groups, all of which also have a revolving fund, continue to meet regularly (weekly), and all have been most enthusiastic about making DSTs, mostly about their group's research activities or other income generating schemes they are involved in.

Since the appointment of a new infomobiliser in August 2006, Muneng telecenter has done much to convene new learning groups, all with separate programs. One of the most active of these groups is a youth group which undertakes a number of income generating schemes. The most profitable of these schemes is cricket raising, and recently begun raising lizards too. Another active group is a farmers' group which has been testing ways of growing organic rice, with much success. They have found that growing organic rice is cheaper and more lucrative (due to higher yields and no reliance on chemical inputs) than those strains that need chemical inputs.

Compared to these two examples, Lapulu has had much less success in its attempts to convene learning groups. Numerous attempts have been made to convene new groups, which quickly dissolve when the members discover that the telecenter has no funds to disperse. At present, the telecenter is working together with a newly established community reading room to offer computer training to the young people that frequent the reading room.



Finding a Voice in Context

Jo Tacchi and MS Kiran

Introduction

The title of this chapter holds two meanings. On the one hand, it refers to how the chapter sets out to locate *Finding a Voice* in relation to the broader field of communication for development. On the other hand, it shows to how the chapter intends to bring to the fore an important principle underlying the project, and a core characteristic of our research – that is, the importance of an appreciation of context. A recent review of empirical research published in academic journals shows that we are not alone in our recognition of the importance of incorporating the vernacular and contextual specificities into the design and practice of development.¹

This chapter is designed to complement the chapters that follow. They discuss specific themes that have emerged from the research – participation, gender and sustainability – and are based on the data generated by the embedded EAR researchers. In this chapter, we rarely refer to specific data, but take the opportunity to explain the underpinnings of the research approach and design. To this end, in the latter part of the chapter, we introduce the key components of *Finding a Voice* and elaborate on our use of key terms including voice, ethnographic action research, communicative ecologies, and, participatory content creation.

¹ Nobuya Inagaki (2007). *Communicating the Impact of Communication for Development: Recent trends in Empirical Research*. World Bank Working Paper № 120. Washington. World Bank. <http://www.comminit.com/en/node/266501>

Communication for Development

One of the two outcome documents from the second stage of the *World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS)* is the *Tunis Agenda for the Information Society*.² The document commits 'governments, international organisations, the private sector and civil society to building a people-centred, inclusive, development-oriented and non-discriminatory information society'.³ It contains a plan of action for moving from principles to practice. Activities include building ICT capacity for all, and promoting the use of traditional and new media in order to foster universal access to information, culture and knowledge. It also reaffirms the principles of media independence, pluralism and diversity, and freedom of information.

The WSIS expressed a commitment to focus on a people-centred information society, but many felt it focused instead on the gaps in access to technologies and information, on new technologies rather than communication rights. According to Alfonso Gumucio Dagron, the right to information refers to access, while the right to communication refers to participation and the appropriation of communication processes and content. One of the major problems he identifies is the dominant communication model still at work in most development agencies,

I have to say it in plain words: The communication model still dominant in most of the international development and cooperation agencies, both bilateral and multilateral, is vertical. It focuses much of the time on how to gain visibility for the organisations.⁴

The World Congress on Communication for Development (WCCD), held in Rome in October 2006, was a collaboration between the World Bank, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) and the Communication Initiative.⁵

It produced a set of recommendations to policy makers based on an understanding that communication is a 'major pillar' for

² ITU (2005). *Tunis Agenda for the Information Society*.
<http://www.itu.int/wsisis/docs2/tunis/off/6rev1.1.pdf>

³ Willie Currie (2007). 'Post-WSIS spaces for building a global information society'. In *Global Information Society Watch 2007: Focus on Participation*, Association for Progressive Communications (APC) and Third World Institute (ITeM).
<http://globaliswatch.org/>

⁴ 'The Babel Challenge' Mazi issue 9. November 2006
<http://www.communicationforsocialchange.org/mazi-articles.php?id=325>

⁵ <http://www.comminit.com/>

development and social change. The set of recommendations contained in the *Rome Consensus*⁶ places community participation and ownership on the part of the poor and excluded at the heart of communication for development. Among the 'strategic requirements' specified in the consensus are: access to communication tools so that people can communicate amongst themselves and with decision makers; recognition of the need for a variety of approaches that reflect cultural diversity; and support to those most affected by development issues to have a say. We can interpret these requirements as the need for community-based media that is context-specific and that promotes a range of voices.

According to the Rome Consensus there needs to be more of this, in greater depth, and it must always be adequately monitored and evaluated. There is a stress on the need to build capacity for development communication at all levels, from community members to development specialists. An essential pillar for any development issue includes 'deepening the communication links and processes within communities and societies',

Communication for Development is a social process based on dialogue using a broad range of tools and methods. It is also about seeking change at different levels including listening, building trust, sharing knowledge and skills, building policies, debating and learning for sustained and meaningful change. It is not public relations or corporate communication.⁷

In this way, communication is promoted as an objective of development in itself: communication empowers people, it enables dialogue, expression, raises awareness of social and structural problems, and promotes self-reflection. Similar ideas also emerge and are discussed at the UN communication round table meetings that take place every two years. Yet there is a pervasive sense of talking the talk but not walking the walk. Communication in development is often given secondary status, is an afterthought and used to promote programmes and organisations.

Despite the clear agendas set in terms of principles, still there is confusion about how to implement these. There are competing approaches and theories⁸ that inform practice and research in this

⁶ <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/EXTDEVCOMMENG/Resources/RomeConsensus07.pdf>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Silvio Waisbord (2001). "Family Tree of Theories, Methodologies and Strategies in Development Communication: Convergences and Differences." Prepared for the Rockefeller Foundation. <http://www.cominit.com/stsilviocomm/sld-2881.html>

field. Vertical approaches to communication are most commonly related to modernist and diffusion theories, horizontal approaches to a participatory paradigm. Nobuya Inagaki summarises nicely some of the underlying themes of the participatory model for development communication:

(1) the participation of the intended beneficiaries in different or all of the project-cycle stages, (2) horizontal dialogue rather than vertical information transmission, (3) cultivation of trust and mutual understanding rather than persuasion, (4) local-level actions rather than national-level programs, (5) local knowledge, (6) the role of development specialists as the facilitator and equal participants rather than decision makers, (7) communication process rather than specific outcomes, and (8) the use of communication to articulate deep-seated social relations.⁹

The idea is that communication processes are inclusive and open-ended rather than goal-oriented. If one takes a participatory approach and includes and responds to the voices of the marginalized there is the possibility of directly addressing structural problems like gender inequality rather than simply focussing on aspects of behaviour, such as unprotected sex.¹⁰ This approach is consistent, in fact, with an approach that upholds capabilities and freedoms as the key to development.¹¹



Madan Pokhara Listeners Clubs collecting money from different households of Palpa. Some amount of this money is donated to Community Radio Madan Pokhara.

⁹ Quote from page 15 of Nobuya Inagaki *Communicating the Impact of Communication for Development*. Op. cit.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹ Amartya Sen (2000). *Development as Freedom*. New York. Anchor Books.

While participatory approaches are 'officially sanctioned' by most of the major development organisations, the remnants of modernisation theory persist.¹² At the same time as the concept of participation has been promoted and mainstreamed in development discourse, it has been criticized and challenged.¹³ Some would say that the concept of participation has achieved 'buzzword' status, reducing it to a series of methodological techniques that has lost its original ideological meaning of grassroots resistance and transformation.¹⁴ It is often unclear what is meant in practice by the word 'participation'. Others argue that participatory approaches to development, especially if there is a focus on popular agency, citizenship and governance, still holds the potential for genuine and positive transformation.¹⁵

In practice, participation happens in degrees, it is sometimes characterised as 'top-down participation' where participation constitutes 'insiders' learning what 'outsiders' want to hear, or simply an exercise in administrative task sharing, or a display of the necessary rhetoric to win funding.¹⁶ While the WCCD focussed on promoting horizontal models of communication to decision-makers, some question if those decision-makers are really interested in participatory communication. Or are they more likely to simply want to use communication for dissemination?¹⁷ Meanwhile, there is the enduring gap 'that still exists between good intentions and actual achievements, between promises and realities, between high sounding principles and concrete actions'.¹⁸ In the broad field of communication for development there is confusion over appropriate models, approaches and implementation techniques.

¹² Nobuya Inagaki *Communicating the Impact of Communication for Development*. Op. Cit.

¹³ Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari, Editors (2001). *Participation: The New Tyranny*. London. Zed Books.;

¹⁴ Leal, Pablo Alejandro (2007) 'Participation: the ascendancy of a buzzword in the neo-liberal era', *Development in Practice*, 17: 4, 539-548.

¹⁵ Samuel Hickey and Giles Mohan, Editor (2004). *Participation: From tyranny to transformation? Exploring new approaches to Participation in Development*. London. Zed Books.

¹⁶ Savita Bailur (2007). 'The Complexities of Community Participation in ICT for Development Projects' 9th International Conference on Social Implications of Computers in Developing Countries, Sao Paulo, Brazil, May 2007; Victoria J. Michener (1998). The Participatory Approach 'World Development, 26 [12]; Sarah White (1996). 'Depoliticising development: The uses and abuses of participation'. *Development in Practice* 6 (1).

¹⁷ Wendy Quarry (2008). 'Decision Makers Do Want Communication But They May Not Want Participation' *Glocal Times* issue 10.
<http://www.glocaltimes.k3.mah.se/viewarticle.aspx?articleID=138&issueID=16>

¹⁸ <http://globaliswatch.org/> quote from the preface of *Global Information Society Watch 2007: Focus on Participation*, Association for Progressive Communications (APC) and Third World Institute (ITeM)

Finding a Voice sits somewhere in the middle of this confusion and these competing paradigms. Ultimately, it is interested in exploring ways to move beyond information transmission models; in understanding the processes of communication at the community level through varied and mixed media; in ways to encourage meaningful participation in the production of locally created content; in ways to understand and locate communication initiatives in local contexts; and, in how evaluation can inform the ongoing development of communication initiatives.

This brings us to the question of why UNESCO has invested in and supported this research project. UNESCO professes a commitment to the free flow of ideas by word and image. It views information, communication and knowledge as core to human progress and well-being and sees traditional and new ICT and media as providing opportunities for higher levels of development across the world. Of course, this opportunity holds challenges, not least due to the fact that many people and nations 'do not have effective and equitable access to the means for producing, disseminating and using information and, therefore, to development opportunities'.¹⁹ UNESCO advocates the concept of 'knowledge societies'²⁰ which are 'about capabilities to identify, produce, disseminate and use information to build and apply knowledge for human development'.²¹ The concept of knowledge societies as promoted by UNESCO encompasses plurality, inclusion, solidarity and participation and is based on certain principles, including freedom of expression and the universal access to information and knowledge. UNESCO used the concept of knowledge societies to steer the WSIS agenda away from a limited concern with the information economy focussed on telecommunications, new technologies and information, towards broader issues of society and knowledge (with limited but nonetheless significant success).²² It is a concept that forms part of a more globally palatable communication strategy than the earlier New World Information and

¹⁹ Quote from page 191. UNESCO (2005). *Draft Programme and Budget 2006-2007*, UNESCO: 135.

²⁰ UNESCO (2005). *Towards Knowledge Societies*. UNESCO World Report. Paris. UNESCO. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001418/141843e.pdf>; Robin Mansell and Ulrich Wehn, (1998). *Knowledge Societies: Information Technology for Sustainable Development*, New York, United Nations Commission on Science and Technology for Development, Oxford University Press; Robin Mansell and Uta Wehn, Editors. (2003). *INK - Knowledge Societies Information Technology for Sustainable Development*. Sussex, University of Sussex. <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/spru/1-4-9-1-1-2.html>.

²¹ Page 191. UNESCO *Draft Programme and Budget 2006-2007*. Op. Cit.

²² Tom O'Regan (2004) 'The Utility of a Global Forum: UNESCO's Significance for Communication, Culture and ICTs' *Media International Australia*. 111.

Communication Order (NWICO) that UNESCO promoted.²³

This explains the background to why UNESCO's Communication and Information Sector has supported this research: *Finding a Voice* is trying to gain and share some insights into how to walk the walk. There are many bodies of thought and practice moving along this or similar trajectories which inform our work: community media; participatory action research; communication for social change; participatory design; and, participatory development, to name just a few. We have learned from and borrowed and adapted techniques and approaches from each of these areas and more.

Voice

*One of the most striking developments in the contemporary politics of poverty is the growing demands for poverty to be understood as powerlessness and a denial of fundamental rights and for the voices of those in poverty to be heard in public debates.*²⁴

In *Finding a Voice* we have defined voice as inclusion and participation in social, political and economic processes, meaning making, autonomy and expression. We have thought about 'voice poverty' as the denial of the right of people to influence the decisions that affect their lives, and the right to participate in that decision making. Oxfam's work on democracy and human rights identifies voice poverty as a focus²⁵. By identifying this form of poverty, Oxfam aims to help the voices of the poor reach policy makers, to increase access to information and realise social and economic rights to education, health and other root causes of poverty. Ruth Lister defines voice as the right to participate in decision-making in social, economic, cultural and political life and as a crucial human and citizenship right.²⁶

The ability to express oneself and participate in social and public spheres through information and communication technologies and media are one way to promote this idea of voice as a right. It impacts on how we think about media and communication and its relevance to poverty reduction and development, particularly participatory development. Clearly not everyone has the same level of access or skills required to be full participants in this way. We

²³ Cf. UNESCO (1980). *Many Voices, One World: Towards a New More just and More Efficient World Information and Communication Order*. London, Kogan Page.

²⁴ Ruth Lister (2004). *Poverty*. Cambridge. Polity Press. Page 10.

²⁵ <http://www.oxfam.org.uk/generationwhy/issues/democracy/>

²⁶ Ruth Lister. *Poverty*. Op. Cit.

can think about this, for example, in terms of new media literacy which can include the ability to create content, which in turn might be considered a fundamental aspect of what it is to be a citizen in a new media world.²⁷

There are at least two areas of work that can be considered to be attempting to bring issues of 'voice' to the fore in development communications. Firstly, there is now an established body of work on participatory approaches to understanding poverty, which is concerned to let those who experience poverty tell those who do not what this experience is like, rather than have external 'experts' assess it from afar. The Voices of the Poor collection²⁸ and its input into the World Development Report 2000/2001 helped to link voicelessness and powerlessness, insecurity and humiliation to concepts of poverty. This is about recognising the need to listen to the voices of the poor in order to both understand and tackle poverty:



Many hilly regions like the ones in Uttarakhand lack even basic facilities like safe drinking water and access to transport.

In a village in the foothills of the Himalayas, in Uttarakhand in the north of India the villagers had no safe piped drinking water for eleven years. They had water pipes, but no water. The volunteers of Hevalvani Samudayik Radio listened to the villagers telling this story. They recorded the voices of the

²⁷Livingstone, S. 2004. 'Media Literacy and the Challenge of New Information and Communication Technologies'. *The Communication Review*. 7: 3-14.

²⁸<http://go.worldbank.org/H1N8746X10>

villagers as they described their situation and the effects on their lives. The radio volunteers replayed this to the responsible government officer at the District Headquarters. The officer denied responsibility, instead blaming village-level politics. His denial and explanation was later played back to the villagers. Hearing this they were ready to take action: they started a signature campaign (petition) and lodged a formal complaint to the government. Three days later drinking water started to flow.²⁹

Secondly, in the fields of development communication and ICT for development there is growing attention being paid to the local production of content. That is, there is a concern in these fields to promote a diversity of voices through media and communications:

In an urban slum in Delhi, poor women have been involved in making digital stories about local gender-related issues. These stories are told from the perspectives of children, adult women, and women who have been victims of discrimination and/or violence. The digital stories are screened to community gatherings – to groups of men, and to groups of men and women together. The discussions that result inform content for the local community newspaper that these women also contribute to. The women use their computer skills to design posters on issues that they feel need to be raised locally, and display them in the local area. In this way, a variety of perspectives and diversity of voices are circulated and debated through a range of communication channels and forums.³⁰

ICT and its relevance to voice (and vice versa) can be related, both for individuals and groups, to access or a denial of access to modes of expression and more generally to freedom of expression. It can relate to opportunity and agency or the lack thereof, to promote self-expression and advocacy and access to technologies and platforms for distribution of a range of different voices. It can also be related to opportunities to participate in the design of ICT and communication for development interventions themselves.

In a new media environment where communication is often networked, there is a movement away from communication models for disseminating messages in the old sender-receiver paradigm, to one that is about catalysing public and private dialogue. The

²⁹Information provided in the field notes of the local researcher, Atul Kumar Sharma.

³⁰Information provided in the field notes of local researcher Aseem Asha Usman and MS Kiran.

emergence of Web 2.0 and the social networking it enables might be thought about as a potential catalyst for dialogue and collective community actions that lead to positive social change. New communication technologies change the communication environment, as James Deane explores in the following table³¹:

The Changing Communication Environment	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional • Vertical patterns of communication from government to people • Unipolar communication systems • Few information sources • Easy to control for good (generating accurate information to large numbers of people) and ill (government control and censorship) • Send a message 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New • Horizontal patterns of communication from people to people • Communication networks • Many information sources • Difficult to control for good (more debate, increased voice, increased trust) and ill (more complex, issues of accuracy) • Ask a question

The new communication environment is well disposed to horizontal communication, to diversified information sources, and to debate. There is clearly great potential, but major obstacles remain. All of these obstacles, which we characterise here as 'issues' and 'gaps', relate to voice, and are summarised in the table below.

Here we have adapted and combined some of the issues and gaps identified by Warren Feek in a review of work on the applications of ICT to processes of human development³² with research findings from *Finding a Voice*.

The first issue can be seen as one of inclusion and freedom of expression thinking about how to allow for a 'pull' on information rather than a 'push'. If given a voice, what do poor people say about their experiences of poverty, and their needs? Relating this back to the earlier table, this marks a movement from easy to control and vertical communication to difficult to control and unpredictable communication; from 'delivering a message' to 'asking a question'.

³¹James Deane (2004). Op. cit. Page 23.

