Participatory Content Creation for Development: Principles and Practices

Research from the Finding a Voice Project
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Edited by Jerry Watkins and Jo Tacchi

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Foreword

In any developing country, a prime ingredient for development is information. How that information is spread among people and how it is understood and used are also crucial, be it the latest research on fertilisers; agriculture or land development; town planning and community building; environment; disaster preparedness; HIV and AIDS; public health; human rights; education; cultural heritage etc. Useful information makes communities aware, and ICTs can promote the free-flow and dissemination of such information in an appropriate and cost-effective manner. Through ICT-based communication, the world really does become a global village where people from one country may learn about happenings in many other countries – as soon as the news breaks. If introduced sensitively and appropriately, moreover, ICTs can help some countries to leapfrog entire stages of economic growth through modernised production systems and increased competitiveness, similar to the Asian Tigers: Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia and South Korea.

But alas! We live in a world marked by contrast. Amidst breathtaking advances in science and technology and consistent economic growth, massive poverty, illiteracy, inequality, and social exclusion persist. Unless marginalised, socially excluded, deprived people are fully involved in the processes of development, the divide will persist and knowledge societies will remain a distant dream. It is a common view that there is a direct correlation between access to ICT and social development. ICT is no longer the consequence of development – rather it is a necessary precondition, with an emphasis on engagement once access is achieved.

This publication is the logical culmination to the Finding a Voice collaboration. It provides substantial evidence of the manner in which ICTs are beneficial to marginalised communities, in the struggle against poverty and the achievement of the UN Millennium Development Goals. Ground-breaking in its approach, the axis of its interventions has been the people themselves. Communities were motivated to keep their senses trained on their own lives and livelihoods; and to use ICTs to support and preserve their culture and traditions, rather than destroy or divert attention from these basics. Experiences demonstrate that by providing the appropriate infrastructure, ICTs can reach rural and remote areas; democratise

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1 Between UNESCO, Queensland University of Technology, UNDP, University of Adelaide, and Swinburne University
the most insensitive and challenged education systems; and make transformative advancements on a national scale. It is also clear that without full consultation with and agreement from the intended primary beneficiaries of efforts to eliminate poverty, illiteracy and powerlessness, success in these endeavours is likely to be unattainable. For uninformed ICT interventions will not only be difficult to sustain, but also will be of doubtful effectiveness in adding value to the intrinsic resources of communities. Through lack of consultation and participation, the potential of ICTs can be defeated before they have ever been applied on the ground.

The *Finding a Voice* project examined the practicalities of stimulating participation through creative engagement with digital ICTs; using convergent social media tools and systems – such as digital storytelling – for the democratisation of society through giving voices to the voiceless. These systems provided unprecedented opportunities for self-expression and the sharing of culture, hopes and dreams through narrowcast, cablecast and other media channels; opportunities which are crucial to peaceful co-existence.

Such practices recall an observation made by Gumurcio Dagron – in a treatise on ICTs and development\(^2\) – that the most interesting ICT for development issue is not the Internet, but the potential for the Internet’s convergence with other electronic media, such as radio and eventually television. This project has documented the extent to which online technologies will have to learn from the fifty-year experience worldwide of community radio, if they are to become the tool for social change (as some believe).

Other strategic practices lead us to the realisation that radio is arguably the best communication tool that development has ever known; especially in the rural context. It is not only an important medium for the diffusion of development information in local languages over widespread and remote geographical areas; it is also unbeatable in reinforcing and strengthening cultural expressions and identities. Radio is used as a platform for democratic discussion and pluralistic expression of ideas and aspirations; a means to raise awareness on social issues; and to collect data on local development issues. Furthermore, it contributes to the development of local pride through the reinstatement of community memory and history. Media convergence also requires information management and digital archiving tools, such as those promoted by UNESCO through its

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emphasis on Free and Open Source Software, information processing tools and web applications. Current UNESCO work in the region is also supporting citizen journalism networks through digital ICTs such as blogs and content shares.

Over the past six years in Asia, UNESCO has experimented with the convergence of analog and digital ICT services at its Community Multimedia Centre model sites. These experiments inform four sets of strategic principles for ICT for development initiatives, which frame successive chapters of this book:

1. **Community ownership**: in order to take ownership of ICT for development initiatives, communities must invest themselves into such projects. A culture of dialogue between the community and donor should be established from the conceptual stages of a project. Development priorities should be analysed by both parties before deciding upon the appropriate ICT solution. Post-implementation, solutions to challenges should come from the community – not donor organisations. Communities must fully commit to using ICT systems to do better what they are already doing for themselves.

2. **Appropriate ICT** must not only be functional, but also usable by communities. An ICT tool becomes 'appropriate' when the community develops a sense of ownership; understands how to operate and repair the technology; and appreciates its technology options, including how to acquire its own home-grown solutions. Communities should adapt ICT to their needs and culture, rather than be changed by ICT.

3. **Local language, local content**: it is unlikely that an ICT intervention can contribute to long-term community development unless it integrates local language and culture. In particular, the so-called World Wide Web does not reflect the cultures of the majority of the world’s population. Local content creation and distribution will contribute to the formation of local information networks which can make the World Wide Web useful for the majority.

4. **Sustainability through convergence**: ICT projects that converge with existing communication projects (i.e. community radio) often have a greater chance of sustainable success, as they can inherit accumulated community experience and a whole history of development and participation techniques.

   There is a wealth of literature on opportunities missed by major development projects. Often the blame is laid at the door of certain
top-down planning techniques that accompany large donor investments. We have learned from our community radio experiences that in order to achieve community uptake and ownership, an ICT for development initiative should be introduced from the bottom-up or from the centre outwards, rather than from the top down. Stakeholders should aim to start small, step back for a year or two to observe progress, make an assessment of progress and only then upgrade ICT systems – if this need is fully grounded.

As well as serving to reinforce the strategic principles set out above, it is my hope that this publication will help other practitioners to think through and devise their own strategies for participatory content creation at the community level. ICT can indeed strengthen communities and catalyse individual and social development; but only with the full participation of the grassroots communities that stand to benefit.

Jocelyne Josiah
Advisor in Communication and Information for Asia
UNESCO, New Delhi
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Introduction: what is participatory content creation?

Jerry Watkins, Jo Tacchi

This book offers insights into issues of sustainability, local engagement and participation; all of which are key problems for many ICT for development initiatives. It also highlights the application of participatory methods to the design, implementation and evaluation of culturally appropriate systems for local content creation.

But just what is “Participatory content creation”? Actually, it's not such an easy concept to define. Try asking around for definitions of the words 'participation', 'content' or 'creativity' and prepare yourself to be bombarded by a myriad of different and often opposing views. At least, that’s exactly what happens to us when we conduct this word game during our content creation training workshops. For the purposes of this book we shall practice what we preach and adopt a definition of participatory content creation that was proposed by participants at a microdocumentary production and distribution workshop in New Delhi: “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”.

We use this definition of participatory content creation to propose that creative engagement with information and communication technology (ICT) should be an important element in poverty reduction strategies, leading to the construction of a digitally inclusive knowledge society. The provision of physical
access to ICT is the principal objective of various development programs; we're aware that the human catalysts driving such programs might feel that content creation is a 'soft' discussion with little relevance to the 'hard' solutions required for the successful implementation of ICT infrastructure. Rather than dwell on the many case studies that attest to the importance of designing ICT systems for usability and engagement, we prefer to explore in this book how the aims of ICT for development programs can be supported by creative strategies for inclusion and engagement.

ICT has made two major impacts on content creation. The first should be familiar to many readers: distribution via the Internet provides a low-cost global information network to anyone who has both online access and skills. Web browsers and file transfer protocols allow content in a digital format to be seen by online audiences both local and global. Although the fog of hyperbole often chokes the Internet debate, this distribution ability truly is a revolution. Of course, it shouldn’t be forgotten that digital content doesn’t even need the Internet to travel: anyone with access to a CD burner and a post office can distribute video, audio and multimedia files; albeit slightly slower than the online user.

The second major impact ICT has made on content creation seems to have been slightly buried under the burgeoning mass of opinion about the Web and Internet. This is of course the tools of production, both software and hardware. High-quality audiovisual capture devices are now affordable and usable by ordinary people the world over. Even mobile phones can capture digital audio, images and video. After digital content has been captured, it can then be manipulated by software applications once costing thousands of dollars and usable only by trained professionals. Such applications now come bundled with personal computers, or as downloadable freeware. To use them, we don’t need programming knowledge; rather, some skills and/or training in the application itself which are quite achievable if we are familiar with Windows® or Mac® operating systems and conventions.

So: production and distribution. The two factors which allow individuals and communities – with access to basic training and affordable equipment – to participate in creating content that can be distributed via disk or Internet to friends, family, village, district, region, nation, world. Makes you think, doesn't it?

This may all sound simple and straightforward, but anyone who is involved in content creation either for fun or for money (and sometimes even for both) knows that it isn't quite so easy. ICT
might greatly simplify and enhance production and distribution, but there’s one thing it doesn’t bring to the table – a reason to engage in content creation. Who has time and inclination to put aside their daily duties to join a community group and participate for hours (more likely days) in content creation activities? And what would you make content about? What’s the incentive?

It’s certainly not financial. We’ve been asked before how many jobs our content creation initiatives have generated: to date, zero. Although some workshop participants have gone on to get jobs after their training, this is undoubtedly a result of their own hard work and perseverance. Due to lack of time and budget, our intervention was never designed to generate local employment. Rather, we attempted to use content creation activities to transfer marketable digital skills to participants, and to stimulate their 'voice'. The latter refers to the injection of content-rich messages from diverse community voices into the public sphere, through creative engagement with ICT. We explain this more fully in chapter 2; suffice it to say for the moment that in this book we state that digital inclusion and creative engagement with ICT are important if we are to build 'knowledge societies'. In other words, providing physical access to ICT alone is not enough: access needs to be supported by various strategies for inclusion and engagement. ICT and its relevance to voice (and vice versa) can then be related – both for individuals and groups – to modes and freedom of expression; opportunity and agency; self-expression and advocacy; and access to technologies and platforms for the distribution of a range of different voices. We also consider opportunities to participate in the design of ICT for development interventions themselves: in establishing what should be the focus of development; in the design and implementation of development initiatives; and in the assessment of whether or not positive social change has resulted.

If you’ve read this far, then hopefully this book is for you. It’s aimed primarily at program-side policy strategists and decision-makers. Practitioners will find chapters 2 and 4 of interest: these describe our content creation training program in some detail. We think the book may also interest donor organisations and researchers. Our investigation was conducted across South and South-East Asia from 2005-2008, and 'touched down’ at 15 sites across four countries. These sites were chosen for their innovative approach to ICT engagement and remain the exception in their participatory content creation initiatives, rather than the rule. The principles and practices that we present are based on what has worked at these sites, and what hasn’t: with appropriate support,
these principles could be extended to many new sites. For example, major scale-up efforts such as the UNESCO-supported Community Multimedia Centre programs in Mali, Mozambique and Senegal could benefit from the examples discussed in this book. Telecentre scale-up initiatives around the world – such as those in India, Jamaica, Indonesia and Rwanda to name just a few – present real opportunities for creative engagement through participatory content creation.

Although ICT is fundamental to our work, this is a non-technical book. We haven’t tried to present a set of formal research findings: rather, we are sharing observations and experiences based on a work-in-progress. It’s far too early to say whether the various interventions we made during the course of our research will have a sustainable positive effect on the communities with which we worked. However, we wanted to share our findings in order to inform current and future ICT for development projects. We hope the book is of use in this regard.
Authors

Emma Baulch researches Indonesian media, particularly the music and advertising industries. She was awarded a PhD in 2004 for her dissertation about rock music subcultures and masculinity in Bali. Between 2003 and 2005 she was a Postdoctoral Fellow at Leiden University (Netherlands). She is now a Senior Research Associate at Queensland University of Technology.

Ben Grubb has been actively involved in the evaluation, planning and establishment of telecentre and ICT training facilities and programs. He has consulted for both AusAID and UNDP in the Pacific, and UNESCO in South Asia. Ben holds a BAppSc in Multimedia and Technology from Swinburne University and is a postgraduate student at Queensland University of Technology.

Jocelyne Josiah has been attached to the communication and information sector at UNESCO since 1981. As Regional Communication Adviser to the Kingston (Jamaica) Office from 1993, she pioneered a series of community radio stations and Community Multimedia Centres. Jocelyne is presently based at the New Delhi Office as Advisor in communication and information for Asia, focusing on the South Asia region.