³²Warren Feek (2003). The digital pulse: the current and future applications of information and communication technologies for developmental health priorities. The Communication Initiative. www.comminit.com/en/node/1342

Issue	Gap
<p>Voice vs. information: too much emphasis on 'pushing' information, not enough attention on the use of ICTs to communicate a range of different 'voices' related to any issue.</p>	<p>Insufficient use of ICTs to increase 'voice' in the development and communication of ideas, information and perspectives.</p>
<p>Technical vs. content: emphasis on technical infrastructure rather than the local creation of content or the development and communication of ideas, information and thinking specific to particular contexts, by and for those people.</p>	<p>Insufficient attention to prioritising local content creation. Potential to include local people in all stages of the content creation and communication processes.</p>
<p>Discrete vs. integrated communication: the tendency is to view new ICT as separate from older technologies. Strategies and programmes that mix them may hold more promise.</p>	<p>Digital divide within developing countries is increasing. There is insufficient incorporation of new ICT with older communication technologies.</p>
<p>Potential vs. proof: programme managers and agencies have insufficient tools to evaluate weaknesses in programme design and make adjustments mid-stream.</p>	<p>Insufficient attention to ongoing and embedded evaluation of the impact of communication programmes, including new ICT and traditional media.</p>

The second issue draws attention to the need for a shift in thinking away from ICT as merely infrastructure for the delivery of information, to creative tools and communication channels that can be used to create local content and distribute it through networks. It is ironic that those promoting the use of ICT for development and poverty reduction are often challenged over how to allow those they target to communicate and share information, and participate in their own development. Through *Finding a Voice* a range of content has been created with a variety of motivations. Some of this content may be considered more 'valid' than others in terms of communication for development for example advocacy on behalf of a marginalised or voiceless group; positive messages about excluded or discriminated groups; messages that promote good health related behaviours. We have plenty of evidence of people wanting to use media to highlight social issues or challenge adversity. But we also see other kinds of engagements with media

that are as much about self expression as about social change or 'development'. This issue and gap marks a shift from a limited number of information sources, to the ability to tap into and acknowledge many information sources, including the knowledge and information of local people.

The third issue is one of mixing technologies. This is possibly gaining currency, and certainly it is something that the ICT initiatives we worked with were keen to develop, if they hadn't already. In fact Jeffrey James argues for a 'paradigmatic shift' from a model that is based on the idea of telecentres equipped with computers, to an intermediary-based model that provides internet access to local intermediaries who blend technologies (new and old) to distribute information and share knowledge.³³ The intermediary might be a community radio station and its presenters, or local social mobilisers or perhaps a local EAR researcher. The mixing of



TV Browsing programmes in Nepal, give the audiences a glimpse into the use of the Internet through their cable TV channel.

technologies and the use of 'grassroots intermediaries'³⁴ is something that we strongly support based on the experience of *Finding a Voice*.

The fourth issue is that of embedded and ongoing evaluation. Not only do we need to rethink how we set indicators and measure impact, we need to build the capacity of local ICT initiatives to conduct ongoing evaluation, in such a way that they can adapt to

³³ Jeffrey James (2004). *Information Technology and Development: A New Paradigm for the Delivering the Internet to Rural Areas in Developing Countries*. Oxford. Routledge.

³⁴ Simone Cecchini and Christopher Scott (2003). 'Can Information and Communications Technology Applications Contribute to Poverty Reduction? Lessons from Rural India.' *Information Technology for Development* 10:73-84.

research findings that they both own and understand. We discuss this further now in the next section as we describe how ethnographic action research has worked in this research project.

Ethnographic Action Research

For most people whose job it is to decide how to spend precious communication development funds their best chance of spending wisely probably depends on occasional and most likely brief field visits, and/or evaluation reports written by others who have occasionally or briefly visited. Their decision might depend on self-reported measures of impact by implementing organisations, and/or on surveys that try to measure impact and somehow fail to capture less measurable impacts that anecdotal evidence may reveal. Yet, that anecdotal evidence might actually seem somehow more interesting and relevant than the survey results. This makes the task of allocating funds appropriately incredibly difficult on the donor side, and the task of producing positive evaluations incredibly important on the implementing agency side.

Ethnographic Action Research (EAR) was first developed in 2002, and has since been continuously refined through application in media initiatives in Asia.³⁵ It is similar to Participatory Action Research (PAR), with three key distinctions: it was developed specifically for use in communication and ICT for development; it is ongoing; and, it uses the idea of communicative ecologies.

Essentially, the EAR methodology combines participatory techniques and an ethnographic approach in an action research framework. The action research framework is important because this is intended to link the research back in to the initiative through the development and planning of new activities. In practice, this has often proved to be the most difficult and challenging step for the local EAR researchers, as we discuss below. The 'ethnographic' in ethnographic action research refers not simply to the kinds of methods that are promoted through this approach, such as participant observation, but also to the embedded and sustained, long term engagement of the researcher in the site of study. A principle underlying ethnographic research is immersion on the field.

To be really effective, EAR should be an embedded component of an ICT or media initiative, adequately resourced and ongoing. It can help to build flexibility into initiatives so that they can adapt to local needs and changing situations. It is an approach that should

³⁵ The latest version of the EAR handbook is available from www.ear.findingavoice.org.

recognise and document successes and failures, opportunities and challenges, recognising that in order to overcome obstacles they need to be fully understood. To achieve all of this the idea is that the initiative develops a research culture through which knowledge and reflection are made integral to ongoing development. The research aims, methods and analysis arise from, and then feed back into, a rich understanding of the particular place. EAR researchers are encouraged to involve participants and workers both as informants and as fellow researchers. It provides a way of listening carefully to what people know from their own experiences and then brings this local knowledge into the ongoing processes of planning and acting.

The key methods that are used include: participant observation and field notes, in-depth and group interviews, participatory techniques, short surveys, as well as various forms of 'self-documentation' such as diaries and feedback forms. The following brief descriptions of the first three methods are adapted from the EAR training handbook, which includes more detail, along with exercises and examples from the *Finding a Voice* researchers.³⁶

Participant observation and field notes

An EAR researcher is both a participant and an observer. Field notes record as much as possible of what EAR researchers see and hear and also record their own reactions and ideas as they happen. This helps the researcher to think through difficult issues, to reflect upon and share with others some of the emerging and important research themes they come across. This is the kind of data-collecting activity that EAR researchers continuously undertake, and can also be undertaken by anyone involved in the project simply by reflecting on what they observe and recording this in the form of field notes.

Interviews: In-depth and group

In-depth interviews are detailed conversations. Interviews are guided by an 'interview schedule' - a list of a few issues to be covered in each interview - while leaving lots of room to respond to what is interesting in the conversation. Group interviews are discussions in which researchers set a topic and guide discussion but allow the participants to talk to each other and develop a conversation. Group interviews are sometimes called 'focus group discussions'. A good group size is between 6 and 10 people.

³⁶www.ear.findingavoice.org

Participatory techniques

The participatory techniques included in the EAR handbook are aimed at getting researchers started in collecting data and quickly gaining an understanding of the local area, local people and local issues. They involve local people participating in defining their own issues. They are a useful way of starting EAR work, and they can be drawn upon at any time to explore issues in different ways, and to test findings or ideas generated using other methods.

None of the methods should be used on their own to fully understand an issue just as you would use a range of tools to build a house; you need to use a range of methods to build EAR research and understandings. For example, a participatory technique, in-depth interviews and participant observation might all be used to explore what poverty means in a particular place. We would not attempt to understand this fully through just using participatory techniques, just using in-depth interviews, or just using participant observation. Through combining these methods a deeper and more grounded understanding of any issue, topic or group can be developed.

The idea is to employ local people as EAR researchers, which presents both an advantage and a challenge. While local people know their way around and understand local languages and dialects, they also have plenty of preconceptions that they need to reflect upon and challenge. Nevertheless, the use of local researchers, embedded in the initiative seems to give insights that would be hard to achieve otherwise. Birgitte Jalov discusses the use of local people to conduct 'barefoot impact assessment'³⁷ which, when it works well, seems to be highly effective. Whether it works well seems to be dependent to a great extent on the people involved, and on the organisation. The same is true for EAR in *Finding a Voice*.

In some cases, especially where there was a large and hierarchical organisational structure, it was difficult or impossible for the EAR researcher to develop a research culture within the organisation, or penetrate the barriers to those in decision making positions who needed to know about the research if it was to have any impact on the initiative. Typically, these kinds of organisations prioritised survey type research over the largely qualitative and

³⁷Birgitte Jallov (2005). 'Assessing community change: Development of a 'bare foot' impact assessment methodology'. *Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast & Audio Media*, 3 (1), 21-34.

participatory approaches undertaken in EAR. In other organisations, EAR was seen to be a driver for the ongoing development of the initiative, and we saw it being adapted to suit the needs of the initiative.

What we can say is that those trained as EAR researchers have generated research data that will keep us busy for some time to come. There is a definite sense that those EAR researchers, many of whom had never undertaken research before, have benefited from the skills they have learned and the insights they have gained. While they all ceased being *Finding a Voice* researchers at the end of December 2007, many of them have been offered alternative positions, such as producer, in their initiatives. One way in which the EAR researchers really excelled was in linking research and local content creation (see below). This, and the careful attention to local context which we discuss next, seems to have been the aspect of EAR that was most appreciated by the host organisations.

Communicative ecologies

An ethnographic approach to ICT and media takes us beyond the immediate concerns of access and use to a consideration of how these technologies and their various contents are embedded in everyday lives. It forces us, that is, to consider how users, consumers and/or producers are 'themselves imbricated in discursive universes, political situations, economic circumstances, national settings, historical moments, and transnational flows, to name only a few relevant contexts'.³⁸ The notion of communicative ecologies provides us with a way of thinking about the relationship between ICT and media, and issues of development. It focuses our attention on the communication-related aspects of the contexts in which the people we are studying operate, which nevertheless are in turn embedded in other structural, social, economic and cultural contexts.

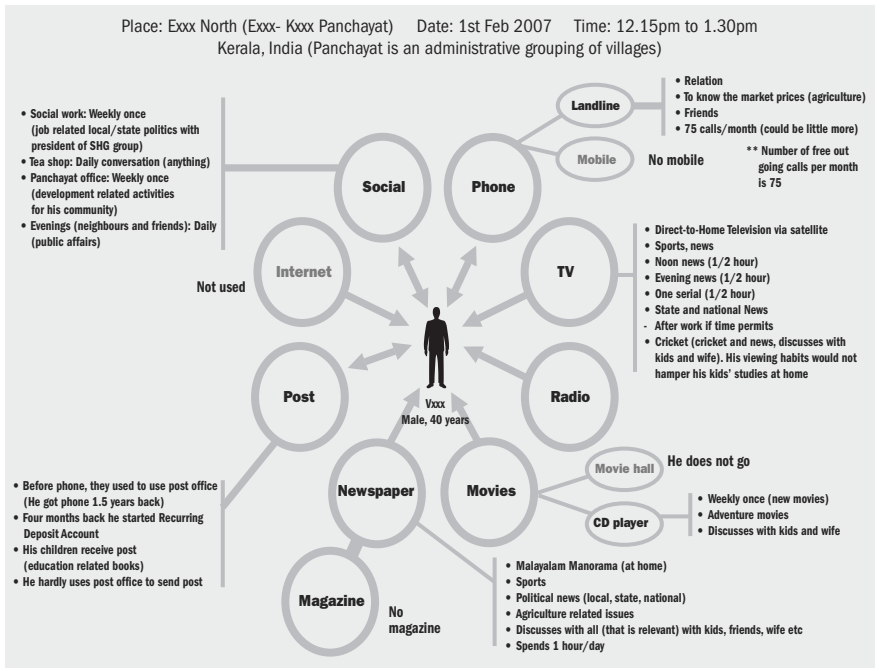
Understanding local contexts is central to EAR. We need to ground our understandings of ICT and media use, the way communication flows, the creation and circulation of information and knowledge. We need to think about this as communicative ecologies, so that we can place ICT (which includes radio, computers, mobile phones, print media and so on) in the context of all the ways of communicating that are significant locally, including face to face interaction. Any 'new' connections and networks (social

³⁸Faye D. Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughod and Brian Larkin, Editors (2002). *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain*. London. University of California Press. Page 2.

and technological) that develop as a result of the introduction of individual ICT or media interventions will be far more effective if they are somehow interconnected with existing, locally appropriate systems and structures.

We then need to think about what these communicative ecologies mean, and overlay other factors – structural and social – such as gender, caste, class and so on. The notion of communicative ecologies does not just offer ways to think about and depict the infrastructure that is available. It also provides a tool for depicting, understanding and appreciating issues of access and engagement, barriers and exclusions. To provide meaningful ICT and media interventions it is critical to think about social context, social purpose and social organisation.

There are a number of points that require exploration in any effort to develop an ICT initiative that has beneficial outcomes at the local level. For example: who are the different groups that make up the local community? How do people communicate among themselves on a variety of issues? What are the most prevalent channels of communication? What local associations and



institutions do people use to exchange information? Where do issues get discussed, and who takes part in those discussions? This involves paying keen attention to the wider context of information and communication flows and channels, formal and informal, technical and social, and monitoring both opportunities for intervention and the changes that result.

This communicative ecology diagram was developed from one created by Jancy Francis, the EAR researcher in Kerala, to illustrate the communicative ecology of a 40 year old man she had interviewed. Jancy felt that in the process of talking to people about their communicative ecologies, and of comparing different ecologies, she was able to 'understand how people interact in the community' in ways that tend to elude other approaches.

The key questions that need to be asked in order to understand local communicative ecologies are:

- What kinds of communication and information activities do local people carry out or wish to carry out?
- What communications resources are available to them – media content, technologies, and skills?
- How do they understand the way these resources can be used?
- Who do they communicate with, and why?
- How does a particular medium – such as radio or internet – fit into existing social networks?
- Does it expand those networks? How can an ICT or media initiative connect to its users' social networks?

The idea is to gain an understanding of the people, activities, relationships and media that people are linked to on a weekly basis, and to indicate the different sorts of information they get from different people and places: health, education, entertainment, family, social events, local news and national news. Different people will have different communicative ecologies; they will be different for different social groups, for different generations, genders, ethnicities, caste groups, and so on. Developing an understanding of a variety of communicative ecologies forces the EAR researchers to think about the different factors that place people in different social networks. It can demonstrate differences amongst people who may otherwise appear to be similar. Gender differences, the impact of the lack of infrastructure, the differences between urban and rural settings, and the impact of differential pricing structures are among the issues that often emerge from this exercise. The



Creativity can play a major role in enhancing the users relationship with technology and creation of knowledge.

continuing importance of interpersonal communication was regularly reported by the EAR researchers.

Local content and creative engagement

Working with a range of community-based ICT and media initiatives, *Finding a Voice* began with the assumption that rather than simply understanding ICT and media as tools for accessing and circulating useful information, given the opportunity, participants are likely to engage with ICT in far more complex, creative and expressive ways. We like to call this creative engagement in an attempt to move beyond limiting issues of access and to encompass ideas about digital inclusion³⁹ and digital literacy. Beyond basic questions that we had about whether this would enhance the experience of using ICT, we wanted to explore how self-representation and social, political and cultural participation could be enhanced. We wanted to encourage people to access technologies and be creative with them in ways that enable their voices to be heard.

We saw an opportunity to develop approaches to new technologies that might tap into local creativity and the desire for self expression that might allow users to explore new technologies on their own terms. Content creation itself is a powerful means of engaging people with media technologies that has added benefits of allowing them to voice their concerns and share and learn locally relevant knowledge.

³⁹ Mark Warschauer (2003). *Technology and Social Inclusion: Rethinking the Digital Divide*. Cambridge, Mass. MIT Press.

We were interested to explore the vernacular – the type of content that ordinary people would produce to express themselves. Jean Burgess uses the term vernacular creativity⁴⁰ to describe the range of everyday creative practices that might include scrapbooking or family photography or the storytelling that happens in general conversations with friends, neighbours and family. For her, the term 'vernacular' signifies the ways everyday creativity happens, outside the cultural value systems of either high culture (art) or commercial creative practice (commercial television or radio for example). Vernacular creativity is always locally specific, shaped to a large extent by the social, cultural, material, and geographic contexts in which they occur. We use the term 'creative engagement' rather than 'vernacular creativity' because we want the primary focus to stay with the issue of engagement. Nevertheless recognition of the importance of local contexts and different vernaculars shaped how we worked with local researchers and partner ICT and media initiatives to explore these things.

We concentrated on the process of content creation, and the need for each initiative to develop its own communication strategy suitable for its context. This involved linking research to content creation. Through workshops we focused not only on sharing some ways to create individual and group mini documentary style content, but also on the importance of thinking about *participation, audience and distribution*.

Various content creation activities happened as a result of these workshops. A sense of this will come through in the remaining chapters of this book. We also deal specifically with this aspect of the project in *Participatory Content Creation for Development: Principles and Practices*.⁴¹ The main things we have learned from these activities are: the need to pay attention to context when thinking about what might be locally appropriate, relevant and beneficial in terms of participatory content creation; the benefits that can be gained from creatively reaching out to and engaging marginalized groups and encouraging a diversity of voices; the usefulness of locally produced content for generating local debate around local issues; and the importance of encouraging participation at all stages of content creation, so that content is locally meaningful and might lead to positive social change.

⁴⁰ Jean Burgess (2006). 'Hearing Ordinary Voices: Cultural Studies, Vernacular Creativity and Digital Storytelling.' *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*. 20(2).

⁴¹ Watkins, J. and Tacchi, J. (Eds.) (2008) *Participatory Content Creation for Development: Principles and Practices*. New Delhi. UNESCO.
<http://www.findingavoice.org/en/publications>.

Conclusion

It's an interesting time to be working in communication for development. There is a growing call and new possibilities for the local production of content. There is a stated concern with promoting a diversity of voices through media and communications, in some cases made possible by new networked communication tools, in other cases using traditional media. Communication for Social Change (CFSC) might be considered as a point of convergence between the development agenda and community-based, alternative, or citizens' media. This space of convergence seems to us to hold the best potential for moving forward with the agendas that promote horizontal models of communication. Another interesting and rich point of convergence can be found in community multimedia centres (CMCs), largely initiated with donor funding, fitting squarely into the development agenda, and yet strongly linked to traditions of community-based media. CMCs combine traditional media with new digital media. The idea is that this convergence will provide a two-way link to global information and knowledge available through the Internet, through the 'intermediary' of local traditional media. Many of the *Finding a Voice* sites can be considered CMCs.

The focus in *Finding a Voice* has been on community-produced media content and participatory approaches to its development. Participation not only in the creation of content, but also in the decision-making surrounding what content should be made and what should be done with it. The experience of *Finding a Voice* has taught us that participatory content creation can be an effective mechanism for participatory development. It does not escape the challenges and barriers that other forms of participatory development face. Some of those challenges and barriers will become clear in the remainder of this book, along with some ways in which they have been overcome.



Participation: Social Inclusion, Motivations and Voice

Kirsty Martin and Jo Tacchi

Introduction

Participatory approaches to communication for development generally propose a human-centered rather than media- or technology- centered approach to development. If communication is understood as articulating and negotiating social relations between people, the term 'participatory' infers dialogue and shared understandings.¹ Dialogue at the community level is proposed as a core component of participatory approaches to communication for development.

The various ways in which communities create and share meanings can only be captured through a sustained observation of the very detail and range of relationships that constitute context. One way of building this grounded understanding is through exploring local communicative ecologies – the everyday, complex networks of information and communication (see chapter 2).

How do local, community-based media and ICT initiatives embed themselves into local communities' diverse social worlds in productive, empowering ways? The relationship between media and ICT initiatives and local people is crucial, as community participation helps ensure the initiatives' effectiveness. In an effort to answer this important question, a range of related issues need to

¹ See Communication for Social Change Consortium <http://www.communicationforsocialchange.org/> ; and, Paulo Freire (2007). *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed: 30th Anniversary Edition*. New York. Continuum.

be considered including; what does participation mean to different groups in the community? What are the barriers to full community participation in media and ICT initiatives? What are the motivations for participation and what are some of the consequences?

In this chapter we discuss these issues, as we reflect on what participation has meant in the *Finding a Voice* project. Participatory approaches to communication for development suggest the need to consider at least three aspects: gaining an understanding of the context, and the barriers to community participation; encouraging participation by motivating people to become involved in the activities of the media or ICT initiative; and designing specific participatory communication activities that respond to and take into account local needs and issues.

In this chapter we present data from the local researchers about the ways in which people were involved in their communities, and the way this impacted on their reaction to and interaction with the ICT initiatives.

Different understandings of what 'participation' means emerged from the research. One of the most interesting findings from the data was that participation meant different things, in different contexts, at different times, and to different people. At the final *Finding a Voice* workshop, the local researchers were asked to write down what they understood by the concept 'participation'. What follows is a list of concepts/expressions that EAR researchers used in reference to the notion of 'participation':

Influence over and inclusion in policy making; active involvement in activities; involvement in community development; expression of personal self; top-to-bottom organizational involvement; opportunities to learn, share and explore; dialogue which leads to social change in the initiatives; 'equal opportunity'; involvement of marginalised groups in decision making level; community mobilization; community to raise their voice; voice for all; community involvement; being a part of the process; platform for all groups to get access to services; must be meaningful, inclusive and transparent and involvement of the community for the community.

Before presenting research findings relating to 'participation', we first briefly discuss our initial thoughts and perceptions about participation at the design stage of the project. In many ways, the diverse interpretations and meanings uncovered and presented by the local researchers in the field diverge from our original concept.

Such divergence demonstrates the dynamism of the concept. It also gives a sense of how, over time, our thoughts about participation have become redefined, and we have grown to appreciate the 'messiness' of participation in practice. The research findings have shown the inappropriateness of thinking with a firm and static concept. This is an important point for those who design and implement participatory ICT initiatives, and we return to it in our conclusion.

The examples included in this chapter illustrate the importance of understanding context, and underscore the urgency of tailoring participatory communication activities to each context.

Meanings of 'participation' in Finding a Voice

Finding a Voice was developed as a research project with two main elements, both of which have 'participation' at their core. The first element is participatory local content creation, where community-based ICT and media initiatives are encouraged to experiment with formats and techniques for 'giving people a voice'. A central goal of *Finding a Voice* has been the exploration of how community-based ICT and media initiatives might reach out to and engage with the marginalized in their communities, and to experiment with the potential of participatory local content creation. It is hoped that this will allow poor and marginalised individuals to become their own story-tellers.²

The second element is a participatory approach to research, using locally embedded researchers and an ethnographic and action research methodology that incorporates participatory techniques. The initial task of the local researchers was to gain an understanding of what 'poverty' meant in the communities in which their initiatives were located, and to understand who in these communities was marginalized, and in what ways.

So, on the one hand, we encourage a research approach that focuses on understanding local dynamics of participation and marginalization; on the other hand, we encourage the ICT and media initiatives to think about participation in terms of how they might get greater and broader participation in the making of content. This research should prompt the devising of programs that, by way of their very design and application, urge people to engage the initiative in creative ways.

² Clemencia Rodríguez. (2001). *Fissures in the Mediascape: An international study of citizens' media*. New Jersey. Hampton Press.



Sita Pandey (camera in hand) and her team of volunteers produce one of the most popular programmes on the Tansen community television channel called 'Twakka Tukka'.

Of course, as an action research project, the ways in which we have thought subsequently about participation have become far more complex. Similar to the way in which we invited local researchers to explore local meanings of poverty, we encouraged them to think about what constitutes participation in their different contexts. This has given us a sense of just how easy it is to use the term 'participation' to reference all sorts of inexplicitly stated 'good change'³ goals, and just how difficult it is to understand how it is or should be practiced. As Majid Rahnema tells us,

To understand the many dimensions of participation, one needs to enquire seriously into all its roots and ramifications, these going deep into the heart of human relationships and the socio-cultural realities conditioning them.⁴

Attaining participation is an ongoing challenge to community-based initiatives that strive to engage the socially or otherwise excluded in content creation. At the same time, it is generally acknowledged as a necessary goal for sustainability (see chapter 5). We would argue that, while challenging, it is nevertheless important for development initiatives to maintain a focus on participation, and make efforts to understand its many dimensions.

³ Robert Chambers (2005) *Ideas for Development*. London. Earthscan.

⁴ Quote from page 126 'Participation'. In *The Development Dictionary: A guide to Knowledge as Power*. Edited by Wolfgang Sachs. (1992). London. Zed Books.

The idea of participatory content creation was expressed and employed in a variety of ways across the initiatives. At a content creation workshop in Delhi in April 2007 participants agreed to the following definition of participatory content creation:

Content created after extensive discussions, conversations and decision making with the target community and where community group members take on content creation responsibilities according to their capacities and interests.

While this was agreed as a very good way of thinking about participatory content creation, and an appropriate goal to work towards, the contextual differences across the sites were also acknowledged, and questions about how this might be achieved in different places received different responses and plans.

Meanings about what participation actually meant as part of a process of content creation were equally broad. For the group at that workshop, who came from initiatives across India and in Sri Lanka, it included content that carries the voices of a variety of people from the community; content that is designed to generate dialogue in the community; and, content where community members are themselves the producers of content. It is important to understand all of these as different but reasonable definitions of participation in content creation.

We summarized the main principles for participatory content creation in our book *Participatory Content Creation for Development: Principles and Practices*.⁵ Some of the important things to consider are:

- Paying attention to the peculiarities and specificities of each context and thinking about what might be locally appropriate, relevant and beneficial;
- Creatively reaching out to and engaging marginalized groups to work towards 'digital inclusion' and encourage a diversity of voices;
- Creating content that is used to generate debate and dialogue locally, to address local issues and raise awareness amongst local communities and those in positions of power; and,
- Encouraging participation at all stages of content creation, so that content is locally meaningful and might lead to positive social change.

⁵ Jerry Watkins and Jo Tacchi (Eds.) (2008) *Participatory Content Creation for Development: Principles and Practices*. New Delhi. UNESCO.
<http://www.findingavoice.org/en/publications>.

Participation as Social Inclusion/Exclusion

Women at the Agyauli Community Library

One way in which participation was discussed and researched by the *Finding a Voice* team of researchers was in terms of social inclusion and exclusion. One embedded researcher working in village Nepal conducted an interview with a computer teacher at the Agyauli community library, about women's participation in the library's basic computer course. The teacher felt there were two main reasons for the high number of female participants (60%) and especially of "housewives" (16% of total). She said the main reason women were comfortable to take part in the course was because the teacher was female. The women felt comfortable attending a class run by a woman, which is not a situation they are likely to come across in commercial computer training courses. She also felt that the large number of housewives taking part was because they had been forced to give up their education and any thoughts about careers after marriage. The women wanted to improve themselves through skills-training programmes, especially those involving ICT, which is seen as highly relevant to modern life.

I found most of the housewives are interested because they are serious about their career. Their academic qualification is above SLC (school leaving certificate) however they were compelled to stop their education after marriage. They want to know something new and they like learning about new technology. I think they are searching for new knowledge to teach themselves about education and technology. Girl students normally take the course to enhance their career development and utilize their leisure time.⁶

This example is both a story about social inclusion and exclusion. Exclusion from formal education institutions is an important reason for the women's interest in taking part in the computer training course at the library. So, the story has shifted from one about women's exclusion from formal education to one about women's inclusion in community-based learning programmes in village Nepal.

The researcher undertook extensive research about how and why women become involved in various library and community activities. This deepened her understanding of how women's participation can be enhanced through knowing what motivates them to participate in specific programmes. During the first couple

⁶ Interview transcript, Adhikari, September 2007



Research reveals that women are comfortable attending a class run by a woman, which is not a situation that they are likely to come across in commercial computer training classes.

of years, the library management was dissatisfied with the low levels of female participation. It seemed that women and marginalized groups were not benefitting from the library and its resources. The library devised some special programs targeting women. In 2007, the library created the community-based, all women micro-finance initiative, which allows all women to save and borrow small amounts of cash on a monthly basis.

The women feel economically safer by taking part in this group. Another attraction of this program is that women get the chance to meet each other weekly / monthly and share ideas and chat with their friends. It helps to instill in the female users some sense of community ownership of the library.⁷

This example shows how local initiatives fill some of the social void left by unequal opportunities for women with respect to access to education, ICT knowledge, and financial institutions. The earlier social exclusion of women from these sectors is in some ways being combated by enhancing women's participation in programmes and activities. The computer course and saving and credit groups are two examples of women actively engaging in their communities.

Madhawiliya Community Learning Centre - Nepal

Initially, only women attended the courses at Madhawiliya CLC in Nepal. Men said they felt intimidated, but now there is a class of 24 males at the CLC. The males appear to be more interested in learning computers while women are more involved in the centre's

⁷ Field notes, Adhikari, August 2007.

literacy courses. Before the centre was running regular computer classes, and was predominantly focusing on literacy courses, there were fewer males at the centre. There seemed to be some sense of shame associated in men participating in 'only' the literacy course at the centre. However, once the computer course was in full operation more males started attending the centre.



There was a noticeable increase in the participation of men in literacy courses once ICTs were introduced in the curricula.

The following account is an example of a problem stemming from a particular woman's participation in the CLC. Her husband and in-laws began to treat her badly after she started attending the CLC literacy course. The local researcher found gender expectations concerning male and female behavior in the community to be at the root of this mistreatment. While attending the CLC the woman interacted with males and this led to accusations of her being in a 'bad' relationship with them.

My husband accused me of having bad relations with a man nearby my village. His family also made similar accusations. When I go to the CLC I had to talk with men so they thought I had some kind of relationship with this man. They treated me very badly. They ordered me to leave my home. I went to the local mother's group of my Village Development Committee ... The next day a number of members of the mothers' group came to my home. Seeing the large group of women, my family members were frightened and begged me for forgiveness in front of the women and promised them they would treat me well. I have learnt this from the CLC - that we should also be aware of our rights.⁸

⁸ Field notes, Deepak, September, 2007.

This incident, and the help she received from the mothers' group, resulted from her participation and reinforced for her the benefits of participation. She actively encourages others to participate.

If I had this problem when I was uneducated then my family members would have sent me out of the home. These changes in my life happened after attending the different programs in the CLC and getting different information. By seeing my work, other women of the village are also aware. So I would like to thank the CLC and the mothers' group. I always attend the programs organized by the CLC. We didn't use to attend any programs when someone called us before, but now we attend the programs. I am now actively taking part in the mothers' group and I encourage others to be involved in this. Before we could not talk to others but now we can have a discussion also.

This example demonstrates how participation in such an initiative can challenge social norms that exclude some on the basis of gender. It also shows the power of collective action – where one woman, through her participation in a local initiative, mobilized local support which in turn helped her to address an inequitable situation.

Barriers to Tamil involvement in CMC

Barriers to participation are not only based on gender and poverty. We have seen different kinds of obstacles to involvement in ICT centers across the participating *Finding a Voice* initiatives. One notable example is the case of the minority Tamil community in Sri Lanka. By conducting interviews with local men and women, local researcher Kosala Keerthirathne uncovered some of the factors contributing to the exclusion of Tamil groups from the Kothmale CMC. These included language and education, but also simply feeling they were not welcome:

When I was interviewing a housewife from the same estate I asked her about the CMC.... And her reply was 'my children used to use the computers when the foreign lady was there⁹.... but after that they didn't go there because nobody was there to teach them'. I understood her to mean that they felt unwelcome at the CMC¹⁰

Without a specific initiative to engage Tamil communities, the social exclusion for these people meant they felt the CMC was 'not

⁹ In 1999-2002 when an Australian volunteer worked at the CMC

¹⁰ Field notes, Keerthirathne, July 2007.

for them'. In addition, the Tamil communities also expressed a lack of self worth. They felt the CMC was for the majority Sinhalese population and generally those of higher status. As an ethnic minority, in a country where a civil war is being waged along ethnic lines, the Tamils in this part of Sri Lanka, especially tea estate workers whose living conditions are often very poor, feel their lower social status acutely.



Digital Story Telling screening in the Tamil villages in Kothmale. For the first time members of this community participated in the activities of the CMC by contributing content on local issues

Overcoming Obstacles to Inclusion - eTuktuk

After researching lack of participation by Tamil communities Keerthirathne started to work with the CMC radio and computer staff to see if they could do more to encourage Tamil participation. This resulted in the use of the CMC's mobile telecentre known as the eTuktuk. This is a three-wheeled auto rickshaw containing a laptop, printer, phone, loudspeakers and data projector.¹¹ The eTuktuk travelled to Tamil tea estate communities and encouraged a group of young Tamil men and women to come to the CMC and undertake a training course in computing. The CMC manager, KAA Priyanka Sriyapali wanted some of these participants to become trainers themselves, to further encourage other Tamil participants to come to the centre. She taught them computing not through the usual office applications, but through making short digital stories.

The first stories they made were about the centre and included the participants talking about what they were learning, how they felt about using the equipment and generally expressing themselves through these audio visual stories. These digital stories were

¹¹<http://www.etuktuk.net>. See Tacchi and Grubb (2007) 'The Case of the e-tuktuk' *Media International Australia incorporating Culture and Policy* 125. Pp. 71-82.

screened, using the equipment in the eTuktuk, to their friends and families back in their community. This meant that more people learned about what they could do at the CMC. It also helped harbour a feeling of inclusion by assuring local people that they were welcome. The group then went on to make pieces of content about local issues that the group felt strongly about including alcoholism and domestic violence.

Keerthirathne asked Sriyapali if she thought this training might help them to find a new trainer for the CMC. She responded:

Well.... Not a conventional MS office trainer but a more creative person who could teach others to express themselves with new media. Yes!

Sriyapali felt that this kind of training held more potential for meaningful participation in the CMC and for generating discussions in the communities that hitherto had not been engaging with the CMC. The issue of feeling welcome and knowing that the CMC was indeed 'for them' was one of the biggest hurdles to overcome in promoting participation amongst Tamil communities. In this example the barrier to participation was a deeply socially embedded ethnic divide and the myriad of exclusionary norms and practices related to it. This could only be understood and addressed once it was acknowledged that it is not the technology itself that is the barrier to participation in this case. Instead it was important for the Tamil community to feel welcome in this social space and to have some sense of community ownership to help them to redefine the CMC as a place that is in fact 'for them'.

Ankuram community television

In West Godhavari district, Andhra Pradesh, Ankuram TV is active in five villages. The aim is to generate content with the participation of villagers. In this area there are major economic disparities between people and groups. Rigid caste structures are evident and serve to marginalize and exclude lower caste groups, and restrict their participation in the social sphere. The Ankuram TV project took note of their early research,

People from the marginalized sections have no voice in the development process, especially in the local governance matters and are yet to use the platform of Community TV for this. Recently the Panchayat meeting in a village was recorded and shown to the people. There was a good response for that and this is the first step in taking to the

people the discussions that affect them.¹²

Informed by this research, most of the volunteers are lower caste, young people. There are participants who are illiterate as well as participants with undergraduate qualifications. All participants had been volunteers which led to some issues regarding participation – especially for those reliant on daily wage work, whose time is, literally, money. In an effort to overcome this problem, four of the volunteers have been offered paid positions with Ankuram TV.

While they see these caste and poverty issues as a huge challenge that they cannot address alone, they want to explore the role community media might play in raising these issues and generating awareness and debate across all sections of the villages. Recognising that the most marginalised were the least likely to have access to television sets with cable TV subscription (a requirement for watching Ankuram TV), and thus unlikely to benefit from any programs the volunteers might make, they set up televisions for community viewing in two villages. One is in a school situated in a lower caste area, the other in a temple frequented by lower caste people.

The 30 volunteers identify issues of relevance to their villages through weekly discussions with the local researcher and project coordinator. They look for locally relevant issues, local talent, news worthy issues and events. The volunteers shoot the video for the programs. A full-time paid editor, with assistance from a volunteering editor, edit the program and later broadcast it. Currently, Ankuram telecasts for 30 minutes, six days a week, which includes a repeat telecast on alternate days. It is interesting to note that Ankuram TV have found that it is important for them, at this stage, to use a professional editor since audiences expect high production quality. They found that while audiences very much liked to see their neighbours on television, and much of the content was interesting, they still preferred watching serials and movies. This is a major challenge for the content producers as they need to find a balance between local content dealing with local issues and sustaining the interest of the viewers in a media rich television environment.

Participation and Self and Social Motivation

Factors shaping local participation in community initiatives cannot be limited to a discussion of social inclusion and exclusion. This section includes field examples which highlight the importance

¹² Research report August 2007 by Veena Yamini and Srinivas Bangaru.

of thinking about the motivations behind individual or community participation in local media and ICT initiatives. For the Ankuram TV volunteers in the last example, motivations for participation range from the attraction of learning skills that might help with employment prospects to the enhanced social standing participants report from being involved in the television initiative itself – an unexpected and welcome opportunity for lower caste participants who otherwise would not expect to get such opportunities.