Kirsty Martin’s extensive ethnographic work explores the economic, social and political meanings associated with local women’s participation in community organisations. Kirsty holds a PhD in Anthropology from University of New South Wales and is a Research Associate at Queensland University of Technology.

M.S. Kiran has expertise in the fields of journalism, teaching and research. He has worked on various education and technology literacy programs with Intel Corporation. He holds both a BA (Political Science, English Literature and Sociology) and MA (English Literature) from Bangalore University; and a Masters in Development Studies from Uppsala University.
Seema B. Nair has worked in journalism, communication development and action research. Since 2006 she has consulted for UNESCO New Delhi on community media, ICT, and communication research. Seema has three years’ field experience in community radio in India, and manages the Global Pilot Project for Community Multimedia Centres in Asia. 

Jo Tacchi has contributed to the growing fields of media anthropology and media ethnography. She holds a MA from University of Sussex and a PhD from University College London. Jo is an Associate Professor in the Creative Industries Faculty at Queensland University of Technology, and a Fellow of the Australian Research Council’s Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation.

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.
Researchers

Govinda Prasad Acharya is a researcher at both Tansen Community Multimedia Centre, and Madanpokhara Community Radio and CMC, Nepal. Previously he was a computer teacher at Padma Public Model Higher Secondary School. He also worked as a proof reader and designer for the Palpa Times newspaper. Govinda holds a Bachelor’s degree in Management.

Sita Adhikari is a researcher at both the Jhuwani and the Agyauli Community Libraries, Nepal. She is President of Jhuwani community saving and credit cooperative, and women’s section coordinator of Jhuwani Community Library. Sita holds a Master’s degree in Economics and has worked as an economics and maths teacher.

Srinivas Bangaru is a researcher at the Byrraju Foundation, Andhra Pradesh, India. He holds a Masters degree in Mass Communication and Journalism from Osmania University. Srinivas started his career as an intern at the well-known Telugu news channel TV9, before becoming project manager with Hyderabad-based advertising agency Zorek Technologies.

Karma Tshering Bhutia has over four years of field and project development experience in information and communication technology. He worked as the Coordinator for both the UNESCO Community Multimedia Centre and the Finding a Voice project in Nepal.

Joann Fildes is interested in development, participation and organizations. She has implemented participatory research into housing trusts for the King’s Fund, a UK-based health initiative. Joann has published on housing in London, and poverty and participation in South Asia. She holds a PhD in Development Studies from the Open University, and lectures in Development Studies at the University of Adelaide.

Jancy Francis is a researcher at the Akshaya Project in Kannur District, Kerala, India. She holds a MSc and MPhil (1989) in Anthropology from Poona University and Madras University respectively. She had served as a guest lecturer at Kannur University and has published in various journals and edited volumes.
Kosala Keerthirathne has been involved with the Kothmale Community Radio and Multimedia Centre (Sri Lanka) since 1999 as a student, trainer and researcher. In 2001 he was selected as the Computer Trainer for the Kothmale CMC project funded by HIVOS and became UNESCO Program Coordinator in 2006.

Deepak Koirala is a researcher at Radio Lumbini fm, Community Multimedia Centre and Community Learning Centre (Nepal). Previously he was a coordinator at Manigram CMC (Radio Lumbini).

Rupa Pandey is a researcher at the Lumbini Information and Communication Cooperative Ltd. at Lumbini Community Radio Station, Nepal. She has completed training in radio presentation and production, journalism, and ethnographic action research.

Atul Kumar Sharma is a researcher at Ideosync Media Combine, Uttrakhand, India. He coordinates initiatives with community radio groups Samudayik Radio Hevalvaani and Samudayik Radio Mandaakini Ki Awaaz. Atul previously worked with the World Health Organization, and holds a Masters degree in Social Science and a Postgraduate Diploma in NGO Management.

Andrew Skuse specialises in health communication, conflict reduction, and ICT for poverty reduction. He holds a BA with First Class Honours in Social Anthropology and Development Studies from the School of Oriental and African Studies, and a PhD in Anthropology from University College London. He is a Lecturer at the University of Adelaide.

Aseem Asha Usman is a researcher at Datamation Foundation, Delhi, India. He has experience in creative writing and journalism, and has made a photo-feature on visualAly challenged children from Ahmadi School for the Blind. Aseem holds a BSc in Chemistry and a Postgraduate Diploma in Development Communication from Jamia Millia Islamia University.
Research sites

India

Ankuram Television, West Godavari District, Andhra Pradesh. The initiative is equipped with television sets in the community, computers, digital video camera, wifi networks, and a cable TV network. It focuses on agriculture, literacy, health, drinking water, child labour, and local news.

Akshaya Centres, Kannur District, Kerala. The centres are equipped with a minimum of five computers, Internet, printer, scanner and interactive community web portals (at panchayat levels). The initiative focuses on e-literacy, e-services, agriculture, livelihoods, education, health, government services.

Gender Resource Centre, Seelampur, Delhi. The centre is equipped with seven computers, Internet, LCD projector, printer, sewing machines and its own community newspaper. The initiative provides medical assistance, legal advice, vocational training, domestic violence counselling, and a Media Development Course.

Hevalvaani Samudayik Radio and Mandaakini Ki Awaaz Samudayik Radio, Uttarakhand. The community radio stations are equipped with radio studios and related technical equipment, computer, radio receivers in the villages, and satellite transmission. The initiatives focus on agriculture, health, local culture, micro-finance, and migration.
Indonesia

Pabelan telecentre, near Yogyakarta, Central Java. Established in 2005, Pabelan is Pe-PP’s pilot project. Finding a Voice also conducted research at the Lapulu telecentre, near Kendari, Sulawesi; and the Muneng telecentre, near Surabaya, East Java. Each telecentre is equipped with five PCs, modem, Internet, television, LCD projector and a digital camera.

Nepal

Radio Lumbini CMC, Manigram, Anandavan Village Development Committee, Rupandehi District, Nepal. In 2004 UNESCO added a telecentre facility to the community radio station; eight PCs for public access and training; Internet access; audio CDs; English and Nepali books; digital cameras (video and stills); audio recorders; printer, scanner; fax; telephone; photocopier; and LCD projector.

Agyauli Community Library (ACL), Danda Village, Nawalparasi District, Nepal. ACL has 3,500 books, including a collection on informal education for women and girls. It has five PCs, printer, television, video player and CDs. ACL is trying to connect a phone line but this has not yet been successful. There is no Internet connection.

Jhuwani Community Library (JCL), Bachhauli Village Development Committee, Chitwan District, Central Development Region of Nepal. JCL has more than 4,000 books and a mobile facility especially for community women and children. The library has eight PCs, Internet access, phone connection, fax, laminator, printer and scanning services.
**Buddhanagar Telecentre,** Lumbini World Heritage Site, Rupandehi District, Nepal. Buddhanagar is a satellite telecentre attached to Radio Lumbini CMC. It has five PCs; one for audio programme production, the rest for ICT literacy and training. It also has Internet access, digital stills camera, audio recorder, printer, telephone and photocopier.

**Madhawiliya Community Learning Centre** (CLC), Madhawaliya Village Development Committee, Lumbini, Nepal. The aim of the CLC is to provide informal education to marginalised groups in the community.

**Tansen Community Multi-Media Centre,** Tansen, Palpa District, Nepal. Tansen CMC its own website and online local newspaper. It has a server; twelve PCs for public access & training; and 5 PCs for audiovisual production; as well as seven video cameras; cable Internet access; printer/scanner; LCD projector.

**Madanpokhara CMC** comprises Community Radio Madanpokhara (CRM), six PCs plus server for public access and training; two PCs for radio production; a wireless Internet connection and its own website. It also has digital cameras (video and stills), printer, photocopier, fax, recorder and CD writers.
Sri Lanka

*Kothmale Community Multimedia Centre*, central hill region, Sri Lanka. It comprises a radio station with 1kw transmitter, and a computer and Internet centre. The CMC is equipped with seven PCs, printer, photocopier, scanner, and broadband Internet connection. The CMC also has a mobile facility called the eTuktuk.
Finding a Voice though content creation

Jerry Watkins, Jo Tacchi

It is widely appreciated that information and communication technology can provide new and interesting channels for civic, political and community involvement. In this chapter we outline our research into participatory content creation programs supported by ICT-equipped telecentres. We examine how to equip these communities to speak with their own voices on advocacy, poverty reduction and social change.

The ability for individual citizens to make their voices heard in the public sphere using digital platforms and applications is used by proponents of ICT to support investment in technology infrastructure development programs. Although agencies such as UNESCO have placed significant emphasis on ICT-enabled “knowledge societies”,¹ various socio-cultural commentators argue that the provision of physical ICT infrastructure does not automatically generate demand for digital products and services within target communities. Within the context of underserved communities, it has even been suggested that new technologies may widen existing gaps “further blocking access to those already without access”.²

In this book, we are concerned with 'voice poverty' – the inability of citizens to influence the decisions that affect their lives.

¹ See from Towards knowledge societies by Bindé, J., in the UNESCO World Report 2005.
A somewhat slippery word, ‘voice’ can be defined in relation to development as inclusion and participation in social, political and economic processes. So defined, strategies to reduce voice poverty require a bottom-up approach which can give underserved communities an opportunity to influence their own social vectors using ICT. This is reflected in a growing interest in communication for social change which insists that “Social Change can be defined as: a positive change in peoples’ lives – as they themselves define such change”.³

There is now an established body of work on participatory approaches to understanding poverty. This is concerned with letting those who experience poverty describe their own lives, rather than have external experts assess it from afar. We link this work to complementary research in the fields of development communication and ICT for development, both of which pay growing attention to the local production of content as a strategy to promote a diversity of voices through media and communications. For example, the World Bank’s ‘Consultations with the Poor’ project demonstrates the mainstream acceptance of participatory approaches to understanding poverty.⁴ Often referred to as ‘Voices of the Poor’, the study is based on the idea that those who are

themselves experiencing poverty are the people who need to describe it; and that participatory techniques can provide a means to generate these descriptions. Therefore the study collected together the voices of 60,000 poor men and women from 60 countries: a huge undertaking which focussed attention on the issue of voice as self-expression, as people spoke for themselves about their own circumstances and their own feelings about poverty-related issues. In so doing, it proved the effectiveness of participatory processes in wider conceptualisations and definitions of poverty.

More recently the Asian Development Bank has published a study called Learning from the Poor. Covering seven states in India, and including over 20,000 people through participatory poverty assessments, again the desire is to place 'the poor' at the centre stage of development and the definition of poverty itself. Participatory techniques are now used across a range of organisations and projects, from the very small scale to large scale like the ADB and the World Bank initiatives. One problem with such large scale 'listening' to voices of the poor is the 'one-off' nature of the endeavour. We can see how Voices of the Poor was the World Bank's first major attempt at collecting local accounts of the experience of poverty; while it has impacted on various approaches to poverty reduction, the question remains as to what happens next to those people and their concerns?

The idea of achieving voice through participatory content creation initiatives underpinned the Finding a Voice research project, which worked across India, Indonesia, Nepal and Sri Lanka from 2005-08. Funded by the Australian Research Council in collaboration with UNESCO & UNDP, Finding a Voice investigated how ICT can enable underserved communities to be heard in the public sphere through digital content creation activities. In this book, when we refer to 'digital content' we’re talking about content that can be transmitted via digital media: words, pictures, music, stories, messages, programs. This creative engagement with ICT is an attempt to move beyond the access debate, in order to consider how digital inclusion could be achieved at the intersection of creative ICT applications and existing community media networks. Community-based media are seen to offer voice through pluralism and diversity, by encouraging dialogue and transparency of administration at the local level. Therefore Finding a Voice worked with a network of fifteen local media and ICT initiatives located

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5 See Learning from the Poor: Findings from Participatory Poverty Assessments in India by Viswanathan, S. and Srivastava, R. Published by Asian Development Bank (2007)
within underserved communities, and offering a basic PC infrastructure and limited web connection. These are known either as 'telecentres' or 'community multimedia centres' (CMCs). Some of the CMC sites in *Finding a Voice* are co-located with community radio or TV initiatives and through this integration of analog and digital media, CMCs can link local and global networks and bring digital tools and new opportunities within the reach of underserved communities, often in remote rural areas. UNESCO runs a global CMC pilot project which is supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

The goal of *Finding a Voice* was to experiment with how ICT could be employed in each local context to empower poor people to communicate their 'voices' within and beyond marginalised communities. The project followed three broad phases:

**Phase 1: Training of trainers** established a core group of content creation trainers in India, Indonesia, Nepal and Sri Lanka. These trainers were usually associated with a CMC or telecentre. Small groups of local volunteers were trained in narrative and multimedia production techniques during a four- to five-day workshop. The trainees were introduced to the techniques required to prepare a short video narrative, with an emphasis on developing digital literacy through storytelling exercises. These exercises were loosely based on a format established by the Center for Digital Storytelling, whereby the individual creator writes and records a personal audio narrative accompanied by a sequence of still images, to create a simple mini-movie lasting between two to three minutes. The creator is responsible for the entire story, from the original idea through to the finished product. A feature of this digital literacy training is the use of off-the-shelf hardware and applications, including digital video and stills cameras and editing software. The philosophy behind digital storytelling is that individual creators are empowered to create their own content and speak with their own voices in the public sphere, by telling their own stories and distributing them via digital media both online and offline. In this way, citizens are able to inhabit a media space previously accessible only to state and commercial broadcasters.

We evolved the digital storytelling format in order to suit our context. Our training workshops were co-hosted by either UNESCO or UNDP, and this connection usually resulted in some kind of development agenda within the stories created by workshop participants. Furthermore, many of these participants had a personal

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6 www.storycenter.org
agenda of social change or activism, which resulted in a more journalistic style of storytelling. We responded to these agendas by inviting trainees to structure their creative process through a technique borrowed from journalism, known as the 'five Ws':

- **What** is happening in this story?
- **Who** is involved?
- **When** and **Where** does the story take place?
- **Why** are you telling this story?

If you're unfamiliar with the five Ws device, then read the main article of an English-language newspaper. You’ll see that these five questions are usually answered within the first two sentences. In addition to this journalistic structure, our training program emphasised the importance of audience-focused communication. We invited trainees to clearly define a target audience for their stories, in order to help them hone their key messages and choice of language. This is a technique familiar to many professional communicators. Therefore, through the five Ws structure and an audience focus, our training program steered participants into creating a type of content known as a 'microdocumentary'. We felt that this was an appropriate goal, given the development agenda within which we were operating. It's interesting to note how the five Ws device was evolved by content creators in both Nepal and Indonesia: this is discussed in later chapters.
Phase 2: Content creation encompasses the content creation programs initiated by the core training team at the project’s various sites. The Finding a Voice research team worked closely with these trainers and their communities to establish the foundation of a sustainable participatory content creation program based at the host CMC or telecentre. Rather than designing a uniform top-down training program across all sites, all parties collaborated to develop a program appropriate to the local context. This strategy was based on the aims of participatory design which “requires a shared form of life – a shared social and cultural background and a shared language. Hence, participatory design means not only users participating in design but also designers participating in use”. These programs have resulted in the creation of scores of microdocumentaries and digital stories by community members from across the region. Some recurring themes include poverty, water and health, gender, education, and substance abuse. These themes are explored by individual creators or creative teams within the local context, for a local audience, using local dialect or language. Some have been successful and display signs of longevity – others not. These various programs are discussed in successive chapters of this book.

Phase 3: Distribution seeks to establish strategies and relationships which can enable the distribution of content created in phase 2 to appropriate audiences. One of the most distinguishing features of pervasive digital networks is the ability for private citizens to upload and publish their own content; either at a local level (via video CD or community media) or even through to the global online community. This ability shifts the citizen from being a passive consumer of media content, to becoming a small-scale producer. The digitally literate content producer is not a fanciful idea – we have only to look to the explosion of 'do-it-yourself' social media portals such as YouTube and Flickr to appreciate the repressed demand for linking personal content creation activities to wider audiences via online distribution. We’re particularly excited at the development of hybrid networks in the development sector which employ both analog and digital media technologies (we discuss a combined Web and community radio information distribution network in chapter 5). There is rich potential to leverage existing community media networks for content distribution in countries like Nepal, which have a well-established community radio landscape. However, any such initiative will require careful formulation of sustainable digital distribution systems and processes.

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The opportunities for digital content creation and distribution are particularly relevant to language groups which are not represented in mainstream media. This is not to say that all the microdocumentaries produced as part of Finding a Voice were uploaded to a social media portal as a matter of course. Distribution networks are a function of audience and message; therefore not all stories are suitable for distribution outside of the immediate community. To this end, the finished microdocumentaries were usually screened to the local community at a CMC, and the decision as to whether they were distributed to a wider audience was left to the creator.

Participation and digital literacy

The purpose of the participatory content creation training was not solely to promote the communication of social issues from the bottom-up. In fact, many trainees used their newly acquired creative ICT skills to produce stories as a form of self-expression, to talk about their everyday experiences without reference to a wider agenda. The varied body of work produced by communities throughout the project illustrates a shift from passive media consumption to the active production and distribution of local content. Through this shift, we have seen how underserved communities can creatively engage in shaping their social, cultural or political identity.

The information and communication skills required by an individual to be considered ‘literate’ within a media-rich culture continue to evolve. No longer is it adequate to think of textual and
visual modes of literacy separately, nor envision the Internet as only a vast catalogue and receptacle of information. Through its virtual pervasiveness, online media challenge the traditional roles of producers and consumers in culture, narrowing the distance between them. We are not suggesting that the ability to both produce and consume digital media – sometimes known as 'digital literacy' – should be considered as more important than traditional forms of literacy or learning. Rather, we see this kind of creative engagement as an important element of any ICT infrastructure development or sustainability strategy. The provision of an Internet connection to an underserved community potentially opens a door to a one-way stream of information and messaging over which the receiver can have little control. We believe that to use the same connection as a means to send one's own information and content 'upstream' requires more substantial, prolonged and creative training. Our approach demonstrates an opportunity to deploy ICT in a way that can tap into local creativity and the desire for self-expression; so that users can learn new technologies on their own terms. Content creation itself can be a powerful (albeit time-consuming) means of engaging people with ICT, with the added benefit of allowing them to voice their concerns and share and learn locally relevant knowledge. The data gathered from across the *Finding a Voice* sites are both rich and specific; suggesting that content creation initiatives can allow different voices to be heard, and demonstrating new bottom-up perspectives on the relationship between ICT, voice and poverty. One of the most interesting developments in our research is the emergence of data around what it means to participate in content creation, how to facilitate it, what its utility might be, and how 'creative engagement' might differ fundamentally to a more pragmatic skills-based approach to 'information access' and computer technologies. Of course, participation in content creation activities is affected by more than purely digital literacy: as you read this book you will appreciate how caste, class, poverty and gender shape or even block creative engagement with ICT. Unsurprisingly, views of usefulness across the sites are patchy and inconsistent – but these disparate views are helping us to understand the importance of participation in any such development communication initiative, including the need to fully account for local contexts.
Social change through local content creation: case studies from Nepal

Kirsty Martin

This chapter presents three case studies from the Finding a Voice project in Nepal which indicate a link between community involvement in content creation and grassroots social change. Nepal is distinguished in South Asia by a reasonably well-established community radio and media sector, which has provided opportunities for collaboration between – and even co-location of – community radio stations and multimedia centres.

The first study is based on the work of Rupa Pandey. Pandey is a researcher at the Buddhanagar Computer Multimedia Centre in Lumbini, a satellite of community broadcaster Radio Lumbini. Participatory content creation was achieved when community members produced and broadcast their own radio program using digital media and applications.

The second study comes from Sita Adhikari’s work with rural community libraries. It discusses a digital story that was created at the Agyauli Community Library in Nawalparasi District. Efforts to create and screen digital stories at the Library have yielded positive responses from the local community.

The third study is drawn from the work of Deepak Koirala, a researcher in Rupandehi district. It discusses a digital story made by women who attend the informal literacy courses at the Madhawiliya Community Learning Centre (CLC).

These case studies are based on more than twelve months' work at the specific sites. They illustrate how the specific social
consequences of community involvement in content creation activities depend on various factors including:

- the nature of the message, including its local meaning and interpretation;
- the level of local participation in content creation;
- prevalent social beliefs and customs, and
- the audience.

If these factors are considered, the Nepalese studies demonstrate how local content creation initiatives can enhance social participation in community ICT programs. They may also serve to disseminate social messages which can change the lives of local communities. In order to achieve this, these key principles should be considered:

1. Implement an inclusive approach to content creation activities and training at all levels (community, volunteers, staff, management and donor organisations).
2. Encourage objective and in-depth community discussions not only about what content should be made, but also the plan and expectations for this content at the distribution stage and beyond, for all involved.
3. Encourage a process of engagement, not only with the 'message' but also with the technological processes of content creation and distribution.
4. Think about audiences and make local content locally relevant.

**Evolving the Five Ws**

We can put these principles into practice by reconsidering the 'five Ws' of What? Who? When? Where? Why? This journalistic device (discussed in chapter 2) was used during training workshops to guide participants in formulating a narrative structure. At the Nepal research sites, the community extended the concept of the five Ws in order to produce a best-practice guide to local content creation.

**What?** Individuals, communities, organisations or initiatives at some point will decide on the nature of the content that is produced, how it will be distributed and to whom. Therefore always consider what is being communicated or put another way, what is the message in the content? This includes an understanding of why this message is important. Issues to consider may include discussing the nature, tone or style of the message. This question can be posed at different levels within the community; including individual citizens, community groups, CMC volunteers and management etc.
**Who?** One factor which will determine the effectiveness of locally created content is the way that community people respond not only to being creators of content, but also to being its audience. If a message does not relate to the social context of the local audience, it runs the risk of increasing the social distance between a content creation initiative and its audience. Therefore when planning a local content creation initiative, one should consider how any message embedded within content relates to the activities, events, rituals, beliefs or local politics of relevant community groups. If local people cannot identify with an issue in a program (even if it is made by other local people) it is unlikely they will be motivated or mobilised to act to change patterns of behaviour in the community. This is one of the main criticisms of 'top-down' content creation processes.

**When?** The social response to locally created content relates to how the message reflects issues of contemporary religious, political, social and economics facing the local or wider community at the time. If an issue is seen as 'out of date' or irrelevant by an audience, the content can lose relevance and thus social impact.

**Where?** By taking part in processes of content creation, local communities raise their issues, thoughts and concerns about their own experiences. At the same time, for a message to have an impact at a regional or national level, it needs to connect with a larger audience. Respecting the local meaning of a local story, while at the same time considering the wider audience reach, can become something of a juggling act. It is important to consider the immediacy of the matter (context) and at the same time the desired social outcome. Remember as well that increased awareness of issues can lead to a change in social behaviours: wider audiences increase the potential for regional and national debates.

**Why?** Put another way, what’s in it for me? What can motivate local people to take part in content creation activities? The desire to participate should not be assumed – we need look no further than a poorly attended democratic election booth to appreciate that just because people have a voice, it does not automatically follow that they will use it. In the design of our suggested training program, we have specified readily available off-the-shelf PC applications as tools for content creation. Therefore trainees learn not just specific narrative and editing packages, but also marketable file management and information presentation skills. In some cases, this creative training using popular applications acted as a further incentive to participate in content creation initiatives; but it in no way guarantees sustainability.
Radio Lumbini and Hamro Lumbini

Radio Lumbini is a not-for-profit initiative of the Lumbini Information and Communication Cooperative.\(^1\) It went to air in January 2000, one of the first cooperative community radio stations in South Asia to do so. In April 2004 a telecentre facility was added to the radio station, creating Lumbini Community Multimedia Centre (CMC). The CMC is located in Manigram, a market area in Rupandehi District, approximately 300 kilometres from Kathmandu. A year later a second telecentre was created approximately 40 kilometres away in Buddhanagar, Lumbini. This centre aims to increase public access to ICT and provide a platform for community awareness about poverty. Its link to Radio Lumbini impacts upon both the creation and distribution of local content, since local issues can readily inform radio programs which air on a weekly basis.