'Thozhi' Kumari Club, participants advocating social change

The following story is from local researcher Jancy Francis in Kerala, India, who shows how young women became involved in a local community group. She tells how their motivation for participation shifted when the activity took on personal and then social significance and how it ultimately became more meaningful for the members when they were able to see the social implications of their activities.

The Thozhi Club ('Friend' Club) meets in Pinarayi West. It is a club designed for 11-19 year old female school and college students. The founder of the club started it because she wanted to "empower" girls through their participation in the club's activities. Initially, the club's meeting was utilised as time for older girls to tutor younger ones in their school work. Everyone would quiz each other in preparation for upcoming academic exams. The group was not very active and lacked enthusiasm. After a group discussion, the teacher realized that they could enhance participation if the club focused more on social issues.

The group's first social focus was the plastic bag problem in their community which led to the poisoning of local wells and therefore drinking water. They started by looking at one particular well. This well is under the control of a committee of local people. The group members noticed the harmful activities of some people and how it was affecting the quality of the water in the well. As there is a play ground near this well, people used to sit on the walls surrounding the well. There were shoes and plastic bags and bottles floating in the water. The Kumari club members prepared a chart which showed the hygienic implications of such activities, and pasted it on a wall near the well. They also persuaded the committee members to cover the well with a net. The people who drew their water from this well noticed the difference and appreciated their efforts. This seemed to give the members a lot of confidence. This initial activity progressed to the girls surveying villagers about their plastic bag use and encouraging them to use cloth by explaining the benefits. A follow-up survey showed a

tangible improvement in the community's treatment of the water supply, and the girls were very happy that they had made a difference.

According to the club members, their association with the club has made them more out-going and provided an opportunity to interact with other girls in their area and also to develop a link with the people in their area ... All the members of the club agreed that the club helps to reduce their mental stress, to clarify range of different doubts, to improve poor self-image, and build their personality and a better team spirit. It has also created improved social awareness among them, and developed a spirit of dedicated service, and commitment to society.¹³

Along with the obvious personal benefits this example also shows the way that individual participation and social mobilization can have an impact on the way members of a society think and act. The group's shift in focus to social issues brought about a new found motivation by the members. It shows how a vital part of any discussion around participation demands consideration of the question: what leads people to become active participants?

This became a vital question for Srinivas Bangaru, local EAR researcher for the Ankuram TV initiative in India. His consideration of who should be a participant in his research, why, and what it means to them is evident in his field notes. Bangaru went to a church to talk with and interview some local people. The church members were all lower caste people. When he attempted to organize a discussion group, potential participants were hesitant wondering what might be the implications of taking part:

I saw their faces and realized that some of them looked tired and some of them seemed excited to listen to what I had to say. I explained to them briefly about my project and how it might be useful for them. Some of the women asked me if they will receive any money from this project. I said that they will not be given any money but it will benefit them in the near future. I told them that knowledge and information is important. Through this project you will come to know what's happening around you.¹⁴

This seemed to satisfy the women and they all stayed and participated in the discussion group. If they hadn't participated, Bangaru would have missed out on this opportunity of trying to

¹³Field note, Francis, September 2007.

¹⁴Field note, Bangaru, December, 2006.

understand things from their perspective. His claim that the project would later benefit them by circulating knowledge and information would have been challenged had he not been able to involve lower caste groups in his research. His research directly impacted upon the kinds of content that later started to be produced in his initiative, and on the strategies used by the initiative to generate participation from marginalized groups.

Gender Resource Centre, India.

At the Gender Resource Centre in Delhi students talked to the local researcher Aseem Asha Usman about their reasons for participating in the Media Development Course. For most of the women it was the chance of improving their career possibilities and thereby financial prospects. Another motivating factor for the participants was the new possibility of working in the media:

They told why they joined the course and the skills they have developed during the course they hoped would help their careers. Most of the women told me that they wish to work in the field of media (either off screen or on screen) especially in the news section, after completing the media course.¹⁵

This illustrates how participation can enhance and extend perceptions of what is achievable. At the same time it demands careful management of expectations. The Media Development Course was developed following research into employment opportunities in the community. A skills shortage in the field of design was identified and the course was designed to take advantage of this situation. Partly, the identification of local job opportunities was important since women in Seelampur are not able to move about freely and they tend to talk about the rest of Delhi as if it were separate from their local slum clusters. Most of their lives will have been spent within a few streets and lanes. The cultural and religious limits on women's ability to participate in social arenas was considered in the design of the course.

The importance of considering motivation is also underscored by our research from Indonesia. It shows how people's individual motivation can be part of a much broader societal phenomena, the product of global and national forces that extend well beyond the initiative itself. Below, we discuss how global development paradigms have become culturally ingrained by way of a forty-year National Development Program. This paradigm provided the primary orienting frame in participants' efforts to come to grips with the

¹⁵Field note, Usman, October 2007.

initiatives, and hence the basis for their consent or refusal to participate.

Examples from the sites in which we worked in Indonesia show how 'voice', as articulated in the various modes of people's participation in the initiatives, is never a pure expression of desires and needs naturally existing in the community. Rather, it can be heavily mediated by the development paradigms that determine project design.

Most of the initiatives with which *Finding a Voice* worked arose from development policy makers' beliefs about the value of using ICT to empower marginal groups, rather than from direct requests from those marginal groups for ICT-related development aid. Most of the initiatives are, in other words, top down in character. Nevertheless, among all the initiatives with which we worked, such top-down dimensions emerge most clearly in those in Indonesia.

By 2006, when *Finding a Voice* began working with PePP, this US\$1 million project was fully funded and established as six so-called 'ready to use' telecentres on the islands of Java and Sulawesi. Rather than on understandings of poverty that reflect the experiences and perspectives of the target groups, these sites were selected prior to the appointment of EAR researchers, and on the basis of instrumentalist measurements of poverty (including income, education levels, kind of dwelling, existence of a domestic toilet, etc), undertaken by government officials. As the EAR researchers in Muneng and Pabelan note (see chapter 5), 'participation' was elicited after the fact.

Not surprisingly, then, the marginal groups that PePP was devised to serve understood the project as an epitome of *Pembangunan*, the National Development Program. One of the primary pillars of the New Order regime under the Suharto Presidency, *Pembangunan* is framed by a 'modernisation theory' paradigm; it foregrounds infrastructural and economic development in efforts to modernise and eradicate poverty. Not surprisingly too, then, when the local researchers went to elicit marginal groups' participation and urged them to voice their needs and desires, what they found were articulations of *Pembangunan*: a consistent and seemingly unbreakable desire among poor people to use the telecentres in ways that would generate income for their households.

Whilst facilitators in some sites were fortunate to receive aid from PePP to establish community income-generating ventures, thus meet this voiced request and secure people's ongoing participation

(for example, Pabelan – see chapter 5), in other sites aid was not forthcoming, and the target groups of poor people responded by refusing to use the telecentre (hence participating in the initiative obliquely, through their NON-participation). Munsir Salam, the EAR researcher from Lapulu Telecentre, in Southeast Sulawesi, reported in one of his field notes thus:

I have been experiencing some problems in executing my EAR research plans. I had planned to do my research on poverty with some of the existing community groups and with new groups that I was going to establish. We tried to establish a new group in No 4 community, but the groups fell apart after the third meeting. At the first meeting 15 people came, and at the third meeting there were only three. When I asked about why no-one had turned up to the third meeting, people told me that they had believed that this new group was going to receive aid funds for a micro-credit scheme, and when they found out that there were to be no aid funds, many of them left the group. I was really surprised at this reason, because at the first meeting I had explained that the reason for forming the group was to learn organisational skills, and I had never promised any aid funds or said that the telecenter was to give the group a loan. But it turned out that they only wanted to be part of a group if it meant that they could receive aid money.¹⁶

Additionally, further pointing to the parallels the target groups drew between the PePP initiatives and Pembangunan, they also suspected and sometimes openly accused telecentre staff of corrupting funds that were meant for local poor people – corruption of development funds by administering officials being another consistent feature of Pembangunan.

What the example of PePP illustrates is the value of analysing particular modes of participation, or voice in context. In the introduction to this chapter, we referred to the importance of taking into account how local communicative ecologies come to bear upon how people participate in an initiative. The Indonesian case highlights how forces that operate nationally, even globally, can manifest locally in ways that are highly significant to any effort to grasp the patterns of communication and getting information on the 'local' level, be that the level of village, province or state.

¹⁶Lapulu, 12 Jan 2007, by Munsir Salam (original in Bhs Ind)



Participation is linked to larger issues like gender, religion, caste and ethnicity.

Participation and motivation are clearly linked to wider issues. We saw the role of religion in terms of Islamic women and mobility in Seelampur, and ethnicity in terms of Tamil communities in Kothmale. In India and Nepal, caste cannot be ignored as is clear in the Ankuram TV project discussed above. In Indonesia, one of the most prominent and visible aspects of participation and motivation we noticed is strongly linked to the national politics of a regime which ended 10 years ago and how this has shaped what people expect from government institutions and development programs (of any kind). In this way, it reminds us of the often expressed view by marginalised people that the kinds of facilities and activities offered by the local ICT and media initiatives are 'not for them'.

Participation in Content Creation

Finding a Voice has revealed the different ways that local people participate in activities in their communities and in media and ICT initiatives. A particular focus of *Finding a Voice* was on participatory content creation. The activities this sparked spanned a range of technologies and media including, but not limited to, radio programs, television programs, wall newspapers and digital stories. A challenge has been to find effective ways of initiating and maintaining community engagement with content creation activities, especially involving marginalized communities. The following examples are about community participation in content creation. They help us to understand the impact of this kind of participation on individuals and the wider community.

Buddhanagar CMC - Nepal

An EAR researcher based in Buddhanagar CMC in Nepal describes the impact that participation in content creation has had on the men in this society. The local men who took part in audio-recording and digital story telling training said it increased their self confidence especially when they had the opportunity to be the 'trainer'. This allowed them to share their new skills with others in the community and to help identify key community issues. The men said that volunteering gave them a new identity in the community.

Participation in the creation of digital stories and then the empowering 'trainer' role of local people redefined their place in the community as informed participant. To answer then the question that we posed above: 'what's in it for me'- this example shows how participation has brought about positive personal gains for the participants. At the same time, the example shows how important social and personal recognition are to ensure the continued participation of volunteers.



Social and personal recognition is important to the volunteers who participate in the activities of the Buddhanagar telecentre.

A woman had been a volunteer for over a year at the centre and tells how she has gained valuable experience and insights through her role.

I have got recognition and I have also gained some self confidence. My husband always encourages me to learn new things. He is earning money, I have taught him computer at home. He had no time to come to the centre to learn computer but I have much more time, that's why I want to learn computer for me and my husband as well as my children.¹⁷

¹⁷Field note, Rupa Pandey, September 2006.

On the one hand, being involved in training brings about confidence while adding to the individual's skills base. In the quote above it shows how learning these new skills has the potential to change the lives not only of the individuals but their family as they pass on their new ICT knowledge.

Strategies for community participation in Mandakini Ki awaaz community radio

In his observations pertaining to a recent visit to a village, local researcher Atul Kumar Sharma notes that people were enthusiastic to participate in the CMC activities and radio for a range of reasons. He found that the students wanted to emulate radio broadcasters they had heard. Village women wanted to participate to make a program on income generation. Some of the woman even hoped that the program itself might be a source of income for them.

Sharma travelled to a junior high school in Bhanaj to teach the students about CMC activities and the planned community radio programs. The students took turns playing a radio program and then became really excited when they were told that the program's announcers were among them. They were thrilled to learn that they too could record their voices.

At the start the girls did not participate in the recording process but as time passed they all became familiar with the process. This now poses a new problem for CMC workers, namely, how to record the voice of all of them in only a short period of time? The students sing songs, tell jokes and share traditional stories. The CMC volunteers record almost 30 minutes of some very interesting audio content each time.¹⁸

Although the school students are excited to learn, at present, their school does not have the technology set up to teach them without the assistance and equipment supplied by the CMC team. The school has received new computers from the government. However, these lie untouched in the computer room which doubles as a store room. The school doesn't have a computer teacher and no one knows how to operate the computers or teach the students. The CMC volunteers have agreed to install the radio editing software on the computers and begin basic training with school students. This way student volunteers will become a source of radio content for Mandakini Ki awaaz community radio and learn computing in the process.

¹⁸Field notes, Sharma, May 2007.

Bhanaj is a village in a remote district of Uttarakhand, where there is limited access to both new and traditional information and communication technologies. Ten community radio volunteers ran a training course in Bhanaj on 'content creation'. Following this in April 2006 they began the broadcast of the first self-produced program. One problem they face is that because they rely on volunteers, they have to manage a situation where people move on as they find work, or get married and so on. Four members of the initiative (including the EAR researcher, two volunteers and a project manager) attended a *Finding a Voice* content creation workshop in Delhi in 2007, and decided to try to address this issue through their programming. What follows is a treatment for a piece of content that a team developed during the workshop.

Content: A 10 minute radio program

Audience: Young college boys and girls in the remote Uttarakhand district Rudraprayag

Medium: Radio broadcast through WS [Worldspace] and AIR [All India Radio]. Community participation through narrowcast and re-creating the content creation process at the village/college as a follow on series program to this one.

Strategy Content idea- Treatment- Tone of voice/language or words

Tone: Light, Conversational, personalized, friendly

Language: Informal

Benefits:

1. Train to gain technical skills that will be useful in enhancing future career/livelihood options
2. Gain the ability to work with community team to get answers to questions like: Where to go for employment? Who is responsible for ensuring that your house has access to water? How to prevent the depletion of forest resources on which you family depends? How to access a bank loan? How to migrate safely to a new city? How to combat a situation of domestic violence?
3. In the absence of other avenues/platform where their ideas and thoughts can get expression, this is a place for them to talk about what they want to say.¹⁹

The content is designed to tell young people about the benefits of getting involved in their radio initiative, what they will learn and so on. They need to work fairly hard at maintaining their volunteer base and on passing on the training and expertise as people move on.

¹⁹From April 2007 - content creation workshop adapted from Venu Arora's workshop notes.

This treatment gives us an insight into how important participation in content creation is to this particular initiative, and it sets out very clearly what they believe are the benefits of participation. Still, trying to maintain that participation requires a strategy and promotional tactics. This only serves to reinforce the many dimensions of participation that require serious enquiry and careful consideration.

Conclusion

Getting widespread participation, especially from the poorest local communities, is a real challenge for community ICT and media centres, and has been a focus of content creation and research training and support in the *Finding a Voice* project. Participation in ICT and media initiatives extends beyond a voice on a radio programme or an image of a community event on a television screen. Participation and all that it entails is different in different contexts. Even amongst one group of EAR researchers there was no uniform definition of the term. For some researchers participation meant decision-making power, for others it was about women's empowerment while others referred to it as the right for everyone to have their voice. In conclusion, it is all of these things. The examples in this chapter have highlighted how the different interpretations of participation initiated different discussions in the field sites. In an effort to understand these complexities, we have shown how these understandings are at some level a discussion about inclusion and exclusion, motivations for participation and social outcomes or consequences of participation.

The EAR researchers discussed how their participants explained the factors that motivated them to join in their local media and ICT initiatives programmes. Participation for local people is about personal and social advancement or some kind of identification with the programme or activity. Despite these positive issues connected to participating in community organisations there are still barriers to full participation and these were discussed in this chapter in terms of gender, caste, ethnicity, religion and political factors shaping behaviours.

Projects like *Finding a Voice* offer a unique chance for dialogue with donor organisations and NGOs about the complexities inherent in participation in media and ICT initiatives. This can lead to a greater understanding about how local communities are involved and want to take ownership of their own communities. By reflecting more on this issue across different sites internationally we will go further toward overcoming the obstacles to participation.



Gendered behaviours and ICT initiatives in local communities

Kirsty Martin¹

The *Finding a Voice* project looked at ways in which information and communication technologies can be utilised to the betterment of local communities throughout South Asia and Indonesia. The project focused on a range of themes that the researchers explored in relation to the potentials of ICT for poverty reduction. One of the themes that the researchers investigated was 'gender'. The term gender is broad and thereby used to describe all matter of relations between males and females in different communities. Rather than rely on any one definition of gender, this chapter is based on field examples from the different research sites to illustrate how women's life opportunities and experiences in reference to health, education, social inclusion and employment differs to those of men.

The chapter poses an important question; further than merely identifying gender inequities in the community, to what extent have the research and content creation processes within *Finding a Voice* initiated any kind of response to these issues. The chapter illustrates the complexities in the Ethnographic Action Research methodology and asks where does research end and content creation and action begin?

By using various field examples and critical discussion of what and how ICT initiatives responded to research findings, this chapter

¹ The author wishes to offer sincere thanks to the EAR researchers who supplied information and explanations about their field sites which helped in the creation of this chapter. Special thanks also go to Jessica Larsen for her kind assistance in sorting data and for her much valued administrative support.

offers an insight into how local initiatives combat gender-based inequities in their communities. If poverty reduction and social change rely on community involvement in local programmes, then understanding gender inequities and obstacles to full participation are a pivotal part of their work.

Gendered traditions in the community

The way that men and women perform different roles in the community was a recurring theme in the research findings. This section includes examples of the way men and women's social role, behaviours and expectations are learned or lived out in the private domain of the home. It is this basic socialisation of gender roles in the community that shapes possibilities for social interaction among women and men, as well as opportunities for their engagements with ICT initiatives in their local communities.

Division of labour

Across the various field sites, researchers discovered how gender circumscribes the way chores are divided (predominantly, unequally) between men and women. An embedded researcher in Uttarakhand India, Atul Kumar Sharma found that in his initiative most of the agricultural work is done by women. While women are legally allowed to own land, in reality they don't have rights over how the land is utilised. In his research Sharma found that men sell the property without the consent of or consultation with their womenfolk.

In one of the farmers' federation meetings all the participants were men even though all farming activities except for ploughing are carried out by women. During the discussion one man stood up and said that 'this whole meeting is a farce because the real farmers of Uttarakhand are the women'. He said that 'the men don't even know about their land but they still have the rights over it.'²

Sharma has found that only a few men help their wives by taking care of the children or by doing domestic work. While Sharma observed women working in the fields or households, he noticed the men sitting around playing cards. When Sharma asked the men about this, they said that they didn't have any work to do. There is also a local saying in the community Suraj ast garhwal mast (Sun sets and Garhwal starts dancing). This refers to the men's tradition of drinking liquor which is seen as one of the traditions in the

² Sharma, field notes, January 2008, India.

Garhwal region of Uttarakhand. As soon as the sun sets, most men start to drink.