One such issue is the expansion of the World Heritage Site (WHS) in Lumbini, which is the birth place of Lord Buddha and has been listed as a WHS since 1997. The expansion of the WHS is a sensitive topic and local people have different opinions about the impact it will continue to have on their lives. Rupa Pandey works at the Buddhanagar telecentre and has interviewed local people about participation and social development:

“From our pilot study we learned that most of the people around the WHS area are dissatisfied with the development process and its impact on their life. We faced great challenges, the main one being that we had to find a balance between the community and government departments. Whenever we used to go into the field to collect the people’s voice, they used to blame the Lumbini Development Trust (LDT) for not fulfilling its promises. One day we discussed how we wanted to promote a positive relationship between the LDT and the local community people. From my point of view the main cause of the conflict between these two parties was lack of ‘participation’ in the development project.”

From Pandey’s preliminary discussions, ideas emerged on how community radio and local telecentre facilities could be utilised to address the social tension surrounding the development of World Heritage Site.\(^2\) Pandey explains how she used her dual role as

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researcher and local reporter for Radio Lumbini in an attempt to address this important issue:

“We could not blame the community nor could we blame the LDT because for us, both parties were respectable and had legitimate viewpoints and we did not want to be seen as taking sides. Finally, we realised that we could ask the local people an open question, simply “How is the WHS expansion process affecting your life?”

In early 2007 a small group of CMC volunteers, community members and program producers began producing a local radio program which aimed to address this very question. Called Hamro Lumbini (“Our Lumbini”), the project is a collaboration between Buddhanagar telecentre and Lumbini CMC and aims to promote cultural diversity and an inter-religious dialogue between local communities and WHS stakeholders. The format of the program combines local reporting, community voices, and interviews with experts. Hamro Lumbini is produced by local people recently trained in content creation skills at the CMC. The group collects local community views using a portable recorder. Audio software is used to edit the vox pops, add a voiceover and produce the final mix at the CMC. This is then saved onto CD and broadcast from the radio station in Manigram.

With assistance from CMC volunteers and community members, Pandey administered a questionnaire survey to 100 local people in an attempt to capture local people’s views on Hamro Lumbini. When asked about the “positive aspects” of the program, responses included:

- Local initiative for local community development; opportunity for local people to express their opinions.
- Community based and locally relevant; local people are interviewed and offer feedback on the issues.
- Informative; raises issues which the local people request; increases community participation.
- Focus on local activities; weekly community-based discussions.
- Voices from local people are included in local (Bhojpuri) language; positive promotion of the Lumbini area and local culture.

When asked “What needs to be changed about the program?” responses included:

- Extra voice cutting (editing) on local voices to improve the clarity of sound quality and professionalism of the program.
• The program is limited to issues specifically concerned with the WHS expansion. Whereas it would be beneficial to address a range of other social issues in this forum.
• Not focused on development of the community
• Should be aired more than once a week
• Broadcasting time should be changed (clashes with news programs).
• Does not solve social problems; it should find solutions
• Should cover larger issues.

_Hamro Lumbini_ shows how the participation of local people in producing the program has enhanced the dialogue surrounding social development processes. Pandey identifies the social change that has come about as a result of the local program:

“As a consequence of this kind of participation in the creation of content for the local radio station, World Heritage Site official parties are now prepared to inform local people about the WHS and its importance which includes how the conservation of the WHS can help local people with regards to local income generation. They hope this will encourage a sense of local ownership and involvement in the process of social change that is taking place at the WHS.”

If we consider this positive outcome in terms of the evolved five Ws strategy outlined above, we can say that the locally created content of _Hamro Lumbini_ contains an important social message concerning an issue that is timely and relevant to local audiences.
Local people became involved because they could see that there was 'something in it for them'. The survey responses reflect that local people look favourably upon broadcast content that can express their views, and that fosters community participation and involvement. Audience feedback regularly calls for a 'solution' to the social problems that are discussed during the program; there has been some question as to just what Hamro Lumbini is trying to achieve, and who exactly is the 'our’ referred to by the program’s title 'Our Lumbini'. Yet despite the community’s overall positive response to the program, key obstacles to sustainability remain. As well as the ongoing search for the scarce resources required to plan, research, and produce a participatory community activity, longer-term funding remains problematic. The managements of both Radio Lumbini and Buddhanagar CMC recognise the importance of cultural programming which does not generate income; but they are also responsible for attracting revenue to meet ongoing costs. This issue faces community radio stations throughout Nepal: Hamro Lumbini has been receiving support from UNESCO Kathmandu and some government stakeholders have agreed to provide support for the program. If sustained funding is not provided by government, the opportunities for community involvement in local content creation activities may need to be revisited.

Agyauli Community Library: Maya's Story

Agyauli Community Library (ACL) was established in 1999 with the support of Rural Education and Development, Nepal. ACL is located in Danda Village, Nawalparasi District, beside a small local market area along the east-west highway of Nepal. The nearest city
is 37 kilometres away; Kathmandu is 180 kilometres away. The Library has more than three thousand books, a children’s section complete with books and toys; a computer section and an audio-visual area. It also runs an extensive range of programs including a basic computer course; various income-generating programs; a women’s section; saving and credit groups; and mobile library and health programs. Since becoming a part of the Finding a Voice project, and attending a content creation workshop in Tansen in December 2006, the Library has begun training volunteers in creating microdocumentaries and digital stories.

Sita Adhikari has been carrying out research at the Library since August 2006 and is interested in the community’s involvement with and reactions to digital storytelling. During one of her regular field visits, Adhikari noticed a female community member making a bamboo rack in her yard. Adhikari describes her reaction to meeting this woman and how this research visit was the catalyst for a locally made digital story:

“I had never before seen a woman perform this type of work. At that moment I became interested in what led the woman to do this kind of work. I asked Maya if she could make a digital story about her life as I found her story inspiring and thought that it might inspire other people in the community.”

To date, Maya’s Story has been screened more than 20 times in the Library during community gatherings and group meetings. Adhikari describes the response to Maya’s Story:

“The local people requested that the Library screen the digital story. I realised that one of the main reasons the local people wanted to watch the digital story was because the content was made by local people, and the story is a success story of a hard-working local woman. After Agyauli Community Library screened the digital story, I noticed Maya and her neighbours started participating actively in the library activities. They also motivate other community people and have become actively involved in the Library’s saving and credit program.”

Maya’s Story is an important example of how one local woman learned to increase her independence through starting her own business. It shows that by learning practical skills – similar to the programs that the Library runs – women are able to generate their own income. These programs have the potential to bring about real social development whereby women do not have to ask or wait for men to give them money. While for many the new digital technology
was a novelty, the locally relevant message about how struggling women can change their circumstance and earn their own money was what most impressed them.

The Library has since made numerous digital stories covering issues such as gender discrimination, illiteracy, alcoholism and the benefits of income-generating activities. The digital technology is new for the majority of the local people and therefore requires further training to increase the numbers of participants in the creation of such local content. At the same time Maya’s Story shows the potential for locally created content – in particular, the positive reaction proves the community audience’s interest in locally relevant messages. The Library has recently procured a data projector and plans to screen its digital stories in other public places for viewing by larger local audiences, including non-library members. However, transporting the necessary equipment over poorly constructed roads with limited access to vehicles is difficult. Furthermore, there has already been theft of technical equipment from another village library. These logistical problems from the field pose real challenges to ICT-based outreach.

**Madhawiliya Community Learning Centre: Changes after reading letters**

The Madhawiliya Community Learning Centre (CLC) was established in October 2006 and is located at Madhawiliya Village Development Committee in Lumbini. The Learning Centre is 300 meters from the national highway which joins the two cities of Butwal and Bhairahawa. The main source of income for this area is traditional agriculture and factory work. Females usually work in the chocolate factory while males work in the iron or gas factories.

Before the Learning Centre was established the building was used as a women’s family planning clinic. The Centre organised long- and short-term skills training courses including computer training, first aid, women’s health, welding, driving, and goat grazing. Today the main aim of the Learning Centre is to provide ‘informal education’ to marginalised groups in the community. Up until recently enrolment in the Learning Centre’s literacy course was overwhelmingly by women – significant due to Nepal’s lower female literacy rate of 40% vs. 63% male.\(^3\) One of the main reasons for this discrepancy is gendered social expectation. In many parts of Nepal it is understood that both household chores and the rearing of children or younger siblings are the responsibility of women. At the same time, women are expected to engage in some form of paid

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\(^3\) Defined as those 15 years old and over who can read and write. Source: CIA World Factbook 2001 Census https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/np.html
work and earn money to feed their children. These social roles are considered their ultimate priorities and demand a substantial amount of time. Males have more socially sanctioned 'outside' roles, such as participation in institutionalised activities and learning (e.g. school), whereas many women have simply missed out on formal education. Furthermore, it is expected that all females will marry – and when they do, they will leave their home to go and live with their husband's family. Therefore an investment in a daughter's education can be locally perceived to be like 'watering someone else's garden', since she will end up living with in-laws and the cost of her education will not benefit her parents. In an effort to combat this social inequity, numerous informal learning centres have been established throughout Nepal (such as the Madhawiliya Community Learning Centre). This has given an opportunity for some previously illiterate women to learn to read and write, and to become more actively involved in their community.

Some female participants of the Learning Centre's informal education course decided to make a digital story to coincide with the World Literacy Day celebrations, after working with researcher Deepak Koirala. Called Changes after reading letters, the story addresses how women's lives have changed as a result of learning to read and write. This idea originated from Koirala's work with local women, and was developed during subsequent discussions with the Learning Centre's management committee. Various people were involved in the making of the digital story, including community members; Learning Centre 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. They recently shared their stories of achievement with researcher Koirala:

“The women told me how after taking part in the informal education course at the Community Learning Centre they now 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 group for that purpose. They know they cannot just approach anyone for a loan as they did in the past, when 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 their husbands 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.”

When *Changes after reading letters* was screened at the Madhawiliya Community Learning Centre to a local mixed gender audience, the men were inspired after recognising the women’s positive experience and expressed their interest in enrolling on Learning Centre courses. This is important as hitherto predominantly women were enrolled in the literacy courses at the Centre. Previously these women lacked the opportunity to study at school and now were learning to read and write for the first time. At the time of writing men have started their informal education class with great enthusiasm. Other local women who were not previously taking part in the Learning Centre classes were impressed by the digital story, and have made enquiries about enrolling in literacy courses. In all, the digital story was shown at two Community Learning Centres and the District Education Office; as well as to a district-level coordination committee meeting in Bhairahawa, with representatives from the District Education Office; District Development Office; District Forest Office; Chief District Office; District Health Office and others. Based on these screenings, Koirala illustrates the importance of linking participatory content
creation to community issues (in this case literacy and education):

“The women asked us to prepare the program in their own language so we prepared the digital story in the local, Nepali and indigenous Tharu language. We showed the same content in Tharu language in the Madhawiliya Community Learning Centre and the same content in Nepali language in the Tamnagar Community Learning Centre. From the group at Tamnagar CLC we learnt that language is not the only important issue in terms of how people relate to content. It is also important to produce the program using content based on that particular community’s needs and this will make it more effective. Continuous research also helped me to know about the needs of the community and this also made the program more effective.”

Conclusion

The *Hamro Lumbini* radio program, and the Library and Learning Centre digital stories, demonstrate how locally relevant content made by local participants can create forums for important social debates. At the same time such content can spread important messages to the wider community about how individuals can bring about change in their own lives. To achieve grassroots social change it is important that local people are not only able to use ICT, but can also identify with and influence the nature of the messages that they are helping to communicate with ICT. This participatory approach to local content creation stands in stark contrast to the top-down content creation of mass media organisations (either commercial or state-funded). In the former, the community are not only the receptors or audience; they are also key social agents who participate in the activities that influence their communities.

Any content creation strategy has to address important challenges including funding and sustainability; recognising and acknowledging local voices; representation; and learning how to integrate new digital ICT with existing analog systems. The response of local organisations to these challenges shapes the impact of such strategies. The social consequences of the Nepali participants' involvement in content creation were derived from the way local people saw themselves and their own lives, in and through the content produced. It is this process of ICT engagement through participatory content creation that can create the potential for social change.
Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks to Rupa Pandey, Sita Adhikari, Deepak Koirala and Maya for generously sharing their thoughts and observations about local content creation since November 2007. All field notes cited in this chapter are derived from their work on the Finding a Voice project (see www.findingavoice.org). Even though I refer to their research and ideas, this paper remains my sole responsibility.
Maya’s Story

My name is Maya. I am uneducated but I know one good handicraft skill so I am happy. I can make different kinds of bamboo racks.

I have had very difficult times in the past. My husband is a drunk and he used to hit me. At that time we had no regular income and I spent my days feeling tense and depressed.