Understanding gender relations in a specific community is imperative to successful community involvement in a local initiative.

In order for Sharma to be able to work constructively with the initiative to increase the involvement of local people, he first needed to understand these gendered ideas and behaviours, and to be sensitive toward social traditions. Social gendered behaviours often become identified as 'local traditions' and disregarding them or attempting to blatantly challenge them can be viewed with skepticism by community members. Armed with knowledge about how men and women spend their time in the community, Sharma can return to the initiative with important questions. Such questions might include: What potentials are there for the volunteers/staff of the centre to engage with men in their leisure time? What kinds of activities would the local men find important enough to participate in? How should they best time their activities for women? Given their workload what is the best time to broadcast women-focused narrowcast programmes? How can those narrowcasts be sure to address the issues that are meaningful to these women?

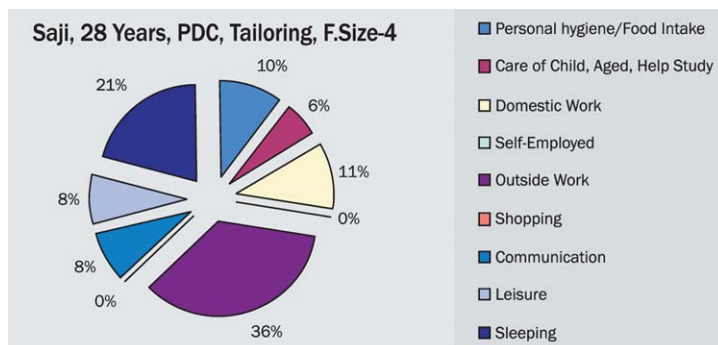
Understanding gender relations in a specific community is imperative to successful community involvement in a local initiative. Put simply, if you don't know why or where people are in the community at any given time, then it is very difficult to make socially relevant programmes for that community. One way in which local initiatives can get a clear idea about where local men and women are at different times of the day is by using the Daily Routine mapping technique.

Daily Routines

EAR researchers used participatory mapping exercises to learn about the way gender defines the type of work carried out in the home. One common type of mapping exercise involves the daily routine mapping of local people (see figure 1.1 and 1.2). This entails the researcher asking people to detail their activities on any given day. In the following example, EAR researcher based in Kerala, South India, shows how this revealed the gender expectations in the local community.

I recorded and analysed the daily routines of two married couples. The most notable difference being that the household chores are seen to be the exclusive domain of the women irrespective of whether the women are engaged in other outside engagements. The percentage of daily time spent on domestic work for the women was 22% and 38% and in both cases the men's was 0%.³

Figure 1.1 : Daily activity chart of a woman collected by Indian EAR researcher Francis.



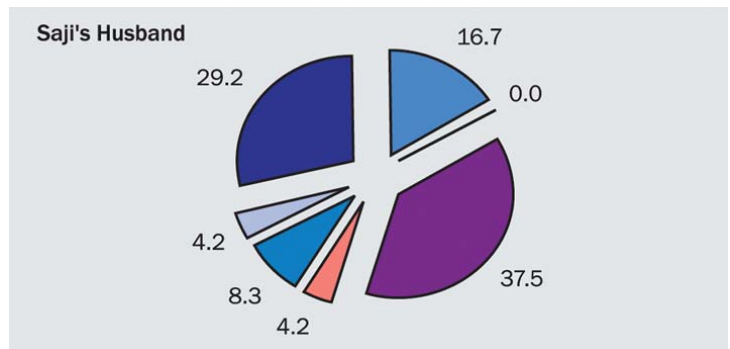
In the above chart, Saji, a young woman from the Muzhappizhangad village details her own daily chores and those of her husband. As we can see Saji spends 10% of the day on personal hygiene and food intake (including her early morning walk). On the other hand, her husband spends about 17% of his time in personal hygiene and food intake. The daily chores of both indicate that both are engaged in outside work. Saji devotes 36% of the total duration of the day for this, which is based on her skill of tailoring. She serves as an instructor in a tailoring Unit. Her husband spends more time on work outside the home about 38 %. However, the time

³ Field notes Francis, September 2007, India.

that she takes for caring for their child is 6% and the proportion of her time spent on domestic chores including cooking, serving food, washing the vessels, washing the clothes, cleaning the house and the surroundings is 16%. Added together, child care and other domestic chores amount to 22% of her day. Her husband does not engage in these domestic chores. Shopping is found to be the sole responsibility of her husband and takes up about 4 % of his time.

Francis' research shows that men are not involved in domestic work including caring for their children. As a consequence women need to spend more time working including domestic work and also working outside the home in order to earn an income.

Figure 1.2 Daily activity chart of a man collected by Indian EAR researcher Francis.



Carrying out the analysis of the daily routines helped me to understand the extended female-workload involving multiplicity of works compared to those of the men-folk. It also helped in understanding the places where the researcher could meet them and what was the most fitting time for an extended interview.⁴

Similar to Sharma's example, Francis shows how community-based ICT and media initiatives need to understand the daily routines of those they are targeting, not only to ensure they can plan activities that fit into their lives, but also so the EAR researchers can find appropriate times and places to talk to local people and conduct their research. Time is a valuable resource for many poor people, and mobility is often limited.

⁴ Francis, field notes September 2007, India.

The way in which men and women's lives are socially defined in different ways is supported in the findings of another EAR researcher, Sita Adhikari this time in Chitwan district in Nepal. Adhikari interviewed men and women in an attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the prevailing perceptions of male and female roles in her community. Similar to Sharma and Francis it is through first learning about these gendered ideas that Adhikari is then able to feed this information back to the initiative in an attempt to devise more socially relevant programmes.

In my two fieldwork sites, Jhuwani and Agyauli communities, gender discrimination is evident in the way that males and females are perceived in the family and in the wider community. There is a traditional belief in most parts of Nepal that sons are the protectors of and providers for the family. Daughters are viewed as the future property of another. Sons can open the gates of heaven for their parents by performing certain rituals after their death. A daughter cannot. Because of various discriminating factors females are compelled to be dependent on their fathers during childhood, on their husbands after marriage and on their sons in their old age. Women also receive lower wages than men. In our community women get around RS.100 to 120 for one days labor work whereas men get RS.150 to 200 per day for labor work. There is no real reason for this difference in pay rate but it is a clear example of gender discrimination in our community.⁵

Adhikari's work within the *Finding a Voice* project included analysing the ways in which women's participation in the community could be enhanced. Adhikari worked together with management, staff, fellow volunteers and local women at two community libraries to devise women-focused programmes. Not only did they devise programmes but they sought community feedback to various programmes and activities by local women.

The type of programmes involving women include a women-only saving and credit co-operative, income generating activities, a mobile village library, and various health camps. The income-generating courses combined with the saving and credit programme has seen local women gain more confidence in dealing with financial matters. Access to loans has seen local women open their own small business including goat-raising, buying seeds for farming and, investing in cattle. Some women have even established their own small tea shop.

⁵ Adhikari, field notes, March 2007, Nepal.

Adhikari's connection to the local community and her links to the library mean that she acts as a kind of community information officer who informs local (often illiterate) women about the facilities that the library offers. One important outcome of her work is the level of involvement of local women in creating digital content.

During a content creation workshop in Tansen, Palpa District, in 2006, library representatives learnt basic skills relating to digital story telling. Digital storytelling is a multimedia format that makes use of recorded voice and photographs. People, both literate and non-literate, can use this format to make short narratives of around 2-3 minutes long.

Since December 2006, the library groups have made more than 17 digital stories. The groups have discussed making more digital stories in the future focusing on the issues of children's welfare, gender and participation, social roles, property rights, domestic violence, women's health, and caste discrimination.



Women learn to make digital stories that enable them to voice their expression and local experience in a creative manner.

By publicly screening personal narratives about women's lives and social conditions, the community library has become a place where local people can talk about these issues. As a result, the library has witnessed an overall increase in the number of female members and participants in women-focused activities. At the same time, for many village women their lives have not fundamentally changed as a result of the library's new programmes. While the benefits of the research are clear the other side of the discussion is that the research alone has not changed the gendered expectations on women in the community nor has it changed demands on how

they should spend their time. This is also true in the case of Francis' daily activity charts (see above). The EAR process shows how learning about a context and community is one part of the process. The real journey begins in how these issues make their way into the social arena and what happens next.

Domestic violence

One serious issue facing women around the world today is domestic violence. The Indian government passed the Protection of Women against Domestic Violence Act in 2005 and the law came in to force in 2006. The law defines acts of domestic violence as illegal and punishable by law. The issue of domestic violence was addressed by one EAR researcher in India. Aseem Asha Usman is based at the Delhi state government's Gender Resource Centre (GRC) in Seelampur in the north east of Delhi. The State Government's Department of Social Welfare-funded initiative has become a community space where local women can become involved in various programmes and activities. Their active involvement has impacted not only on their own lives but also on the community itself.⁶ The GRC opened in April 2007 and is run by the locally active NGO Datamation Foundation. However, the center is monitored by the government. The centre runs five main programmes related to; health, legal counseling, vocational training, non-formal education and media development.

Since early 2007 the GRC has been active in the use of and training in various new media packages including digital storytelling. The centre also offers a Media Development Course (MDC), which is a digital design based course. The idea of the course is that training local women in a range of technology-related skills will increase their potential to find paid employment in their local community. Some questions arise about where and what kinds of jobs would be socially acceptable for local women. Indeed, it raises the important question as to why women should be limited to employment opportunities in their 'local community'. This leads itself to a complicated discussion about women's mobility in the community and once again gendered expectations about what types of work are acceptable and where.⁷

Despite the geographical limitations and controversy of this objective, the GRC and programmes such as the media

⁶ See MS Kiran 'Challenging an asymmetric power relation: Media development for social change in Seelampur, India' In Watkins & Tacchi (Eds.) 2008. *Participatory Content Creation for Development: Principles and Practices*. New Delhi. UNESCO.

⁷ Ibid.

development course provide avenues for women to access employment opportunities which are not otherwise available to them.

Raising Community Awareness

Women from the GRC joined a programme run by a local NGO, 'Sur Nirman Educational & Cultural society'. The programme is called Shakti Mahila Panchayat Sangh and involves raising awareness of the rights of women affected by domestic violence, eve-teasing,⁸ dowry murder, rape and other forms of oppression against women. The campaign against domestic violence is called Mumkin Hai or 'it's possible'.⁹

After joining the programme, the women from the GRC met with a young woman Nisha,¹⁰ who was a victim of domestic violence. Nisha's experience of domestic violence highlights the connection between financial hardship and abuse against women in India. Nisha was from a poor family, as a result her parents arranged for her to be married to a man 20 years her senior. The man already had a wife, and her new husband beat her. A local Mullah (priest) became the mediator and began to collect money from her husband to compensate her husband's first wife, and continued to do so, causing financial hardship for Nisha as the second wife. Nisha said 'the mediator took money from my husband for my husband's first wife as compensation for our marriage, but he used to come to our home even after the marriage to take money from my husband'.

The GRC women showed Nisha some of their digital stories including a story about the impact of domestic violence on children based on the true story of a local girl who we'll call Sultana. Her young life has included many hardships, including witnessing her mother being physically abused by Sultana's father. A neighbour and friend of Sultana made a digital story reflecting Sultana's hardship and how she was able to continue her education. The digital story was called Shama Jo Jal Uthi (The Flame That Burned).

Sultana began making her own digital story entitled Ma Banungi Ilm Ki Shama (Mother, I will become the light of knowledge). The script for her story reveals how her lack of education has affected her life:

⁸ Eve-teasing is a euphemistic term used to describe the sexual harassment of women by men in public places. It can range in severity from merely verbal to physical assaults/molestation.

⁹ Usman, field notes September 2007, India.

¹⁰ Not her real name. All names of victims or witnesses of domestic violence in this chapter have been changed.

After wasting the first 15 years of my life I was determined that I would start studying. I believe that as the hand is useless without the fingers in the same manner without study a person's life is a waste and then I found the GRC. This is a centre where women can come and learn how to sew clothes and they can even take primary education. At first I did not know how to hold a pen, when I wrote my name in Hindi, I felt like I was the happiest soul on earth. I want to learn more and more and to share my knowledge with others who unfortunately have not had the chance to study like me. I will become the light of knowledge for them.¹¹

Sultana subsequently began attending the GRC, and enrolled in Hindi, English and mathematics courses. Despite her enthusiasm, Sultana did not complete the story which she started in July 2007. She later also discontinued her informal education courses. While she attended the GRC a few more times she never became a regular visitor to the centre. Her story shows that the GRC (and other gender based initiatives) have potential to involve women and to spread important social messages throughout the wider society. At the same time Sultana herself still has to overcome the obstacles in her everyday life and at this time this means she is not able to attend the GRC and participate in regular activities.

The social Impact of digital story telling about Domestic Violence

The first example of a digital story about domestic violence, as mentioned above, was seen as less controversial as it was told from the point of view of children who had witnessed the violence. This gradually helped to broaden the issue of domestic violence to include all acts of discrimination against women. Further, the female students who attended the GRC became activists and started sending text messages to fellow community members about domestic violence.

Violence against women campaigns resulted in the formation of new and important social networks, including the Sur Nirman and Dr Zakir Hussein Foundation. Sur Nirman offered its expertise on domestic violence; Dr Zakir Hussein Foundation offered financial assistance for an interschool workshop on content creation and it encouraged students and teachers from their schools to attend a local community workshop. Men and women of all ages participated in the discussions that were triggered by the digital story screenings on various issues related to their community, including violence against women.

¹¹ Extract from Sultana's digital story script, Usman field notes, July 2007, India.



Local women in Seelampur, New Delhi have started voicing their views against domestic violence either by lending their voice to the actual digital stories or by becoming active participants in community discussions.

For the victims of abuse, the 'outing' of the issue has meant that they have had opportunities to tell their story. Local women have started voicing their views against domestic violence in the community, either by lending their voices and stories to the actual digital stories or by becoming active participants in community discussions. A few women have also been able to get legal assistance. Some have come to GRC's lawyer for legal counselling assistance, while others sought advice from Sur Nirman.

The GRC's social networking with local NGOs has brought local content to a wider audience. It is unrealistic to assume that once a digital story is screened in public the social problem ceases to exist. Unfortunately, some women still face the reality of domestic violence in their daily lives. Instead, with these wider networking and social support channels comes the possibility of social dialogue on these issues. Once the content makes its way out of the gendered space of the GRC into the wider social context, the message is heard by a wider audience, and the content has the potential to become identified and even owned by the community, rather than merely the individual whose voice is in the recording. The stories may become community stories.

The creation of content about socially taboo topics including domestic violence can be brought into social forums via this type of content creation and delivery. The fact that the stories of domestic violence were told from the point of view of children made them less confronting for the community. It was through this less confrontational approach that allowed this sensitive topic to make

its way to a wider audience. The example of the GRC shows how content and delivery of local messages generates dialogue in the community, even dialogue about highly sensitive (often taboo) social issues. There have been community screenings of the digital story about domestic violence and community discussions where men have started to think about and respond to the messages.¹²

Education

The qualitative research methodology employed in *Finding a Voice* has allowed a unique insight into social factors shaping gender inequities and literacy throughout South Asia. The project's qualitative approach offers a detailed in-depth understanding of how education is perceived and how gender beliefs underpin the opportunities available to males and females in different communities. This information can inform policy makers and donor agencies about ways to best strategize and effectively address prevailing gender inequities in terms of literacy levels.

When a girl reaches the age of 20-22, her parents start to search for a boy for her to marry. Most of the parents in Nepal think that an intermediate level of education is sufficient for their daughters. In many cases parents invest in their daughters' education because they feel it will help them to find her a good and educated husband. Before they marry, women do not know about their husbands' economic and social background, or where they will live after the marriage. For this reason, normally a Nepalese woman cannot make plans for her future before she is married. Suppose I am interested in one particular field, but after marriage my husband doesn't like it - then I have no choice but to change my career and follow my husband.¹³

In her field work in Jhuwani village Nepal, Adhikari found that because of local gender beliefs people are less motivated to invest their money in girls' education.

Parents are not ready to spend extra money on their daughter's education and employment. They will be ready to sell their land or ready to take loan out to invest in their son's education and foreign employment but in the case of a daughter - they do not like to spend their money. If there is a school or college near the family home she might be able to study otherwise she will be compelled to stop her education.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Adhikari, interview transcript, March 2007, Nepal..

Due to the stark inequities in terms of access and utilisation of educational facilities, the community libraries take on important and meaningful social roles. Similar to the informal learning courses offered to the women at the GRC in Seelampur, India (discussed above) the community libraries in Jhuwani and Agyauli have become places where women can take part in educational programmes. At the same time the libraries provide extensive reading material and offer a public space for the sharing of knowledge. One local library in Agyauli village has provided literacy classes for more than 800 lower caste women over the last three years. The library also houses appropriate reading material (big letter books) in simple Nepali language for those who are in the transitional stage between illiteracy and literacy.

The discrepancies in educational opportunities are known in other districts in Nepal. In Rupandehi district EAR researcher Deepak Koirala learned about the value and social significance attached to male and female education. Koirala found that if local women are educated then they are normally sent to the free government schools and the boys in the family will be sent to the more expensive private schools. His respondents told him that this is because parents think that girls will leave the family home after marriage while boys have the responsibility of staying with their parents and will be the ones who take care of their parents in their old age. Sometimes girls are not sent to school at all but instead are expected to stay home and do the household chores or work in the field.

Koirala conducted detailed ethnographic research at the Madhawiliya Community Learning Centre (CLC) looking into the social significance of informal education courses. The aim of the CLC is to provide informal education to the marginalised groups in the community. Up until recently, only women enrolled in the CLC's literacy course. This is significant when considering the comparatively lower female literacy rates in Nepal compared to males.¹⁴ Through his role as a local ethnographic action researcher, Koirala was able to understand the importance of the CLC for the local community. He was able to map this social story by listening to the voices of local women who told him how their lives had changed as a result of participating in the informal education course at the CLC.

¹⁴Male 55.1% and female 24.9% (Acharya, 1994: 478).