One day I saw a family making bamboo racks near a local market. I remember thinking to myself ‘I can do this’. I asked the family some questions about the work and they gave me some information.

I was determined to make this work. When I started this business I was not helped by my husband. Nor did I get any support from my relatives. But I was determined to keep trying and eventually I was successful. Today I work hard at this work. I take the bamboo from the field and cut it into pieces then fix it together. Then I colour it and that makes it look attractive.

I have no problem at the market. I sell my product in the local and national market.

Now it is easy for me to manage my household budget and I can also pay for my children’s education.

Now I feel proud of my occupation. People say this kind of job is only for males but I have proved them wrong.
Chapter Four

Literacy in the locale: content creation in Indonesia
Emma Baulch, Jerry Watkins

This chapter discusses experiences from the Finding a Voice project with respect to participatory content creation initiatives in Indonesia. It shows how the training program implemented in Phase 1 of the project (see chapter 2) was adapted by our partners and applied to three telecentres across Indonesia. It concludes with points of learning derived from how these adaptations were applied and received. These points are organised according to two principles, which emerged from research by fieldworkers, community participants and program trainers:

- An understanding of literacy in the locale is necessary to appreciate the cultural ramifications of content creation activities within a given community, and design programs accordingly.
- Sustainable strategies for participatory content creation activities require careful consideration of both the production and distribution of local content.

Partnerships for e-Prosperity for the Poor

Partnerships for e-Prosperity for the Poor (Pe-PP) is the agency responsible for overseeing the three participatory content creation initiatives in question. Based in Jakarta, Pe-PP is implemented through the National Planning Board and funded by UNDP. Between 2004-5, Pe-PP established telecentres in villages in Lapulu, Pabelan and Kertosari which aimed to alleviate poverty by offering Web

1 www.ict4pr.org
access and computer training to the community. Villages were selected on the basis of having 30% or more of the population below the national poverty line; and also on their capacity to host a telecentre. To date, there are now eight Pe-PP telecentres; two were opened in Papua in early 2007.

Through Pe-PP, each telecentre was furnished with five computers, a modem, television, LCD projector and digital camera. Three staff positions were funded for a year. Pe-PP builds partnerships between provincial agencies that help fund the telecentres, and village-level ‘host’ organisations that donate the telecentre building and help to raise awareness among the local community. After one year, telecentre overheads and staff costs should be funded locally or provincially, with a view to the centre becoming self-sustaining. In mid-2005, Pe-PP employed ‘infomobilisers’ in all of their six telecentres; these social workers are responsible for working with local learning groups to establish income-generating programs that encourage community engagement with ICT. Some of these groups predated the telecentre, or had been established as part of former aid projects. In Pabelan, the learning groups were established as a result of the telecentre program and received seed funds from Pe-PP to establish income-generating projects, which were supported with information from the Web.

**Finding a Voice**

Researchers began formally co-operating with Pe-PP in July 2006, through a content creation training-of-trainers (ToT) workshop in Lapulu, southeast Sulawesi. The strategy was to train a Jakarta-based team in core participatory content creation techniques. This team would then adapt the syllabus as required to train teams across the Indonesian telecentre network. The aim was to ensure all staff and volunteers in a telecentre...
content initiative would be trained and would have a role in developing their own plans for subsequent participatory content creation. This aim was a response to previous experiences where a single content creation “champion” from an initiative would attend a training workshop, but receive no support from colleagues or management on return to their organisation. We hoped our modified approach would increase participation and sustainability by providing training across an organisation. The syllabus structure is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: structure of content creation training syllabus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day 1 : Planning</th>
<th>Day 2 : Production</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Storytelling exercises</td>
<td>Image / audio selection and preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story ideas and construction: five Ws, audience focus, storyboarding</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Photography and audio recording</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day 3 : Post-production</th>
<th>Day 4 : Presentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Captions</td>
<td>Distribution ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editing</td>
<td>Feedback and evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public screening</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Immediately following their ToT workshop, the core team trained a second group of community volunteers from Lapulu. Fresh from this immediate grounding in participatory content creation, the Pe-PP training team returned to Jakarta and immediately began adapting the ToT syllabus to make it applicable to the local Indonesian context – starting with translation into Indonesian. This evolutionary development was anticipated and welcome, since ongoing participatory design of content creation systems was

Storytelling exercise: ‘digital icebreaker’. Rather than conduct a formal group introduction, trainees start the workshop process by audio interviewing each other. The recorded interviews are then played back to the rest of the group. This technique aims to integrate technology and storytelling in a non-threatening way. Lapulu, July 2006.
integral to our approach. The Pe-PP team used their adapted module to conduct ToT workshops in two telecentres on Pabelan and Semeru, both on the island of Java. Their experiences inform the two principles which structure the rest of this chapter.

**Principle 1: literacy in the locale**

From their inception, the telecentres had mostly been used to support the learning groups' income-generating activities by feeding them with information from the Web. Some content creation activities had taken place, although usually conducted by the telecentre staff or the Pe-PP infomobilisers. For example, Lapulu telecentre staff had produced several issues of a journal entitled Berita Pesisir (“News from the Shore”). This journal was established as part of a previous World Bank-funded urban poverty alleviation project, which provided funds for the community to improve local infrastructure. Initially, the journal had reported on the successes and achievements of the project; it then became the organ of the telecentre. In Kertosari, the telecentre staff had compiled text and image web advertisements for products made by the learning groups, as well as text-based success stories written for Pe-PP’s website.

The participatory content creation training usually represented the workshop trainees’ first foray into using a telecentre space to make multimedia narratives, and the Pe-PP team recommended that all trainees have at least some prior experience of using a computer. This stipulation immediately excluded any community member without a basic degree of digital literacy. Conversely, Pe-PP believed that a more extended training period which encompassed basic PC training would be impractical, as the time required to complete the course might exclude those with the least time to spare, such as poor women.

Participants often had little or no prior reason to write creatively in their daily lives beyond the telecentre. As we discovered in our conversations, many trainees only had primary school education. Some considered that writing was something for more educated people. Others worried that their handwriting was too messy, which would make them the brunt of other trainees’ jokes. In one trainee’s view, “The difficult part of making a digital story is developing a story. I already had an idea in my head about what I wanted to say. But putting it into words was so hard”. It seemed that writing stories – so central to the way we had conducted training previously – was a largely alien practice to the everyday lives of community

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2 Quote by Ibu Limah, from Emma Baulch’s field notes 27 July 2007.
members and the broader programs of the telecentres. Mindful of this, the Pe-PP trainers’ four-day program dedicated the first day and a half to exercises in sharing, writing and analysing stories. Like their counterparts in Nepal, the Pe-PP team also evolved the five Ws narrative device into a very useful matrix to guide trainees in analysing other content. The rationale for the use of the matrix was that if trainees could identify the five Ws of someone else’s story, they could gain some understanding of basic narrative structure in order to better construct their own. The Pe-PP trainers found this framework to be a useful way to get the participants to really understand structure, and referred to the matrix frequently during their workshops.

Pe-PP punctuated the syllabus with screenings of digital stories made during previous workshops in Indonesia, in order to impart the variety of themes and messages adopted by their peers. However, after a number of workshops had been completed, it transpired that many trainees had used the examples as a template for their own stories and reproduced very similar visual and linguistic aesthetics. This resulted in patterns of structural and thematic uniformity across the digital stories produced in Indonesia over the Finding a Voice project. Specifically, this uniformity appeared as a consistent interest among the trainees in writing narratives which open with an introduction of themselves and a description of where they live, before embarking on the main story. This ‘personal introduction’ was seen as a positive outcome of the content creation process by one community trainee: “The good part of making the digital story is that now I am well-known in my village, because people see me on the digital story”. In contrast, the Pe-PP trainers and the Finding a Voice research team had anticipated a higher degree of diversity. It may have been possible to address this during the training process by imposing ‘top-down’ creative direction on the style and substance of each story, disguised as hints and tips. To their credit, the Pe-PP trainers resisted this option and stayed true to the aim of the project: to allow ordinary citizens to tell their own story without interference. However, the uniformity resulting from this degree of participation was remarked upon by one Pe-PP trainer:

“The digital stories present quite a uniform voice. This is not something we planned. From the beginning we did not want to interfere in the digital story-making process and the themes that people choose. We did not want to interfere because we wanted it to be their own voice. But I am confused about this”.

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Principle 2: sustainable strategies

The Pe-PP initiative was responsible for the creation of 50 digital stories across the telecentre sites in 2006 – 31 by men and 19 by women. A basic content analysis exercise was conducted to identify the main themes, messages and audiences of these stories. However, it is rather more difficult to evaluate how much participatory content creation activities of Pe-PP and Finding a Voice have represented – or perhaps repressed – the voice of marginalised citizens at the research sites. The longer-term fieldwork required to answer this question was not conducted in Indonesia; but based on discussions with community trainees over the course of several field visits, one important observation can be made. At all three sites, community members were visibly excited about going to a telecentre to learn to use a camera, make their own mini-movie and see their face on screen. The workshops opened up creative spaces in the telecentre initiatives for community participants to laugh together, show off, and have fun with each other. In this way, a sense of ownership of the initiative was developed in local people. This level of excitement contrasts with a telecentre’s traditional focus on teaching how to use the Web to access information. We feel that similar initiatives can integrate more effectively into local communities by providing both information access and content creation programs.
As described in chapter 2, a broad three-phase participatory content creation strategy was employed across the Finding a Voice project, namely:

1. Training of trainers workshops.
2. Participatory content creation programs and activities.
3. Distribution strategy for locally created content.

Our research in Lumbini, Nepal demonstrated how distribution of content to appropriate audiences and hubs is an important factor in the sustainability of a local participatory content creation program. Nepal benefits from a thriving community media sphere which can contribute to content distribution (see chapter 3). In Indonesia, strategies for distribution were discussed in detail during the first training of trainers workshop in Lapulu. An intensive planning session generated many ideas for collaboration with local government agencies, such as the use of digital stories for agricultural and fisheries education. Distribution of content across the telecentre network itself was also suggested. However, this level of strategic planning was not repeated by the Pe-PP trainers during successive workshops in Indonesia. Although digital stories were usually screened to the local community at a CMC using a data projector, no more substantial plan for wider distribution was implemented. The ambitious strategic distribution collaborations discussed in Lapulu were not followed up.

Conclusion

Referring back to our first principle of literacy in the locale, we have argued that in the design of content creation training, it is not only important to know the general levels of literacy, but also how literacy manifests itself in a community. In Pabelan, many trainees had completed primary school education and could read and write, but rarely had the occasion to do so. The Pe-PP team effectively adapted the content creation syllabus for the local context, but the issue of literacy in the locale limited progression.

In terms of the second principle sustainable strategies, we have observed how the training program elicited much more excitement among participants than more typical Web or office application training. We surmised that the content creation activities brought a more creative and humorous ingredient to the telecentre initiatives, as community members wrote and created self-portraits and biographical stories using the existing ICT infrastructure. Yet lack of consideration of medium-term distribution strategies contributed to the minimal impact that the content creation intervention in
Indonesia had on existing social communications structures.

If the Indonesian initiative did not feature a well-articulated medium-term content creation strategy, this might reflect the fact that content creation was considered peripheral to the lead organisation. The mission of the Pe-PP infomobilisers was to alleviate poverty by establishing learning groups, and to link these groups to appropriate Web-based products, resources and information. The potential role of participatory content creation in helping Pe-PP’s mission was perhaps weakly expressed: certainly, it seemed poorly understood by stakeholders. Therefore content creation activities were not continued in Indonesia, and the infomobilisers did not undertake sustained research into the meaning and significance of digital storytelling among the learning groups.

Another possible failure lay in the structure of the content creation workshops themselves. The training syllabus was based upon an arts-based approach to individual storytelling: in short, the trainees were shown how to express personal narratives. This personal, individual approach to the task was at odds with the wider approach taken by the Pe-PP program, in which infomobilisers facilitated learning groups and rarely worked at an individual level. Partly as a result of this, and also due to the narrative uniformity observed previously, the Finding a Voice researchers later conducted more advanced workshops in Nepal and India which introduced microdocumentary production by small creative teams. Team-based content creation is a standard approach for many professional communicators using audiovisual media (TV, radio, multimedia etc.). To date, this strategy seems to produce more varied and sustainable initiatives than in Indonesia.

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Munsir Salam, infomobiliser, Lapulu.

Suti’ah, infomobiliser, Kertosari.
Mulyadi's Digital Story

Hello friends. My name is Yadi. I want to talk to you about the dangers of narkoba (narcotics), a kind of psychotropic drug that can ease pain.

There are various kinds of narkoba. There are pills, capsules and even syringes.

If you use narkoba, you are sure to feel like the man in this picture.

You could even end up like this.

How awful!

What a pity it would be to end your life tragically at a young age.

You don't want that, right? Then stay away from narkoba.
My friend Herry says that without narkoba we can be more creative...

...like the youth of Lapulu who play sport...

...sing in a choir and...

...play PC games. More interesting, huh?

Remember! Even one small pill can do a lot of damage to your nerves.

So, keep your wits about you!
For many ICT for development initiatives, one of the biggest challenges faced once digital technologies are made available is how to make them meaningful and useful for all, including the most socially excluded. Reasons for lack of engagement might include geographical distance from ICT infrastructure; lack of social mobility; and barriers to participation based on caste, class, ethnicity, or gender. For those whose survival depends upon daily wage labour, spending time in ICT centres is unlikely to be a priority. Some people simply think that ICTs are 'not for them'. Early on during the Finding a Voice project, two key questions arose:

- How can an initiative reach out to communities who are the least likely or able to engage with ICT for development?
- How can an ICT initiative work at involving the least engaged and most frequently marginalised people in content creation activities?

Although the different solutions and strategies needed to answer these questions are specific to each context, and we have learned that successfully reaching out to rural and remote and otherwise excluded communities is hard work, there are some principles for ICT engagement that emerge across Finding a Voice sites. In this chapter we present three principles that support creative ICT engagement by reaching out to communities through:

1. Participatory content creation: link peripheral communities to the centre through creative engagement.
2. Targeting the excluded: experiment with multiplatform distribution and narrowcasting. Distribute content across more than one channel to make content work harder for you.

3. Mixing media: combine and leverage new and traditional technologies.

The main example of creative engagement that we use in this chapter is the Kothmale Community Multimedia Centre (CMC) in Sri Lanka. It exemplifies our principles in two ways: firstly because there is a strong history in Kothmale of using technology and people to reach out to communities; and secondly because the CMC team has found an interesting way to move beyond the limitations of a fixed telecentre. Other examples from India and Nepal are also drawn upon, and given space we could have presented many others.

Kothmale CMC: reaching out to communities

The Kothmale CMC is located in a fairly remote settlement called Riverside, a 45-minute bus ride from the two nearest towns of Gampola and Nawalapitiya, in the hills of Central Province, Sri Lanka. The CMC comprises the Kothmale Community Radio station (KCR) started in the late 1980s, and a computer and Internet facility established in 1999. The area consists mainly of small villages, rice paddies and tea plantations. The population is a complex ethnic mix, with the majority being Sinhalese (mostly farmers and public servants), and the largest minority being Tamil (mostly tea plantation workers).

Even before Kothmale Community Radio was established, mobile production teams would travel to villages to find out about local issues and bring content back to regional or national radio services for broadcasting. This constituted an attempt to use radio to reach out to communities and ensure their concerns received some media attention. While this content was ultimately controlled by the state broadcaster, nevertheless it shows an early concern with the idea of rural and remote outreach. KCR was started in 1989 as part of a series of community radio initiatives in Sri Lanka, initially with the main purpose of easing the relocation of large numbers of people in the area due to major irrigation and power development schemes. Whilst community radio in Sri Lanka resembles other initiatives throughout South Asia, it is distinguished by being managed and financed by the Sri Lankan Broadcasting Corporation – the state broadcaster – having received additional support from UNESCO and the Danish International Development Agency.
The computer and Internet centre was co-located with the radio station to constitute the first UNESCO-supported CMC in the late 1990s. UNESCO and other stakeholders felt that the Web could be used to provide access to knowledge and information beneficial to people in the area. Three public access computers were set up, and another placed in the KCR studio. The idea here was to use radio – to which most people in the area could listen – as an additional distribution medium to deliver information from the Web, which very few people in the area could access directly. A new content format called ‘Radio Browsing’ was developed for this purpose. Listeners are invited to send in questions; presenters search the Web for answers. These presenters translate information found in English, provide local context, and broadcast the information to their listeners. By allowing listeners to call or write to the radio station with requests for information from the World Wide Web, KCR effectively used Radio Browsing to enable broader participation in ICT despite the barriers of language and access. This illustrates our third principle of mixing media: the older and more locally established radio medium provided leverage for the Internet-based medium. The service has not always functioned smoothly at Kothmale – for example, problems with funding have led to occasional long breaks in the Internet connection. However, this innovative method of mixing media has often led to interesting and exciting activities (some of which we discuss below) and has influenced other initiatives across the world.

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1. www.unesco.org/webworldcmc
2. See Information Technology and Development: A New Paradigm for delivering the Internet to Rural Areas in Developing Countries by James, J. Published by Routledge (2004).
In addition, people were encouraged to access the CMC itself, and training was offered in a range of computer skills. Many have benefited from this; in particular young people, such as Kosala Keerthirathne. Living in the town of Nawalapitiya with his widowed mother and two brothers, Kosala had received a scholarship at Grade 5 to study in a school in Kandy. He was the editor of the astronomy society at this school, and responsible for the notice board. He had heard on the radio in 1999 that there were new Internet facilities available at the CMC and they were free and open to anyone. Before this he had not used a computer or really understood what the Internet was; he just knew that it could be used to find information on 'just about anything'. One day, Keerthirathne travelled to the CMC after school with a friend to see if he could access information for the notice board. He could, and in the process started to learn about computers, the Internet and web design, coming to the CMC as much as he could after school or during holidays. Today he is completing his engineering degree and working as UNESCO Program Co-ordinator for the CMC.

Keerthirathne’s first visit to Kothmale CMC – and the opportunities he then leveraged – changed his life. This is one example of how discussions about ICT on the radio also attracted people to come to the centre itself and constitutes another way in which the CMC has reached out to communities. However, due in part to its rural setting, not everyone feels able to access the centre in the same way as Keerthirathne and others like him. With this in mind, a mobile CMC called the ‘eTuktuk’ was developed at Kothmale in 2005. The eTuktuk is a three-wheeled auto rickshaw
containing a laptop, printer, phone, loudspeakers and data projector.3 It serves as an outside broadcast unit for radio production, as well as a mobile telecentre connected to the Internet via a CDMA handset.4 While the eTuktuk alone does not overcome all the issues around lack of engagement with Kothmale CMC, it does serve to illustrate all three of our principles of creative ICT engagement:

1. Participatory content creation: a suite of applications for content creation activities.
2. Targeting the excluded: physical mobility allows access to rural communities.

More recently as part of the *Finding a Voice* project, Kothmale CMC staff and volunteers have been experimenting with ways to enhance community participation in content creation, and finding innovative ways to distribute that content. The CMC therefore provides an interesting example of 'reaching out to communities' through both technology and people. The next section of this chapter looks at further examples of effectively using and mixing

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3 www.etuktuk.net. For further details, see ‘The Case of the e-tuktuk’ by Tacchi, J. and Grubb, B. in Media International Australia (2007).
4 CDMA = code division multiple access
media and technology, to illustrate our principles for reaching out to communities.

**Principle 1: participatory content creation with marginalised groups**

Kothmale Community Radio encourages direct participation by local communities. A local lawyer produced a regular radio browsing program; a local lottery ticket seller made a regular radio program on films and film songs. Indeed, most of the regular presenters over the years have been local people first trained at the station. The same holds true for the Kothmale CMC: most of its trainers are local people who first developed digital literacy at the CMC. Yet there has also been a distinct under-representation of minority or marginalised groups. And while most of the content creators are local people who learned to make media content through Kothmale radio or CMC, the wider community’s involvement in content creation has been limited. As part of the CMC’s involvement with the *Finding a Voice* project, Keerthirathne examined the role of the eTuktuk and content creation in engaging communities that were not participating with radio and CMC activities. He collected and analysed data on the usage of the eTuktuk during two months in mid-2007, and found that the vast majority of eTuktuk activities were biased towards the creation of live and recorded radio content, due to the influence of the KCR staff who accompanied the vehicle. There was potential to deepen levels of community participation. Reflecting on this later, Keerthirathne considered:

“This can be expected from a traditional radio [initiative], since for more than 15 years these producers have been producing radio content for the people, and tending towards other new media content production can be a slow and gradual process. [While the] radio content which is being produced is participatory, the participation of the community in program [making] can be seen mostly at the beginning of the production process. It still has a long way to go to get community participation throughout the content production process”.

In order to increase participation, Keerthirathne identified a clear need to plan for different types of programming and production using the eTuktuk. His research also highlighted that Tamil communities were not being well served by the CMC, even those communities who lived very close. Keerthirathne raised the lack of participation by Tamil tea estate communities, due to social and ethnic exclusion and the lack of a Tamil-speaking trainer at the

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5 Keerthirathne field notes, 30 Sep 2007
CMC. Economics is another reason for non-participation: the computer training courses conducted at the CMC attract a small charge. Tamil communities in the area constitute the poorest groups and are generally unable to afford the cost of computer courses for their children.

In response to these findings, in July 2007 the CMC Manager KAA Priyanka Sriyapali with ASA Fauzia – a Tamil radio announcer – took the eTuktuk to an underserved Tamil community in order to encourage participation in CMC activities. The CMC had previously recruited ICT trainers, radio producers and announcers from local communities, but had far less success attracting people from Tamil communities. Sriyapali’s plan was to recruit a young Tamil trainer for the CMC through offering training to a group of young Tamil people. She anticipated that this would encourage other Tamil youth to come to the centre and also take part in radio production. The longer-term plan is to establish a community-owned mini-CMC at the tea estate.

Once they had recruited a group of young people between 16-28 years old (6 female, 3 male) Sriyapali and Fauzia conducted a digital storytelling workshop for them at the CMC. Sriyapali explains that:

“I could have done the office course for them.... but this time I want to teach them something more important, much more creative for a beginning. They can learn office anywhere
but this kind of skill cannot be learned elsewhere. More importantly, digital storytelling training will encourage them to talk openly about themselves about their lives in a different way. This will be a different experience for us too”.

The first digital stories made by the trainees were about their experiences of the CMC, but subsequent stories were based on issues that they felt needed to be explored and discussed in their communities. Keerthirathne observed that:

“So far we have got very good scripts from the group which talk about alcoholism, domestic violence, and various other issues. The fact is that these are real stories about their real life and will draw the attention of the audience into deeper topics”.

Once involved with CMC activities, the Tamil youth group was encouraged to learn about the Web and become involved in radio production. Many of the participants who visited the CMC at weekends to make their digital stories also started to come during the week to surf Tamil language websites. Sriyapali and Fauzia asked female participants to gather information from the Web for KCR’s Tamil language radio program. Keerthirathne felt that this was a successful participatory content creation activity:

“I asked them about the radio side and how they interacted with the studios. All of them have participated in live or recorded Tamil programs in KCR during the past few weeks and they were really happy about the opportunity. I congratulated them and told them that one day they will be able to do their own programs. They thanked Fauzia for giving them the opportunity”.