The women told me how after taking part in the informal education course at the CLC they understand they should send their children to school on time. They know more about the importance of saving their money and have formed their own saving and credit groups for that purpose. They know they cannot just approach anyone for a loan as they did in the past whereby people used to cheat them because they could not read the details of the loan. They know about health issues and can write their own name and the name of their village. They can now ask the bus conductor for their change before exiting the bus. They can calculate the money when they buy vegetables at the market and they can keep a record of the money, which has been sent from abroad. They were not able to do this one year ago when I met these women for the first time. They are very proud of their achievements.¹⁵

After working with Koirala for more than a year, some female participants of the informal education course decided to make a digital story to coincide with the World Literacy Day celebrations. The digital story was called “Changes after reading letters” and the short film focused on how women's lives have changed as a result of their learning to read and write. Various people were involved in the making of the digital story, including community members; CLC members and instructors; Koirala and a UNESCO field officer. The group invited local women to share their personal experiences about how their lives have changed as a result of taking part in the informal education course. The women enjoyed telling their 'success' stories and displayed a sense of pride in their accomplishments over the past twelve months.

Through in-depth interviews and discussions with community men and women in Nepal, both Adhikari and Koirala have uncovered ways in which formal inequities in access to education have in part been combated by informal educational learning programmes. These examples show that local Nepalese women are enthusiastic to learn to read and write and they utilize their spare time attending literacy courses. The overall national and international response to unequal literacy levels between males and females has hitherto focused on informing people about the importance of females attending formal educational institutions. While it is no doubt important to continue the struggle to increase the number of females accessing formal education, such structural change will take time. In the mean time these informal learning centres have the potential to significantly change the lives of local women, as we

¹⁵ Koirala, field note, October 2007, Nepal.



Research in Nepal has uncovered ways in which formal inequities in access to education have been in part combated by informal educational learning programmes.

saw in the case of the women who learnt to read and write at the CLC. Additionally, literacy achieved through non-formal education could facilitate the next generation to enter formal schooling.

At the same time the women's voices on the CLC's digital story reveal an important social fact about the state of literacy and gender in rural communities in Nepal. They show how even now women still lack the same opportunities to education as men. One could interpret the message as a powerful gender statement or reminder that if things do not change – in terms of more widespread answers to these important inequities surrounding literacy – then the next generation of local women's voices will also be heard on digital stories as women who have also missed out on their right to an education.

Health

Across the various research sites, data shows that, in certain communities women have limited or less access to sufficient health care. Below is an excerpt from an interview that EAR researcher Adhikari conducted with a woman in her community. The respondent describes her second childbirth experience:

When I gave birth to my second child I experienced real physical difficulty because the placenta did not come out, even after many hours. The family members and neighbors were acting crazy, getting me to drink the water of Nanglo¹⁶ washed water. They used a spade because they believed this would make the placenta come out. When it was done I started bleeding. I really bled a lot. I was about to lose my life.¹⁷

¹⁶Nanglo is used to filter rice and other grains.

¹⁷Adhikari, field notes, September 2007, Nepal.

The issue of reproductive health and women's access to trained medical professionals is important for women in village Nepal. Access to health services and information, especially in regards to reproductive health, poses a significant challenge for local women. The community people, library staff, managers and volunteers are all too aware of the seriousness of the health issues in the community. The library has a weekly health clinic specifically for women, which focuses on reproductive health. The library also hosts women's health camps and offers basic treatment for pregnant women.

The community library also operates an ambulance which is crucial in medical emergencies. Prior to the library's ambulance service there was no facility in the village to bring people safely to hospital. The transportation service of the ambulance is critical in Jhuwani as public transportation methods such as taxis or rickshaw do not exist.



By providing healthcare services to women, community libraries in Nepal have managed to strengthen participation of women in many literacy activities.

The library offers health care to both men and women in the form of a free dental camp, tuberculosis and HIV awareness campaigns and an eye camp. It is through their membership and involvement in the community library that women access important medical support which is otherwise inaccessible or unaffordable.

Adhikari talked at length with women about the impact that the issue of access to healthcare has on their lives as we saw in the above quote. Despite the research findings and the detailed experiences that women shared with Adhikari, the library is not financially in a position to add additional medical services to cater

for local women. While the research has uncovered some important insights into the ramifications for women who lack access to health care, the solution to this important social concern has not yet been found. This example highlights one of the important realities of conducting ethnographic action research. On the one hand, it uncovers many important social inequities in the community, but the action component of the research poses its own challenges, including whose responsibility it is to act, who should fund such programmes, and, indeed, which programmes should be given priority.

The potential to have important social issues aired in public domains was discussed above in the example of the GRC and the issue of domestic violence. Similarly, the community library has contemplated making a digital story focusing on some of the basic health issues in the community in an attempt to raise awareness in the wider society. One idea they discussed was to make a digital story about the library's eye camp. It will be interesting to see whether or not this digital story eventuates and, further, what kind of response it elicits in the community. The case of the library and its health programmes illustrates the complexities and 'messiness' inherent to Ethnographic Action Research. It points to a gap between what is learned and the ever more difficult question that arises; what to do with what has been uncovered.

The social issues hampering women's access to proper health care is not just evident in Nepal. In his work in Juvvalapalem village in India, local EAR researcher Srinivas Bangaru identified the issues surrounding women's access to healthcare. He identifies 'access to healthcare facilities' as one of the key issues which needs to be addressed in the community. His field notes describe one of the key concerns being that women are required to travel to neighbouring villages for maternity and gynecological medical care. This adversity in the form of distance actually acts as a disincentive for the local women to seek this much-needed health care. In his field work observations, he details the distances that women have to travel in order to seek medical attention.

For maternity services, women have to go to Kalla Mandal which is 9kms from the Juvvalapalem. Women from the Cherukumilli and I-Bhimavaram have to go to Aakiveedu Mandal which is 7 kms away from the villages. Women have to go to the near by towns to visit the gynecologists.¹⁸

¹⁸Bangaru, field notes June 2007, India.

The majority of local women do not have access to hospitals, which means they have to travel to nearby towns to address their gynecological concerns. Many of the women do not access western medical treatment some say because of their traditional beliefs about healing. Through his research, Bangaru learned about the issues pertaining to women's health from the staff and volunteers at the Byrraju Foundation's health centers. They told him how there are many women who do not go to the village but instead remain in their homes and keep their problems to themselves. One of the reasons that they hesitate to go to hospital is because of affordability. The costs associated with access to this medicine include the costly doctor's fee. They also include the cost of transportation for the 14 kilometre round trip which they need to make to access medicine. By contrast, the Byrraju Foundation Health Centres offer health services for a nominal fee of 5 rupees.

Telemedicine and Ashwini Centers

The Byrraju Foundation provides health care for rural people through its Health Centers. In addition to gender health services, the health unit particularly focuses on tuberculosis, epilepsy and diabetes. *Finding a Voice* was involved in three villages with the community TV project Ankuram TV. Additionally, the same villages also have Ashwini Centers and Health Centers. Telemedicine is conducted at the Ashwini Centers every fortnight (sometimes more if need arises).

Telemedicine is conducted twice a month in each village in an effort to mobilise women from the village to attend telemedicine programmes. Through these telemedicine programmes women can get treatment for their gynecologic problems. For the less poor groups of women in the community, who can afford the cost of attending a Private Hospital, they travel to a nearby urban centre, Bhimavaram.

Health Centers have Village Coordinator Officers (VCOs) trained nurses working at the village level. The VCOs goes door-to-door to inform about the scheduled day, time, and the doctor's specialisation. The doctor will be sitting in a hospital (a medical college) 75 to 80 kms from the villages answering the patient's questions. Doctors with different specialisation would be available on different scheduled days. This has been useful for the women particularly for the treatment of gynecological problems and skin diseases. In addition to the three villages in which the Ashwini Centers are located, they each cater to 3 or 4 neighbouring villages.

While these programmes are addressing women's health concerns, on a basic level local women are still reluctant to take



Many women are still reluctant to take part in telemedicine programmes because they say they can only get prescriptions but not medicines which they cannot afford.

part because they say they can only get prescriptions but not medicines which they cannot afford. However, some women do utilize the telemedicine facility, since public health care facilities are not available to or feasible for them. They lack specialized services, and are expensive.

Potentials for empowerment

If one of the main challenges facing EAR researchers is trying to work out what to do with the social inequities they uncover, then one of the ultimate rewards is hearing how people turn their lives around. Naturally not everyone is able to change their lives through learning new skills. However, some women have managed to do just that. The following two examples are 'success stories' from the *Finding a Voice* project which show how local women have taken advantage of training courses in their local centres which has led to a positive change in their immediate lives. In both stories, women overcome the social disadvantages facing them in their communities, most of which we have discussed at length in this chapter, to make a better life for themselves.

Bamiya and her life changing choice

This example is derived from Adhikari's work as a researcher at Jhuwani Community Library, Chitwan district, Nepal.

Thirty-two year old Bamiya is a regular reader at the Jhuwani Community Library (in Chitwan District, Nepal). She used to be illiterate but that changed five years ago when the government ran a literacy programme for adult members of the community. After taking part in the literacy course, Bamiya was still not able to read

all books but she could read thin books with big letters. She told Adhikari about a book she had just finished reading. The book is a true story about a woman who used to eat betel nut during the day. Her small daughter also ate betel nut regularly. Both the mother and daughter got mouth cancer. Bamiya herself also used to eat betel nut regularly. She said she was not aware of the harmfulness of betel nut. When she had some money she used to go to the shop and buy betel nut. After reading this book and learning about the harmfulness of these betel nuts she stopped eating them.¹⁹

The books Bamiya reads are short but interesting and informative. She doesn't have much free time to read, but she sometimes takes out a book to read while grazing the cattle. She shares her new knowledge with her friends and also motivates them to read.

Bamiya has access to big letter books from JCL. In fact JCL has more than 1000 big letter and simple Nepali language books which cover a range of subject areas including farming, diseases and child care. It also has books with information about how to write an application for citizenship to the district office as well as other practical knowledge about how to manage a saving and credit group and how to run a co-operative. A digital story of Bamiya was screened on the television at JCL using a DVD player. More than fifty people saw the digital story and afterwards they expressed great interest. They recognised that Bamiya's story raised some important issues in their own communities. Many were enticed to follow the reading habits of Bamiya.

Bamiya became something of a local folk hero and an inspiration to other illiterate women in the community. Bamiya's story shows how her connection to JCL opens up opportunities for her to tell her story and share her new knowledge with other neo-literate and literate people in her community. This story illustrates how the library is a place for women to learn and read the big letter books. It is also a place where community people can learn and share in Bamiya's experience through the creation and screening of her digital story.

For Bamiya, several factors contribute to her ability to turn her life around. It is the combination of her desire to change her life, the running of the government's literacy course and the availability of

¹⁹ Sections of this example will be republished in Kirsty Martin and Sita Adhikari (May 2008) 'More than books; A study of women's participation in Community Libraries in rural Nepal' in *Journal of International Women's Studies*. Vol 9. No 3. www.bridgew.edu/soas/jiws/

big letter books at the village library that make it possible for her to continue to learn to read and write. It was through the interest of the EAR researcher Adhikari that Bamiya's story became a social story to inspire other illiterate and neo-literate women in the community and throughout the country. In this case the EAR researcher's role includes; social researcher, content facilitator and social educator. It is the uniqueness of this role which in this case helped spread the social message of Bamiya's personal experience.

Women coming out their shells

The following example is based on field notes by Aseem Asha Usman an EAR researcher based at the Gender Resource Centre in Jafrabad, India.

Poornima is a jeans factory owner in Jafrabad. She has experienced many hardships in her early life including leaving school after the 5th grade, getting married at the age of 15 and divorced at age 22 (due to domestic violence). She was left a single mother of two. Despite these early obstacles she was able to overcome these adversities. She actively began participating in local self-help groups made by Datamation Foundation in Babul Uloom Madarssa. She eventually left and started her own small business making jeans. She did all the groundwork for the business herself including research and design.

A profile of her in a community newspaper led the Media Development students to make a digital story about Poornima's life:

Seelampur community women liked the success story of Poornima a lot. Local people demanded to make the digital story based on her success story via their letters to a local newspaper. Men were also surprised to see the step by step progress of this lady living in the same community through this digital story.²⁰

The students went to her factory to meet with her and conduct research, finally making a story that outlines 'not only the achievements of the woman but also tells about her pains, aspirations, ambitions and even problems she overcomes to achieve even more success in her business.' Poornima was particularly inspirational to the students because she is a woman 'from [their] community who broke the barriers and became successful. Being Hindu she made her identity in the trade where

²⁰Usman field notes, July 2007, India.

Muslim males are dominant.²¹

After being the subject of a digital story, Poornima attended the centre to learn how to make her own digital story:

Poornima is the owner of a local jeans factory. She is the only non Muslim women working with most of the Muslim fellows in the area. She sells jeans produced in her factory. She is the member of local SHG. She needs money to develop her business. She wants to make a digital story in which she wants to show her success story on the other hand she wants to show her digital story to the government or loan agencies to sanction credits for developing her business.²²

Poornima visited the GRC to record the voice over for the digital story of her life, which was being made by the students at the GRC. Poornima herself has not made her own digital story. As with Bamiya, it is others who are impressed about the choices she has made and in particular her ability to overcome adversity. It is others who are inspired by these extraordinary women in their communities who decide to share their stories and tell others about the way women can change their circumstances and have a better life.

While they are referred to as 'success stories' it is equally important to remember that they are not fairytales. While Bamiya was able to increase her knowledge through her ability to read and write her daily activities remain the same. In the case of Poornima we recall the students wanted to share her story in its entirety and show that her life did not magically change and that she encountered many obstacles. One of the main benefits that Ethnographic Action Research can bring to the forefront is the whole 'messiness' of local experiences. Even the stories of ultimate social victory for women remind us how much further women have to go to achieve social equity in their communities.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how *Finding a Voice* used research and content creation facilities to raise pertinent gender inequities for social discussion in different communities. The ethnographic research process is by its very nature broad and we have seen how some important social issues are not able to be addressed due to financial, social, personnel or other constraints. The constraints on resources determines which research themes and findings will be

²¹Ibid. August 2007.

²²Ibid. June 2007.

made into content which of course begs the question who chooses these and what are the social ramifications of the issues that don't get 'seen' or the voices that don't get 'heard'. What and how do researchers fulfill this huge social responsibility and obligation to honour the experiences and stories that local women and men share with them? The examples presented in this chapter have identified a gap between the research process in terms of identifying issues and thinking through the action component of Ethnographic Action Research which asks the question what should we 'do' with what we learn?

On the whole, there has been strong support from organisations and from management groups to create content in the form of digital storytelling. While it is no doubt possible to create content separate from the initiatives, these examples show how with support from the centres, community organisations, and local people, local content is able to reach wider audiences and has the potential to entice a wider social dialogue.

Through introducing content creation initiatives across the various sites, local women and men have found their own voice and told their own personal stories. These stories may become social narratives and can provide opportunities for social engagement and community ownership which transforms the personal into the social. At the same time even the success stories that we mentioned at the close of the chapter show how creating content is not the end in itself. The content creation and delivery process does not 'solve' social dilemmas. Instead, like the research it provides local communities with opportunities to engage with important issues and possibly address or change gendered behaviours and social traditions in the community.



Sustainability

Emma Baulch

Introduction

One normally understands sustainability as a term connoting the capacity of an initiative to raise or seek funds that enable it to continue. However, as we shall show in this chapter, in the initiatives with which we work, the question of how to sustain is a multifaceted one. It is more, that is, than simply a question of how the initiatives can continue to be financially sustainable. There is a need, rather, to find ways to marry social (including organisational), technical and financial sustainability.

All of the initiatives with which we work include among their aims and objectives the use of ICT to fulfil locals' communication and information needs. The specific utilities of the initiative, its place in the local communicative ecology, ought to help empower local people to get information they need and to speak out. All of them also acknowledge that certain modes of locals' engagements with the initiative, or modes of participation, can help to achieve these aims.

How to elicit engagements and build modes of participation that encourage locals to need, use and value the initiative is discussed in chapter 3 on participation. In this chapter, we are specifically concerned with how, after seed funds cease, the initiatives can endure. It draws on our discussions with all the researchers about their views of the question of sustainability, based on their experiences in the field.

Notably, in our discussions, the matter of financial sustainability did not feature highly. The relative lack of importance the local researchers attribute to financial sustainability may well be a feature of their position as community facilitators, and not managers responsible for seeking and securing funds. Although the researchers, whose observations form the basis of this chapter, regard it as relatively unimportant, we recognise the need to discuss the matter of financial sustainability. We do so in the final section under the theme of 'partnership', by highlighting some of the innovative and sustainable ways that one initiative, Jhuwani in Nepal, has sought the necessary funds to keep going.

In the first two sections, our emphasis is on social sustainability. In the researchers' views, social sustainability – building an initiative that local people feel they need and are keen to sustain – is an urgent and complex one, and should occupy prime place in a chapter which seeks to reflect on and share our collective thinking about sustainability in *Finding a Voice*.

In the first section, we highlight examples of how some initiatives have devised modes of participation by which local people become aware of the value of digital literacy (at the very least using the internet to gain information) to poverty reduction efforts.

In the second section, we present examples of how they have devised managerial systems that help the initiative sustain by involving community members in managerial decision making, and by making effective use of volunteers.

The examples we present, however, offer no easy solutions. Rather, they underscore the complexity of the question of sustaining the initiatives' efforts to facilitate poor people's engagements with ICTs. How must poor people participate in the initiative in order for it to meet agreed indicators of social sustainability? Is it possible to concomitantly elicit satisfactory modes of poor people's participation, build sustainable management systems, and secure funds to support overheads such as electricity and internet connections?

Participation for sustainability

In this section we shall discuss the model of participation developed by our partners in Indonesia, Partnerships for e-Prosperity for the Poor. This model was successful, to a large extent, in building a sense among locals of the specific utilities and value of the initiatives, and a sense that they have a stake in the initiatives' sustainability. As we shall discuss, the *PePP* model in certain regards proved to be a quite successful example of 'top down participation',

'where participation constitutes "insiders" learning what "outsiders" want to hear', as mentioned in chapter two of this book.

As a number of the Indonesian EAR researchers have noted, the 'need' for internet among poor villagers was determined not by the villagers themselves, but by bureaucrats at the national level. For example, in his initial field report, known as an MDS (Mengenal Desa Sendiri: Know Your Own Village) in the PePP program, the facilitator from Pabelan, Suhardi, commented that "the biggest challenge for the telecentre at Pabelan has been to try to find ways for the locals to need the internet facilities that came to the village by way of ICT4PR's top down approach" In a similar report, the facilitator from Muneng, Yayak, observed:

The people of Muneng never felt like they really needed the internet. The host organisation was never told about then plan to establish a telecentre at Muneng.... In order to get them using the telecentre to solve their problems it was decided that community needed to be empowered in a participatory way.

It was then the EAR researchers' task to organise locals' relations with the initiatives in such a way that they came to see its resources as valuable and useful; to see it as something that needs to be sustained. In the cases we present, Muneng and Pabelan, there were some weaknesses in the ways this model has been applied, as we shall also discuss below. However, our primary stress here is to highlight EAR researchers' efforts in Pabelan and Muneng to organise community-initiative relations that successfully demonstrated to local people the how the internet could be put to good use in generating income.

The PePP model

Between late 2004 and late 2007, the Indonesia National Development Planning Agency (Bappenas) and UNDP implemented Partnerships for e-Prosperity for the Poor (PePP).

PePP envisions poor communities empowered with access to information, actively communicate their needs and concerns, and help themselves improve their livelihoods. The project aims to empower poor communities to utilise information and communication technologies (ICT) for their access to basic social services and economic activities, thus contributing to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. During the course of its three year term, PePP, a USD 997,645 project, established six telecentre pilot projects on Java, Sulawesi and in Irian Jaya.

The four following objectives guided the work of PePP:

- To empower and mobilise poor communities for economic activities and accessing social services through better access to information and communication
- To forge strategic partnerships in bringing individual efforts together for the benefit of the poor communities
- To establish multi-purpose community development telecentres to provide poor communities with access to information, and to be a channel through which partners can bring services and opportunities
- To draw on and disseminate the best practices and lessons learned from the pilot projects in order to raise awareness of the applicability and potential of ICT for poverty reduction, thus contributing to the formulation of national / regional policy and replication of successful implementation of ICT for poverty reduction activities¹

In this section, we are concerned with the first objective, namely, the model PePP used to reach out to poor people, to facilitate activities among them that somehow engaged telecentre facilities and were relevant to the overall project of poverty reduction. In the PePP model, this process is referred to as infomobilisation, and community facilitators/ EAR researchers as infomobilisers. Infomobilisation combines Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and EAR. It makes use of some key EAR concepts (such as communicative ecologies), but does not adopt EAR wholesale.

Infomobilisation commenced with training sessions for fresh recruits, all of whom were familiar with PRA but not with EAR. Following the trainings, they then applied participatory techniques such as mappings to gain knowledge of the local communities' profiles of themselves, their views of village history and geography, and of local problems and potentials, and their ideas about the kinds of information needed to help solve those problems or uplift those potentials.

On the basis of these community profiles, community groups (some of them pre-existing and some newly formed) submitted proposals of activities that engaged the telecentres' facilities to be funded by PePP and facilitated by the infomobiliser.

¹ Amrih, Mulya (2006). 'Partnerships for e-Prosperity for the Poor (Pe-PP):Mid-term review report'



School children using the telecentre in Muneng. Participation increased after some community members started to feel like the telecentre was 'their' place.

Among the most successful of these groups is that hailing from Muneng, a youth group called the GPTK (Gabungan Pemuda Terampil dan Kreatif: Creative and Skilled Youth group). We measure success by the capacity of the groups to sustain their activities and their relations with the telecentre. We dedicate this section to discussing the evolution of this group's relations with the telecentre, its context and background, and to highlighting some of the ways in which these relations may be deemed successful in the context of the PePP program. We also discuss, however, some of the further questions these successes open up, pointing to the intricately complicated nature of efforts to measure and plan for sustainability.

The Muneng Telecenter is hosted by a farmers' co-operative which was chosen as the host after winning first prize in a competition of farmers' co-operatives across the country. Established in 1998, Kelompok Tani Madu Rasa has been involved in producing organic fertilizer and offering credit to members who want to purchase seeds and fertilizer and pesticide, etc. It has a revolving fund, and is responsible for marketing its members' agricultural products. The choice of this co-operative as host of the telecentre was problematic for, as soon became clear to the telecentre staff, the head of the co-op, Pak Narji, was not popular. This made many people hesitant to come to the telecentre, for the head of this group was allegedly corrupt and the group's finances far from transparent. Due to general dissatisfaction with this group, most farmers chose not to be a part of it, opting to buy unsubsidised input on the open market and relying on informal, although regular, gatherings of farmers at roadside stalls for information about crops, markets, pests etc..

One of the primary defining features of poverty in Muneng is landlessness or minuscule holdings. In order to survive, most farmers rely on a few farmers with large holdings, for whom they labour or on whose land they share crop. These well – off farmers are also important sources of information for smaller or landless farmers, and often recognised as 'community leaders'. These community leaders, being perceived as information sources, are often implicated in the dissemination of interesting information, about political candidates or new varieties of seeds, pesticides etc, for example.

Clearly then, poor farmers' in Muneng had an urgent need for alternative, uninterested sources of information about agricultural inputs. However, despite its capacity to provide such information, the telecentre was initially seen as the property of Kelompok Tani Madu Rasa, and poor farmers were hesitant to visit it, or be associated in any way with it. For this reason, in 2005, the newly appointed infomobiliser was not able to solicit the co-operation of locals to carry out the initial survey, and was therefore unable to facilitate the formation of community groups.

Rather than with poor farmer groups, then, in its first year the Muneng telecentre worked with a number of individual farmers. Telecenter staff worked with a local melon farmer to obtain information from the internet about planting and tending melons to increase yields. They worked with cattle owners to obtain information from the internet about how to make feed to fatten cattle. Thirdly, they worked with a newly established youth group which undertook income generating ventures using local products.

Unlike the poor farmers, these people were willing to come to the telecentre to seek information. The value of this information became evident to all when Pak Sartono's cattle got fatter, Pak Sukad's melon yield increased, and in 2006 the youth group, the GPTK won an award from the UN for its very successful cricket raising business. In fact, so successful is the cricket raising business that all the group members have been able to purchase motorbikes and mobile phones with the money they have made.

Currently, GPTKs activities include rosella farming, gecko raising, marketing bamboo baskets (locally made), and they have rented various pieces of fallow land around the village with the aim of rehabilitating it by planting bananas and papaya on it. They will sell the fruit and leaves.

As we shall discuss in greater detail in the section on financial sustainability below, since the appointment of a new facilitator,



The Youth Group activities include rosella farming, gecko raising, and marketing bamboo baskets. Here women weaving baskets at Muneng are being filmed.

Gampang Boediyono, in September 2006, GPTK has begun working very closely with the telecentre. At the core of this co-operation is the telecentre's role as facilitator of the GPTK's various income – generating activities, beginning with cricket raising. Specifically, Boediyono has worked with the GPTK to find buyers for their products, ensure the group has the capacity to produced promised quota, and solve technical problems that emerge in the course of building income- generating ventures. The internet has sometimes served as a useful resource in Boediyono's work with the GPTK, but his main concern is not integrating ICTs with existing activities. Rather, it is to build income generating ventures that make use of products that can be produced locally, hence promoting self sufficiency.

Although ICTs are not central to the activities of the group, the GPTK members seem very familiar with, and to have developed a sense of ownership of, the telecentre. Unlike members of other groups, they are not scared to go to the telecentre because they have no history with Pak Narji. Many members are computer and internet literate and go to the telecentre daily to look for information they need for the various group activities.

'Members of our group feel free to go to the telecentre any time they like. We rely on the information we get from the internet to develop our businesses and find partners. We rely on the telecentre because there is no other internet service nearby', said Naryo, head of the GPTK.² Clearly, staff at the Muneng telecentre had successfully elicited the kind of community participation in which

² Field notes from Emma's visit with Budhi in May 2007

digital literacy has become key to the task of poverty reduction. The youth group's reliance on the telecentre's facilities represents a first step towards social sustainability. But it also opens up further unanswered questions about the initiative's capacity to sustain. These questions pertain to, firstly, the telecentre's capacity to engage poor people, and secondly, its capacity to transfer the necessary management skills to those local groups who are digitally literate, and who make good use of the telecentre.

- The youth group indeed rely on the telecentre, and their activities generate income that may be said to reduce poverty, but does it represent the poor villagers that the program aims to reach? Since the appointment of Boediyono, a new infomobiliser, in September 2006, the telecentre has been active establishing new community groups which extend the telecentre's local networks into groups of poor farmers. The telecentre has facilitated various income generating activities with these groups, of which there are seven. However, members of the new groups refuse to visit the telecentre and therefore the links between their income – generating activities and ICTs remain, to their minds, tenuous. They did not have a feel for the use and value of digital literacy, and when we (Emma Baulch and Pepp's community development officer, Budhi Supriatna) visited one of these groups, Madu Manis, in May 2007, they asked us: 'How can the telecentre help us to realize our aspirations?'. In Muneng then, the use and value of ICTs to poverty reduction was clear among some locals in Muneng, intimating the initiative's social sustainability, but not among groups of poor farmers that represent the initiative's target group.
- The youth group may well rely on the telecentre, but does it have the capacity to ensure it can sustain? Does it have the capacity to manage the telecentre and its relations with the regional funding bodies that currently pay for the internet connection? Does it have the capacity to seek funds to cover the electricity costs? Does it have the capacity to train and manage volunteers?

Management and sustainability

In this section we shall discuss two examples. The first example, Pabelan, is meant both as an example of sustainable management systems (by embedding the telecentre's management within pre-existing, local and securely funded NGO), and the questions this example raises for the sustainability of the program's initial social aims. We present the second example, Tansen, as one of successful and sustainable use of local volunteers, requiring transfer of management skills.

Pabelan

The Pabelan telecentre is hosted by an NGO called Badan Pengembangan dan Pemberdayaan Masyarakat (BPPM: Body for the Community Development and Empowerment) that is part of the local Islamic boarding school, Pondok Pabelan. It was established in 2004 as a pilot project. Some initial problems with its establishment, related to top down hierarchical models, and local perceptions that the telecentre was for students or rich people have been described in Robinson³ from which the following quote derives.

The implementation of e-Pabelan reflected established top-down approaches to development and stands in contrast to the project's stated participatory and community based aims. The project was directed from the national level down, opened by the 'mayor' (bupati) and initial 'open' public meetings were dominated by invited officials, village leaders and selected (some villagers claimed) members of the community. All, naturally, showed their support. The result being that the intended beneficiaries were, or perceived themselves as being, excluded from the process. ... From the beneficiary level, attempts to subsequently market the project to the community appeared as little more than an afterthought.

In 2005, the current infomobiliser, Suhardi, undertook an initial survey, using participatory techniques, as mentioned above. As part of this survey, Suhardi undertook three group discussions with ten different groups in the village. The first was to identify 'potentials and problems', the second to map a seasonal calendar and the third to depict as a Venn Diagram various sources of information and their different qualities.

On the basis of this initial survey Suhardi went about inviting villagers to establish learning groups, through which they could engage with the telecentre. He then worked with each group to establish test plots for a variety of agro-fishery ventures, all of which were funded by PePP and called 'research by farmers' and which were fed with technical information by the telecentre. Some of these ventures have succeeded, others not. But all the groups, all of which also have a kind of revolving fund known as *arisan*, by which members take turns at contributing to and winning an aggregate sum of money,

³ Alex J. Robinson (Forthcoming). 'The e-Pabelan National ICT4PR Pilot Project: Experiences and Challenges of Implementation in an Indonesian Context' in Gasco-Hernandez, M. Equiza-López, F. & Acevedo-Ruiz, M. (Eds.). Information Communication Technologies and Human Development: Opportunities and Challenges. Hershey PA: Idea Group Inc.

continue to meet regularly (weekly). The groups use profits that these income – generating schemes yield to buy vouchers, which buy their members' time online at the telecentre.

One outcome of the *PePP-Finding a Voice* partnership was to initiate digital storytelling workshops among telecentre staff and community members in three locations, including Pabelan. Digital stories make use of still photographs and recorded voice to tell stories of about two minutes in length. In Pabelan, most staff and selected members of all the learning groups learned to make these two minute films, using still photographs and recorded narrative to tell a story. In Pabelan, the workshops elicited much enthusiasm among learning groups members. Most of them made Digital stories about their group's research activities or other income generating schemes they are involved in, or personal profiles. In a separate publication dedicated to *Finding a Voice's* content creation activities,⁴ we discuss the significance of community group members' creative engagements with the telecentre through their involvement in content creation training workshops. Here, Pabelan locals' enthusiasm for content creation serves only as background, and our main concern is with the implications of the telecentre's management system for sustainability.

To date, all of the learning groups in Pabelan continue to meet and carry out their income generating activities. Initially, they made good use of the internet to find information about developing their agro-fishery ventures. Learning group members used the profits from their ventures to buy vouchers, which allowed them free internet time every week. Whilst use of the internet's digital facilities among these farmers has dropped off, the groups do continue to meet, and at the recently formed Federation of Learning groups, which meets monthly at the telecentre, attendance is high.⁵

⁴ Emma Baulch and Jerry Watkins (2008). 'Literacy in the Locale: Content Creation in Indonesia'. In Watkins and Tacchi. *Participatory Content Creation for Development*. <http://www.findingavoice.org/publications>

⁵ This intimates that the telecentre has a strong symbolic value for these groups of poor farmers; somehow, they feel they have a stake in the sustainability of the initiative. In his EAR research, Suhardi asked group members what the telecentre meant to them, they consistently replied that they viewed the telecentre as an opportunity to improve their economic position. Indeed, Hardi had successfully applied for funds from PePP to establish the groups' income generating ventures. Soon after their establishment, then, the groups all received aid. In my own visits to the groups I observed that the hope of receiving more aid lived on among group members, and it is possible that this hope animated the Pabelan farmers' solidarity and support for the telecentre. However, other factors may undermine the certainty of this analysis. Firstly, community groups in other places also received aid from PePP, and in these places the hope of being beneficiaries in the future also lived on among community members. But this hope was not enough to

Whether or not the Pabelan telecentre will continue to 'be' now that seed funds have ceased is not the central question at stake. The school may be counted on to continue to cover overheads, for it is a valuable resource for the students and serves as a prime selling point for the school. Some school students use the telecentre extensively. Male students are the most frequent visitors to the centre, according to the telecentre visitor logs. Between seven and nine nightly, members of the learning groups get priority use of the computers.

There are also considerable management skills within the school that can ensure that the initiative is appropriately staffed. Certainly, the Pabelan telecentre is sustainable in the financial and managerial sense. But when the infomobiliser's contract finishes, will the telecentre's links to the groups of poor farmers be sustained? Are the initial aims of the telecentre to serve groups of local poor people, sustainable? Such questions Hardi raised in his final report, prior to the end of his contract in December, when he noted thus:

In an operational sense, the sustainability of the telecentre is not a concern, because it is a part of the BPPM's (Badan Pengembangan dan Pemberdayaan Masyarakat: Body for the Community Development and Empowerment) program. It is highly likely that the telecentre will be subsidised by other project budgets within the BPPM. However, whether the telecentre will be able to sustain its original mandate and mission to reduce poverty is a question that begs our consideration and the development of appropriate strategies.

Tansen

The management system in place at Tansen community media centre in Nepal, provides quite a striking contrast and alternative example to that in Pabelan. In Pabelan, the telecentre is managed by a local NGO, run by groups within the community that are quite distinct from those groups of poor farmers that it was established to serve. The example from Tansen shows how the abovementioned question concerning the sustainability of the centre's original mandate to serve the most marginal groups is resolved when those groups are responsible for managing the centre. It shows, in other

sustain the community groups. Secondly, in Pabelan, although part of a government program, the telecentre is housed in the local Islamic boarding school, which implicates it, perhaps only obliquely, in local religious practice. It may be that the religious connotations of the telecentre's location helped sustain its role as a hub of farmers' gatherings. However, this is mere conjecture and we have no research findings that point to this.

words, how consideration of social sustainability – the capacity of a centre to continue attending to its original mission – needs to include consideration of organisational structure and systems, and the implications of these for how marginalised groups participate in the initiative.

For some years now, volunteers have been an important part of the running to the CMC at Tansen. Initially, volunteers' work for the centre included raising awareness among other community members about the existence of the centre, its mandate and real and potential functions, as well as to alert other managers at the centre of issues emerging in the community, which the centre needs to address. But around 2005, it came to light that the volunteers had become disgruntled about the centre's financial management. They felt that they should be entitled to some monetary incentive, and were suspicious of the perceived lack of transparency in the managing of the centre's funds.



Volunteers in Tansen community multimedia centre now manage the finances and the programmatic directions of the CMC.

In response to the volunteers' complaints, the management structure was altered to include volunteers in the decision-making process and administration of funds. Nowadays, volunteers are responsible for managing the centre's finances and for the programmatic direction of the centre. In late 2005, the management also introduced a commission system for the volunteers who generate revenue for the centre either by video editing, videography or commercial video shoots. By late 2006, CMC had only one paid staff and the rest of the centre's work was undertaken by volunteers.

Further, volunteers make up the majority of the management committee – of seven committee members, four are community

volunteers, and most of them are from poor and marginal groups in the community; they are high school dropouts.

The management of the CMC Tansen provides marginal groups with a forum to voice their opinions and concerns. At first glance, this is an altogether positive development, from the point of view of participation of target groups in determining the running and direction of the centre, ensuring that it is in line with their needs and thereby helping to ensure its social sustainability. However, opening space in the centre's management system for community participation is at once a step towards social sustainability and one that complicates the matter. Whilst such a model of community participation in management does allow people to voice their concerns, it also opens space for political contestation among the marginalised, as became evident at Tansen, as well as space for them to speak in ways that do not serve in logical and rational manner the betterment of the centre, as also displayed there.

The messiness of community participation in management is clear in the Tansen case. Whilst conventional development workers may see this messiness as proof of the 'lack of organisational capacity' among poor and marginal groups of people, we (*Finding a Voice*) view it as an opportunity to cultivate an understanding among the various parties involved in management, concerning their different interests at stake, and how different parties may share the space of centre management and use to realise their different goals.

Partnerships for sustainability

In this section we consider the question of financial sustainability by presenting some examples of how initiatives have sought income to cover overheads by forging partnerships.

Agyauli and Jhuwani

Agyauli and Jhuwani community libraries are two Nepali organisations that work with *Finding a Voice*. Both libraries offer interesting case studies in how partnerships can help sustain an initiative, because both do not depend on one or two national or international donor agencies. Rather, they generate funds from local level partnerships.

For example, Jhuwani community library has forged a strong and multi-faceted relationship with the neighbouring national park. The library is situated in the buffer zone of the Chitwan national park; one of the most frequently visited national parks in the world. Fifty percent of the national park's revenue goes to the Buffer Zone

Council for community development and environmental protection. The Council has used some of this budget to assist Jhuwani Library. It donated the wood needed to construct the library, and provided the sand and stone for construction at a discounted rate. The Council also regularly supports the library's various programs, such as those aimed at women's empowerment, environment awareness program, skill development training.