**Principle 2: targeting the excluded via multiplatform distribution and narrowcasting**

The eTuktuk’s loudspeakers and data projector were used to show the first digital stories produced by the young people to their families and friends at a public screening. Keerthirathne records that:

“This was a very important visit for us and the estate people since the digital stories had given the message of what’s happening at the radio station and CMC in their own voice, in their own language. This was better than an outsider telling the people to use the CMC”.
The use of the eTuktuk's facilities to support collective listening or viewing in a single space is an example of what is called 'narrowcasting' in parts of South Asia. The Kothmale CMC teams often use the eTuktuk to narrowcast radio-style program or live announcements using its microphone, audio mixer and speakers. This form of multiplatform distribution is appropriate to the rural and remote context. For example, Keerthirathne went to another nearby tea estate to find out if the community listened to KCR and what kinds of issues they faced in their daily lives. He was accompanied by Preethi Viraj Pavitheran, a Tamil radio producer and presenter who has been working at KCR for a number of years. Neither of them had visited this community before and they found a community living in 30 old tea estate line houses in very poor condition. These used to belong to a private tea estate, but in the late 1970s a Government department had bought the estate land to relocate families from flooded areas due to a large dam construction. This community was somehow forgotten, left without secure or steady employment and with no-one to take care of their houses. The most urgent problem was drinking water: there was one open, dirty water tank shared amongst all. Over the next few weeks, Keerthirathne and Pavitheran visited a few more times and used the eTuktuk's facilities to make a radio program and a digital story about these issues. They played these to various communities and broadcast the radio program on KCR. Both programs were circulated to various groups including the local Lion’s Club, which in response offered to help to purchase a new water tank for the forgotten tea estate community. Keerthirathne reflected that the eTuktuk had effectively allowed the CMC team to audio narrowcast the radio program to the Tamil tea estate communities, as well as screen the digital story. This was important because he found through his research that few homes here had radio sets, so they had to use other means of communication.6

Another interesting example of audio narrowcasting and media mixing can be found in northern India at Havalvani Samudayik Radio, whose studio is located in a town called Chamba in the foothills of the Himalayas. The radio studio is part of a CMC, and young community volunteers have been trained in radio production. Hevalvani Samudayik Radio is active in 15 villages, each of which has a volunteer involved both in identifying village-specific issues, and in mobilising the community around them. Community reporters make programs on these issues at the Havalvani Samudayik studio.

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6 For more details see Kothmale Community Radio and its Role as a Provider of Mobile Media Technology to the Rural Poor by Keerthirathne, K. Presented at CMS Symbols Conference, Hyderabad (1-3 November 2007).
in Chamba. These programs are copied onto cassette tapes, which are then taken to the villages, often by foot as the road system is limited. This cassette is played to an assembled community audience, and followed by discussion which the reporters record for follow-up programming. The reason for 'narrowcasting' here is that it is only very recently that community radio has been legislated for in India. So while Havalvani Samudayik Radio prepares its application for a broadcasting licence, it continues to narrowcast its content. Furthermore, issues-based narrowcasting in front of a community gathering can trigger an immediate debate. Thus it provides a useful tool for generating a short-term action plan by the assembled community. Once a broadcast licence is obtained by Havalvani Samudayik Radio, its programs will be broadcast more regularly, to more villages. However, station staff will continue to sit with groups and listen to programs since this approach is recognised as valuable in generating local participation and action:

“For example: during the narrowcast of a 15 minute program on June 10, 2007 a woman asked the [radio volunteer] to rewind and replay the words of a government official about an issue with local relevance. Later, this group of women villagers proposed that she take the lead in a piece of positive local action. She wrote a draft application that would be given to the government. The issue was water scarcity – drinking water included”.

This kind of close engagement with local communities can greatly support local or community radio broadcasting. In particular, as the above case illustrates, narrowcasting can be effective in creating consensus-driven collective action that is specific to a very local community on an issue with wider or more general relevance.

**Principle 3: mixing media**

The eTuktuk demonstrates how a mobile ICT platform can support media mixing and multiplatform distribution of local content in order to reach audiences without access to TV and radio. However, the latter were readily accessible at other *Finding a Voice* research sites, and this final example explains how the radio browsing format first developed in Kothmale has been adapted for television and put to good use in the town of Tansen, Palpa District, western Nepal. Tansen CMC was established in 2003 as a computer and Internet centre co-located with a community television initiative.\(^8\) A one-hour locally made television program is made and

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\(^7\) M.S. Kiran, field report, July 2007

\(^8\) tansenpalpa.net
broadcast each week via one of the local cable television networks. One of this program’s segments is ‘TV Browsing’, which was first used here in 2004. The TV Browsing segments are produced by three local young people who were trained in television production and online skills at Tansen CMC. Each week the group decides on an issue of relevance to local people as the topic of the segment. They research the topic via the Web and consult with local experts; so if the topic is a health issue, they will consult with local doctors. This local participation allows them to validate, question and contextualise the Web-sourced information. Materials are translated into the Nepali language and the segment is broadcast on the cable television channel. Therefore TV Browsing uses TV as an additional distribution medium for the World Wide Web. Tansen-based researcher Govinda Prasad Acharya has found that it is mostly young people who are attracted to the CMC in particular and ICT in general through these TV Browsing segments. In April 2007 a program was made on the School Leaving Certificate examination, in order to alleviate apprehension or anxiety experienced by student candidates: “Students who do not have access to the Internet or lack the understanding of how to search the web for such information were exposed to this information for the first time”.9 The day after the broadcast, Acharya was walking along the main street of Tansen when he met a student preparing for the SLC exam. The student remarked upon how he had misunderstood the Internet only as a medium for sending messages, but who now understood that the World Wide Web was “the house of information”.10

Conclusion

In this chapter we have presented a set of principles for reaching out to communities through participatory content creation activities. These principles are based on examples of actual practices, documented by researchers across South Asia. Barriers to participation in such activities can be varied and difficult to overcome, but creative engagement with ICT can provide solutions. Narrowcasting at Havalvani Samudayik Radio in India demonstrates how multiple distribution channels can engage communities and allow their contribution to the content creation agenda. TV Browsing in Nepal shows how mixed media can circulate knowledge in innovative ways, to benefit the daily lives of local people.

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9 Acharya, field notes, July 2007
Our focus has been on Kothmale CMC in Sri Lanka, which ably demonstrates all three of our content creation principles: participation in local content creation; experimentation with distribution platforms; and the mixing of analog and digital technologies. We have seen how Tamil communities in close geographical proximity to Kothmale CMC still felt excluded from the Centre’s activities for social, ethnic and economic reasons. The eTuktuk was used to reach out through a raft of content creation activities, to give excluded young people the skills to be creative and produce their own content. In so doing, they came to appreciate that the CMC was as much for them as anyone else.

It is interesting to reflect that Kothmale CMC was started in the late 1990s when debates about the 'digital divide' were ripe and there was a great concern among national governments and intergovernmental agencies to ensure that those on the wrong side of the divide were 'connected'.\(^{11}\) At that time, the focus of the policy arena was largely on infrastructure. But once ICT was made available to practitioners on the ground, issues emerged around digital inequality, inclusion and engagement. Just how do you get the marginalised to engage with community-based media and ICT? We hope that the principles for participatory content creation presented in this chapter and throughout this book may provide some answers to those in the field.

\(^{11}\) See ‘From Digital Divides to Digital Entitlements in Knowledge Societies’ by Mansell, R. in Current Sociology (2002).
Acknowledgements

This chapter draws upon research data produced by researchers and others involved with the *Finding a Voice* project. Special thanks to Kosala Keerthirathne, Atul Sharma and Govinda Prasad Acharya. M.S. Kiran’s work underpins the narrowcasting discussion. Any shortcomings are attributable solely to the authors.
New Vision

By KB Buddhika Sampath

My name is Buddhika and I'm 24 years old. I live in the central hill region of Sri Lanka.

In 1999, the Kothmale Internet Project was started by UNESCO. Like everyone in our village, I was really curious to see what it was all about. I had seen a computer before but I had never touched one.

I met some of the community radio staff and a volunteer from Australia named Tanya. At that time, I was in my final year of school and we had a special project where we could choose any topic we wanted.

I decided to do a project on the Kothmale Mahaweli dam project. My first website was in both Sinhala and English. Tanya helped me a lot with learning all about web design.

After that I began teaching myself and now I have my own web development team. Together we update the kothmale.org website and I also designed the national governments ICT website. You can view it at www.nanasala.lk

Through my interest in computers, music and training, I also became involved in operations at the Kothmale Community Radio station. I learnt broadcasting from Mr. Sunil Wijesinghe, who manages the station.
The Kothmale Internet Project moved my life in a new direction. Now I am helping Kothmale strengthen their media centre. We are developing some great ideas – like the eTuktuk that is taking the Internet and multimedia out to villages.

I hope our centre can connect villages with each other and give young people opportunities to develop their careers.

As someone who comes from a rural village, I know that this centre is providing new opportunities for young people.

This is an outline of a short video created by KB Buddhika Sampath Darshana at a digital storytelling workshop held in Buddikote, India in early 2006. Darshana returned to Kothmale where he facilitated a variety of content creation activities with staff, volunteers and community members of the CMC. Many of these stories – including those discussed in this chapter – can be viewed online at: http://findingavoice.blip.tv/
This chapter draws upon examples from an ICT-based Media Development Course in Seelampur that challenges an asymmetric power relation within the community. Communities may be ‘asymmetric’ in terms of power relations due to issues around caste, class, religion, or gender. These asymmetries may have deep roots in a community, and any attempt to change the existing situation might be opposed or even confronted by those who ‘enjoy’ the position of power. In such situations, those in the community who benefit least from an asymmetric power relation may be hesitant to participate in content creation initiatives. These issues pose considerable challenges for the Seelampur initiative, which explores sensitive issues such as domestic violence against women. From research conducted at Seelampur, this chapter proposes a gradualist approach to participatory content creation based on five principles:

1) **Neutrality**: present and articulate a position via content creation that is neutral or non-controversial; yet persuasive enough for both sides of the asymmetry to debate.

2) **Trust**: encourage participation in a local ICT initiative and its content creation program by building trust at the community, family and individual levels. Show how an initiative can help with everyday and longer-term issues.

3) **Multiplicity**: use multiple content formats to both reach wider audiences, and also to reinforce the issues and messages under examination.
4) Feedback: encourage discussion-driven outreach to provide feedback on content creation projects. Any discussion generated can be fed back to the community as ongoing 'activated' content.

5) Networks: increase the effectiveness of participatory content creation and outreach activities through both informal networks (e.g. groups such as students of the Media Development Course discussed below) and formal networks (e.g. non-governmental organisations) to help cross-fertilisation of content and messages across different groups.

Digital storytelling about domestic violence

*It is part of human nature to interact and participate in the lives of other people.*

At first glance, the Seelampur community in north-eastern Delhi epitomises urban poverty; with its noise, open drainage, scattered garbage, disease, crime and thriving informal economy. Every available space off the narrow lanes is tightly packed by residences or commercial premises. Tricycles and rickshaw pullers clog the roads, whilst the youth imitates the latest Bollywood fashion trends. Seelampur is predominantly inhabited by Muslims, and features a literacy rate of 76.94%; this is higher than the national average of 64.8%. However, there is a low gender ratio of 840 females to every 1000 males; the already low national average is 933 females to 1000 males. This ratio points to a phenomenon described as “missing women”, which suggests that female mortality from age-specific factors should be significantly lower than male mortality within a comparable environment. However, gender-based discrimination results in females suffering disproportionately from poor health and nutrition, causing a low ratio of females to males.

In September 2006, a digital storytelling workshop was held as part of *Finding a Voice* in Ballimaran. The workshop was originally meant to be conducted at Datamation Foundation’s Open Knowledge Network (OKN) centre in Seelampur, which offers services such as informal education for children, health camps, self-help group facilitation, and a community newspaper entitled *Ek Duniya Gyan Patrika* (“One World Knowledge Magazine”). However, neighbourhood violence in Seelampur at the time — sparked by the Government of Delhi’s decision to demolish illegal

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construction — prompted the workshop relocation. During the training, 15 volunteer female participants (girls and younger women) from Seelampur created personal mini-movies on local issues and problems. Some chose gender issues; one of these stories was on domestic violence. Entitled *Shama Jo Jal Utti* ("Flame that Burned"), the story tells of a girl who witnesses domestic violence as an 11-12 year old. Her parents separate and her elder sister marries, forcing the girl to do household work instead of going to school. The story is written and narrated by the protagonist’s friend and neighbour Farzana Malik, who describes how the girl becomes an “orphan despite having parents”. In later life, the girl decides against marriage through her fear of repeated marital violence. Malik’s narration ends by asking: will the girl ever get married? Will she be able to move on with her life?

Early screenings of *Shama Jo Jal Utti* in the community resulted in little reaction from the mixed gender audience. For example, one young girl responded to the story by declaring that she would also have decided “not to get married” had she witnessed the same at home. A mother of five retorted that “You should not punish yourself for someone else’s fault”— which ended the discussion. However, later showings of the mini-movie were accompanied by discussion facilitated by Farzana Malik, the story’s creator. Responding to her impetus, the community slowly started discussing domestic violence. In a focus group discussion, a male suggested that after seeing the story he would think better of his daughter. But other men in the group gave voice to an entrenched asymmetry of gender power, revealing issues of control in marital relationships: “women
should understand husband’s emotions. If he is in bad mood, then they should not do things that would further anger him”; “[women] are argumentative and this causes fights”; “there is a huge difference between men and women; women can withstand emotions, but men lack this capacity”; and in response, “what’s wrong in this?”.