As well as direct financial aid from the Buffer Zone Council, the library also draws indirect benefit from its location nearby the national park. Some of the many tourists visiting the park display an interest in visiting the village and the library, thereby extending the library's network of sources of financial support. Sometimes, tourists who visit have been willing to fund constructing new library buildings, and many deposit money in the donation box. Many also come with books for the library.

The Agyauli Community Library enjoys a partnership with the District Education Office. The Agyauli community library runs literacy classes, which target lower caste rural women. To date, 850 women have benefited from the library's literacy classes, which are ongoing. The district education office provides the salary for a facilitator of the literacy classes, as well as course books for students.

Chamba

One of *Finding a Voice's* partners is a community media centre in Chamba, in the Indian state of Uttarakhand. This community media centre was established by Havelvaani Samudayik Radio in 2005. However, Havelvaani is not registered by law, and is therefore not eligible to apply for a licence to broadcast. Hevalvaani has therefore forged a fruitful partnership with a registered organisation, AASTHA, which will allow for the broadcast, as well as the production, of community-made content. The Hevalvaani-AASTHA partnership illustrates how such co-operations can help an initiative to sustain not by providing it with additional funds, but by helping it to grow in new directions.

Ideosync, as part of its global communication for development partnership with Equal Access, an INGO, started working with five youth radio groups in the Indian state of Uttarakhand in 2004. Ideosync started by providing training in recording techniques, digital audio and script writing, through a series of workshops. The groups began by narrowcasting programmes with cassette recorders. Then, as part of Equal Access support to the groups, their programmes began to be broadcast on the Worldspace satellite radio network.



Local partnerships between volunteer groups like the ones in Uttarakhand, can enhance and augment each other's effort to achieve its goals.

By 2005, the youth groups initially trained by Ideosync had evolved into Hevalvaani Samudayik Radio, based at Chamba. Currently, Hevalvaani works with Ford Foundation and Ideosync to produce a 52 episode series on Safe Migration, which will combine a radio drama element with voices from the field, and with the American India Foundation, to provide recording inputs for another 52-episode series on HIV awareness.

Until recently then, Havelvaani Samudayik Radio has been responsible for producing, but not for broadcasting, radio programs at Chamba. The radio shows produced by Havelvaani Samudayik Radio have been broadcast on other networks, such as the aforementioned Worldspace Radio Satellite network. However, in 2006, the Indian government introduced community radio licencing policy which allows non-profit organisations to establish community radio stations. But the license can only be obtained by NGOs registered for more than 3 years, and Hevalvaani is yet to be registered. In order to be able to broadcast its content on community radio, Hevalvaani is applying for a licence in partnership with another organisation, AASTHA, with AASTHA supplying its name and background for the application - and Hevalvaani providing the programming, station management and staff.

Whilst still in its infancy, the Hevalvaani-AASTHA partnership is included in this publication as an illustration of how non-financial forms of co-operation between NGOs can help an organisation to evolve, branch out in new directions, to augment the pathways to particular goals. Often, in the rush to financial sustainability, NGOs

are at loggerheads as they compete for funds from large agencies. What this partnership begs us to remember is that community organisations and NGOs often have complementary attributes, and by working together, can enhance and augment each other's effort to achieve its goals, hence help one another to sustain its foundational mission.

Conclusion

We have used this chapter to present *Finding a Voice* research findings around the question of sustainability. Rather than present success stories and solutions, we have chosen to use this chapter to highlight the very disorderly and complex character of the issues pertaining to sustainability. As we have shown in this chapter, each step towards sustainability seems to yield more problems, hence augments several fold the work of the community facilitator. For example, as discussed above, once digital literacy and the will to sustain an initiative has been cultivated, several new problems emerge that beg attention, such as the matter of community capacity, modes of participation, and the availability of funds. The work of sustaining, in other words, is an ongoing one. It is a constant process of solving problems that blossom as an initiative evolves. Rather than arriving at a fixed and certain point, our research suggests, sustaining an initiative is a constant labour of, firstly, attending to the myriad problems that social and financial sustainability entail both in and of themselves and, secondly, attending to the complex question of how to most suitably marry these two.



Take Home Messages

Jo Tacchi and Seema B. Nair

In the introduction to this book, we talk about the difficulty of being conclusive in reporting on our research. This is partly because the communication processes and activities we have been observing need time to embed into ongoing practices, and will adapt and change over time. In place of a 'conclusion' which suggests closure, we'd like to present a series of 'take home messages' which suggest a work in progress. This indicates our desire to see what we have learned to date being discussed in other forums, and used to inform other activities and research. These messages are directed particularly to those we specified as the intended audience for this book. To reiterate, they are program-side policy strategists and decision-makers. We also think these messages will resonate with and be of interest to those who are implementing similar initiatives, and to donor organisations and researchers interested in communication for development.

The two authors of this chapter bring different experiences and perspectives: one is especially keen to maintain a focus on rich research findings and to analyse and learn from them; the other is especially keen to ensure practical uses and applicability of the insights that the research provides. This is fitting because, like the design of *Finding a Voice* itself, with its combination of an ethnographic approach with an action research framework, this collaboration ensures that research and practice are both given due attention. We hope this provides thoughtful and useable 'take home messages' and welcome opportunities to discuss and share our research further.

The take home messages are not necessarily presented in order of importance. There are many potential overlaps that we would like to communicate. It is the potential for cross-fertilisation of the ideas contained in the messages that we would like readers to consider. We have learned that it is in these overlapping spaces and in cross-fertilisation of the ideas, that interesting things start to happen.

The importance of context

The importance of context cannot be overstated. If the first rule of successful property investment is 'location, location, location', the first rule of successful development should be 'context, context, context'. Do those who develop policies and strategies for development fully appreciate the importance of context? As we hope we have demonstrated, this is not just about being culturally sensitive; it's about understanding situations from the perspectives of local people.

Everyday life is not neat and tidy; it's messy with ebbs and flows. To understand local contexts you need to engage with and become immersed in them. Understanding communicative ecologies can help communication initiatives tap into existing channels and flows. It also helps understand relationships. It helps understand the differences in communication and information possibilities and resources available to different groups in communities. It helps to identify barriers to communication and opportunities for overcoming them.

Wider contexts are also important to consider. During the course of *Finding a Voice* larger political situations such as the ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, and the difficult process towards a Constituent Assembly election in Nepal, impacted upon the lives of people in the locations we were observing. In India, new legislation for community radio opened up new possibilities for community-based media groups to work towards broadcasting as well as narrowcasting.

Participation in communication

Participation is challenging but worth the effort. It is important to appreciate its different meanings from different perspectives, and its different applications in different places. Participation in communication initiatives can be much more than a local voice on a radio program – it might mean the power to make or contribute to decision-making, it might mean empowerment for women, it might mean a diversity of voices being circulated and listened to. It might lead to content becoming more relevant,

appropriate and inclusive, it might lead to increased community dialogue and debate, and it might lead to a strong sense of community ownership. We have found that participatory content creation activities can provide interesting examples of participatory development.

All of this suggests that it is worth investing in participatory communication and content creation. Initially, it might be resource intensive, and it requires a shift in relationships. It's not about delivering messages, it's about generating debate. It is difficult to control and unpredictable. It's unsuited to vertical models of communication for development. It requires the implementation of horizontal models.

Building capacities

Capacity building at the grassroots level is important for development to be relevant and have lasting impact and residue. In *Finding a Voice* we did not 'fly in' with solutions and formats. We worked with local people to develop their own solutions and formats. This was through EAR and through participatory content creation training and support. Local researchers developed their own research plans, identified their local issues, fed research findings into the development of their local organisations, and local content creation activities.

Researchers, managers and content creators took part in workshops where we collectively worked through ideas and strategies for developing participatory content creation. These needed to suit their local communities, their organisations, facilities, and distribution opportunities. Content creation strategies were developed locally, adapted as they were tried out, and as new opportunities emerged.

This has built local capacities in such a way that the local initiatives are well placed to be able to understand and improve their practices and increase their local relevance.

Embedded research

There is great value in embedded research, whether this is done as Ethnographic Action Research or some other form of 'barefoot impact assessment'.¹ Not only can it provide useful and useable data to help the initiatives develop in ways that suit local circumstances and respond to local communities'

¹ Birgitte Jallof (2005). 'Assessing community change: Development of a "bare foot" impact assessment methodology'. *Radio Journal: International Studies in broadcast & Audio Media*, 3(1), 21-34.



Local researcher facilitating a group discussion in Kannur, Kerala. Research of this kind provides rare insights into ground realities and helps shapes how the initiative develops.

needs; it can also provide rare insights into what is happening on the ground. These insights are valuable to implementing agencies and funding organisations, who become equal participants alongside local communities in shaping how the initiative develops, led by local knowledge.

Embedded researchers can do a lot through social mobilisation or animation to encourage and maintain participation from local groups, especially the hard to reach. They can also act as an interface or intermediary between new digital technologies and local people, and between the ICT or media initiative and local communities. Participatory research and evaluation is easier with embedded researchers. They can provide regular feedback to local communities.

EAR and any other form of embedded research is only really useful if it improves the effectiveness of the ICT or media initiative itself. A challenge remains for EAR to find better ways to bring research findings to bear on the activities of the initiatives. In some cases it worked well, in others it proved hard to penetrate the decision-making layers of local organisations. Any such embedded research approach requires whole organisation commitment. It is, essentially, a project development methodology. So far it has been easier to implement most effectively within smaller and more flexible organisational structures. Where it works well it allows those initiatives to adapt and innovate in ways that are highly beneficial.

Local content

Local content and local voices are worth promoting and listening to. There remain no excuses for not investing in explorations of local content creation and the promotion of a variety of voices – technologies allow for it, and it helps to generate the kind of dialogue that is widely seen as essential to human development. It places communication at the centre of development and shows how with a considered appreciation of what horizontal communication means, many of the current barriers to participation in development might be overcome.

'Creative engagement' with digital technologies is an aspect of *Finding a Voice* that has been extremely interesting. This promotes an approach that is not foregrounding the training in computer skills that focuses on learning basic office software packages. Rather it foregrounds the concept of digital literacies, and the use of technologies as tools to achieve the expression and communication of local voices. Amongst other things, it helps in many cases to answer the question from local people, 'what's in it for me?' They get to express themselves, individually or as part of a group. It can help to share and grow understandings of issues at the community level, and beyond in some cases. With careful thought about distribution, problems identified in this way can receive responses. This kind of engagement with digital technologies can encourage higher levels of participation.



Creative engagement of technologies and content production can encourage higher levels of participation of local communities.

Mixing media

ICT for development can learn from and be more relevant and effective when linked to community media. Mixing new digital technologies with traditional technologies like radio helps the newer technologies to become accessible and relevant. We are by no means the first to make these points.² We simply want to reemphasise them. UNESCO has long supported community-based media across the world, and needs no persuasion of its relevance. UNESCO's support for the Community multimedia Centre (CMC) model demonstrates its interest in the mixing of traditional and new media at the community level. We have found this to be an effective approach to ICT for development.

One of the key things we believe UNESCO has learned from *Finding a Voice* is the need for a deeper understanding of what participatory communication entails. This is relevant not only to deepen UNESCO's own understanding, but also to help raise crucial issues concerning communication and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

UNESCO has been a crucial supporter of the development and application of Ethnographic Action Research in this and other projects since 2002. Through *Finding a Voice* we can see quite clearly that the EAR process complements and responds to horizontal and participatory communication. It reflects the need to develop an ongoing understanding of audiences as well as the capacity and possibilities for audiences to also become producers of content.

While the practice of pre- and post-project baseline surveys and evaluations continue to dominate the assessment of development initiatives, development actors need to understand that research is not only the prerogative of academics, consultants or practitioners. UNESCO was always keen on this aspect of EAR, on exploring the idea of training local people to become embedded researchers. *Finding a Voice* has demonstrated to us and to UNESCO that when this works, it works extremely well. It is an aspect of EAR that gives it a lot of added value over alternative approaches. At the same time, it can have limitations, some of which we have alluded to. It is one of the aspects of *Finding a Voice* that the authors of this book

² Bruce Girard (Ed.) (2003). *The One to Watch: Radio, New ICTs and Interactivity*. Rome. FAO. <http://comunica.org/1-2-watch/> ; Jeffrey James (2005) 'Technological Blending in the Age of the Internet: A Developing Country Perspective', Telecommunications Policy 29: 285-296.; Alfonso Gumucio Dagron (2001). *Making Waves: Participatory Communication for Social Change*. New York. Rockefeller Foundation. www.comminet.com/en/node/1621

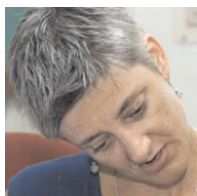
will go on to explore further - a more considered reflection on EAR, and how we might improve it.

Finding a Voice has gone further than earlier applications of EAR³ to demonstrate how this methodology can have clear and direct benefits in terms of developing participatory content creation strategies. A large number of civil society and donor organisations believe that the prolonged presence of an implementing agency within a community is good enough to ensure a deep understanding of local communities and their needs. EAR had disproved this, time and time again as embedded researchers have challenged their own and their organisations' preconceptions.

There is one final take home message that we would like to leave the reader with. It is that change is the constant in all of the above. Contexts change, strategies have to change, new technologies emerge, and uses of technologies change and adapt. Governments change and regulatory and legislative environments change which can prompt different uses of technologies. People, communities and their situations change too. In terms of making technologies socially effective and culturally empowering, what works today may not work tomorrow, and vice versa. Community-based ICT and media initiatives need to constantly monitor the local pulse and always leave room for change.

³ Don Slater and Jo Tacchi (2004). Research: ICT Innovations for Poverty Reduction. New Delhi. UNESCO. http://eprints.qut.edu.au/view/person/Tacchi,_Jo.html

Authors



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Researchers



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Karma Tshering Bhutia has over four years of field and project development experience in the field of ICTs. He worked as the Coordinator for the CMC project and *Finding a Voice* in Nepal.



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Jerry Watkins has a 20-year track-record in communication design and has provided consultancy to some of the world's leading organisations. He researches creative communication and participatory content creation at Swinburne University. Jerry holds a BSc with First Class Honours in Communication and IT from University of Westminster, and a MSc in Human-Computer Interaction from University College London.

Finding a Voice outputs and resources

If you are interested in finding out more about *Finding a Voice*, there are a number of resources published by UNESCO that are freely available:

Ethnographic Action Research Handbook

This is a substantial revision of the earlier Ethnographic Action Research training handbook that was written by Jo Tacchi, Don Slater and Greg Hearn in 2003. This latest version was published by UNESCO as a CD ROM in 2007. You can access it online at www.ear.findingavoice.org or pick up a copy from the UNESCO, New Delhi office.

Participatory Content Creation for Development: Principles and Practices

If you would like to know more about participatory content creation in *Finding a Voice*, this book was published in 2008. Copies are available to download from www.findingavoice.org/en/publications, or pick up a copy from UNESCO, New Delhi office.

Poverty and Digital Inclusion: preliminary findings of the Finding a Voice project

Preliminary research findings were published in 2007. These preliminary findings can be downloaded from www.findingavoice.org/en/publications, or pick up a copy from UNESCO, New Delhi office

Narratives for the Future: Digital Stories about the Millennium Development Goals

This DVD was produced following an initial content creation workshop in India in early 2006. It contains a selection of digital stories produced at, or as a result of the workshop.

Forging Innovations: CMCs in Nepal

A short book about community multimedia centres in Nepal published in 2007. You can download this from the *Finding a Voice* website, or pick up a copy from UNESCO, New Delhi office.

Local Information Networks: Social and Technological Considerations

This study was carried out in 2005 in collaboration with local EAR researchers and this report was published in 2006. It presents three case studies of communication initiatives in India. You can download it from the *Finding a Voice* website or pick up a copy from UNESCO, New Delhi office.

www.findingavoice.org

This is the *Finding a Voice* website. It provides online access to these and other research outputs, along with some of the content produced through the project and details of the project collaborators. This site will be updated with news and new resources as they become available.

Other publications

A range of scholarly papers have been written which report on the research. We provide a current list below. Details of additional publications will be included on the *Finding a Voice* website (www.findingavoice.org/en/publications) as they are published:

Hearn, G., Tacchi, J., Foth, M. and Lennie, J. (forthcoming 2008) *Action Research and New Media: Concepts, Methods and Cases*. New Jersey. Hampton Press.

Martin, K. and Adhikari, S. (May 2008) 'More than books; A study of women's participation in Community Libraries in rural Nepal' in *Journal of International Women's Studies*. Vol 9. No 3. www.bridgew.edu/soas/jiws/

Martin, K, Koirala, D, Pandey, R, Adhikari, S, Prasad Acharya, G, and MS, Kiran. (2007). 'Finding the Local Community in Community Media: Some Stories from Nepal', *Asia Rights*, Issue 8. <http://rspas.anu.edu.au/asiarightsjournal>

Tacchi, J. (forthcoming) 'Finding a Voice: Digital Storytelling as Participatory Development' In John Hartley and Kelly McWilliams (Eds) *Story Circle: Digital Storytelling Around the World*. Blackwell.

Tacchi, J.(2008) 'Voice and Poverty' *Media Development*. 1:2008

Tacchi, J. and Grubb, B. (2007). 'The Case of the e-tuktuk'. *Media International Australia incorporating Culture and Policy* 125. Pp. 71-82.

Tacchi, J. (2007). 'Information, Communication, Poverty and Voice'. In *Moving Targets: Mapping the Paths Between Communication, Technology and Social Change in Communities*. Servaes, J. and Liu, S. (Eds.) Penang. Southbound.

Tacchi, J. and Watkins, J. (2007) '*Participatory Research and Creative Engagement with ICTs*'. In Proceedings ACM Sensys 2007 workshop "Sensing on Everyday Mobile Phones in Support of Participatory Research", the Sensys Conference Hotel, the Swissotel Sydney.

<http://eprints.qut.edu.au/archive/00010616/>

If you would like to request any further information, request copies of the scholarly publications listed above, or share your work with us, please contact Jo Tacchi by email j.tacchi@qut.edu.au or by telephone +61 7 31388178 or by mail: Creative Industries Faculty, Queensland University of Technology, Musk Avenue, Kelvin Grove, QLD 4059, Australia.



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