To date, *Shama Jo Jal Utti* has been screened over fifty times in the community, followed by a focus group or discussion either facilitated by Malik herself and/or researcher Aseem Asha Usman. Children have participated in the discussions and have spoken openly about witnessing domestic violence; which has in turn prompted some women to join the discussion. Roughly speaking, the majority of vocal male focus group participants considered that although women are physically abused, a greater emotional damage is caused to children who witness domestic violence. Although actual victims were hesitant to come forward and produce content, the *Shama Jo Jal Utti* digital story was instrumental in bringing to the fore an issue that was not previously discussed openly by the community. This discussion may well have been possible since the digital story had adopted the first principle of neutrality. The narrative took a non-controversial position and simply described how a family suffered through domestic violence: the father who was the direct cause of the physical abuse was not blamed directly. This position helped to gradually generate open discussion in a male-dominated community.

*Farzana Malik facilitates a focus group with men on domestic violence (GRC, August 2007).*
Media Development Course: extending content creation and outreach

In early 2007, the Seelampur OKN centre evolved into a Gender Resource Centre (GRC), also run by Datamation Foundation. GRCs are a Government of Delhi state-wide initiative of centres that target women in marginalised communities. They are run by NGOs that are active in the target communities, and all services are offered free of charge. As well as continuing many of its OKN services, the new Seelampur GRC offers a Media Development Course (MDC), an ICT skills program for young women which provides training in desktop publishing, multimedia and website design, free of charge. Students learn fifteen different PC applications, offered after extensive research of comparable community programs, as well as consultation with various agencies in New Delhi about suitable software skills required for job hunting.

The MDC also varies from other programs in its overt aim to achieve genuine 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). Not only does this approach demonstrates effective digital literacy training through community content creation, it also illustrates some of the content creation principles raised at the beginning of this chapter. For example, multiplicity and recurrence: one article written for the community newspaper reported on a group discussion on domestic violence, held at GRC and organised by MDC students. This demonstrates how multiple formats (e.g. digital story and community newspaper) were used to distribute the same content to wider audiences, and also to reinforce the issues and messages under examination. Furthermore, the use of the community discussion to inform the piece demonstrates the principle of feedback and content: the group discussion on domestic violence was fed back to the community as ongoing 'activated' content.

The sustained content creation activities based on domestic violence gradually expanded to include other gender issues including dowry, mobility and eve-teasing. Eve-teasing (unwanted and persistent sexual advances by men against women in public) is one common reason for the restricted mobility of women in the community. A MDC student created a cartoon for *Ek Duniya Gyan Patrika* based on a true story about a successful woman from the community who completes her studies despite facing persistent...
eve-teasing, and goes onto work as an information technology assistant in a government school. This story demonstrated a neutral yet persuasive approach to eve-teasing (a principle of content creation) and rather than sparking further gender-based asymmetry within the community, was part of the reason that men also came forward to support the content screenings.

Principle 5: networks

As in any social change endeavour, the effectiveness of participatory content creation and outreach activities depends on both formal and informal networks for content creation and distribution. A key informal network is clearly the family, whose support is important to students of the MDC. Aseem Asha Usman has deliberately encouraged the families of MDC students to visit the GRC to observe its activities, as he explains:

“Parveen Siddiqui is a resident of the poorest area in Seelampur called Janta Colony. She has passed her 12th class [grade], she and her co-partner Kalam Fatima come from Janta Colony for the morning class at MDC. She gave her precious time to the centre for the production of innovative designs. Her mother was not interested in the centre in the beginning but when she herself paid a visit and saw the work done by Siddiqui, she was surprised and said to me, 'My daughter is doing well here, please help her to get a job, if possible so that she may utilise her knowledge and earn something for her future’.”
This poster was designed by twelve MDC students after extensive discussion (September 2007). It shows how the parents of Kammo decide to "marry off" their under-aged daughter to a poor man, as they are unable to provide dowry. Later, her in-laws prevent her from finding a job, and Kammo is abused by her husband for not having a male child. She meets a local religious leader, who threatens to ostracise her husband from the community if the abuse continues. The poster also provides contact details of Seelampur Gender Resource Centre and Sur Nirman Educational & Cultural Society; both organisations offer free legal advice and urge victims of abuse to come forward: "Don’t be silent, come and meet [us] today". It is possible that local religious leaders – who wield considerable power in the community – could have felt undermined by this initiative. However, the non-confrontational message sent by the poster did not challenge other parties in the community.
Informal networking can lead to the formation of creative teams, as occurred when a group of MDC students visited a jeans factory run by local woman Poonam Devi, herself a victim of domestic violence. She separated from her husband and after years of hardship started the small-scale factory. Her story was the subject of a feature in the community newspaper, which prompted a follow-up visit to the factory by the MDC students to speak to Poonam Devi about her success story—made all the more remarkable by the fact that she is a Hindu woman in a trade traditionally dominated by Muslim men. The MDC group reassembled at the Gender Resource Centre to participate in a content creation workshop facilitated by researcher and content trainer Usman. He organised a ‘story circle’ to which the students contributed their research in order to write a script and storyboard for a digital story about Poonam Devi. The resulting mini-movie defines not only her achievements, but also her pains, struggle, aspirations, ambitions and even her current hurdles to achieve ongoing business success. The creative story circle process became a brainstorming session for the young MDC students to learn about a woman from their community who broke barriers to become successful.

Of course, the power of networking goes beyond content creation. Other cartoon stories on violence against women were made into posters which gave contact details for both Seelampur GRC and Sur Nirman Educational & Cultural Society, a NGO with branches across Delhi which provides free legal advice to poor women. The contact details on the poster led to the visiting lawyer at the GRC receiving enquires; two women visited for legal
consultation. This emerging formal network was further cemented when young women from the GRC registered for a special campaign against domestic violence run by Sur Nirman Educational & Cultural Society, known as Mumkin hai (“It is possible”). The campaign is now supported by participatory content creation: MDC students have created posters for the NGO, and have also screened digital stories on domestic violence to drive discussions at meetings organised by Sur Nirman. Notes from these meetings evolved into content for *Ek Duniya Gyan Patrika*. From the Sur Nirman perspective, the content created by MDC students has helped to raise awareness and encourage discussions on violence against women in the community, both in their meetings and throughout the wider community. From the GRC’s perspective, the Sur Nirman staff members have encouraged victims of domestic violence to participate in the discussions, which then led to content creation activities.

Another formal network arose when MDC students offered a content creation training workshop to local schools in the community. Five schools sent two students each, accompanied by their IT teacher. The workshop was organised and financed by Dr Zakir Hussain Foundation, a local NGO that also runs one of the schools participating in the workshop. One of the school teams created a digital story on eve-teasing; another made a story about restrictions to women’s freedom and mobility. Seelampur GRC’s services are provided exclusively to women, yet some young boys were amongst the school participants. Aseem Asha Usman raised this issue with facilitator Zakir Hussain (unrelated), who offered the use of his own house to record voice overs for the multimedia narratives. Hussain manages the Foundation personally and has attended content screenings at Seelampur from the early days. Both the schools workshop and the offer of his house as a recording studio reflect his belief that participatory content creation activities are a public good. The content produced during the schools workshop was shown to local politicians, including a member of the legislative assembly of the Government of Delhi.

**Sustainability through consistency**

The long-term effectiveness of Seelampur GRC’s Media Development Course as an agent of social change hinges on its ongoing strategies for exploring community issues. Any future social change project that overlooks the issue of violence against women would alienate the already established community network based on this issue, and therefore erode trust in the GRC. Therefore new social issues and the participatory content creation activities that accompany them should be treated as a complementary program to
the issue of violence against women, which requires constant and ongoing negotiation and engagement with the community in order to achieve the substantial behavioural change necessary for its eradication.

The challenge comes from the fact that non-profit organisations tend to raise funds from an array of potential donors, which forces some organisations to address a multiplicity of issues in order to fulfil their sponsorship obligations. Therefore existing social change programs are dropped for new ones. For instance, the Seelampur OKN centre which predated the GRC focused on encouraging informal education for small children (both boys and girls), to help them enter mainstream schooling. This vital program was lost (at least to date) when the GRC supplanted the OKN centre. The principles presented in this chapter may provide one way to avoid such discontinuity: ‘new’ social change programs can engage in participatory content creation activities using networks and formats established by an ‘older’ issue. In so doing, some degree of continuity of the old program can be achieved.

This chapter has argued that a gradualist approach for participatory content creation and outreach is necessary to achieve engagement in underserved communities on issues that question asymmetric power distribution. Fast-paced, radical social change is often opposed by those on the more powerful side of the
asymmetry. The chapter also highlights the need for a consistent and sustainable approach to content creation and outreach activities. By providing some examples from an ICT initiative in Seelampur, the chapter demonstrates five more principles for content creation: neutrality, trust, multiplicity, feedback, and networks.

The in-depth examination of the Seelampur GRC and its Media Development Course should be balanced against the national context. India is at the forefront of the information technology revolution; it leads the developing world’s software industry and through its successful business process outsourcing enterprises is also regarded as “the world’s back office” after economic reforms in 1991. Indians have witnessed and debated this success for nearly two decades, which suggests that urban Indian communities — especially in the predominantly urban state of Delhi — are aware of the importance of ICT skills for employment. Yet as other chapters in this book demonstrate, the application of ICT in other contexts such as illiterate remote rural India and elsewhere poses an altogether different set of challenges.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Aseem Asha Usman, on whose work and field notes this chapter builds. Specifically, this chapter extends our paper ‘Making Content on Domestic Violence in a Male Dominated and Conservative Society’, presented at the CMS Symbols Conference in Hyderabad, 1-3 November 2007. All errors, of course, are mine alone.

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4 For more details, see ‘The India Model’ by Das, G. In Foreign Affairs (July/August 2006). Also, The End of Poverty: How to make it Happen in our Lifetime by Sachs, J. Published by Penguin Books (2005)
My Steps Forward?

By Saira

I am Saira and I have been living in Chauhan Bangar locality at Seelampur in north-east Delhi for the last 25 years. I have three sisters and five brothers.

In our family, education was not encouraged. Growing up, I always saw my elder sisters doing housework.

Rituals, wedding ceremonies, family gatherings... social life was limited to these events. I used to think that the life of a woman is confined to these things.

Though I had passed my Bachelor of Arts by correspondence, I had little information about the outside world.

At this time, I heard about the ICT centre at Jafrabad, in Babul Uloom Madarassa. I went to the centre and watched young women working on the computers.

Gradually I started using the computer like them. When I saw different photographs on the computer, I started to think that I should get involved with the media.
I enjoyed manipulating images on the computer. My dream came true when I got the opportunity to work as a reporter for a local Seelampur community newspaper.

I collected local news for this newspaper by going to different places and talking to new people. Although my parents never liked this, I was enjoying learning new things daily.

I also learned how to make digital stories in a workshop organised by UNESCO. During the workshop, I made a digital story which won a prize from the Mass Communication College at Jamia University in Delhi.

The Delhi newspapers carried this story, which gave me much strength.

In our society photography is supposed to be a sin; but today I can take pictures using a digital camera, and I can make a digital story.

I think other women in Seelampur should train for new careers like the media, so that they can develop new ways of thinking about the outside world. Furthermore, they will learn a new way of earning money.

*This microdocumentary was produced by Saira and a team from Datamation Foundation during a Finding a Voice content creation workshop in 2007 was Saira’s first introduction to computers at the Seelampur ICT centre. She went on to work at the centre and mobilised other community members to participate in the initiative.*
Through this book, we have attempted to address a research gap in literature dealing with the circumstances and consequences of creative ICT engagement with underserved communities. Some of the most interesting work on creative engagement with new technologies deals with Western contexts; generally speaking, low-infrastructure areas are only dealt with in terms of digital divide or access issues. On the other hand, research concerned with developing country contexts are firmly located within – and build upon – work in the field of development studies and development communications, with a strong focus on poverty reduction. Our aim has been to combine these two areas of interest.

*Finding a Voice* was an academic intervention, not an ICT for development project. Therefore it was staffed by a small research team working with a comparatively small budget. Its purpose was neither to establish robust poverty reduction systems, nor generate revenue or employment. Rather, the intervention demonstrated how ICT infrastructure – in the form of telecentres, community media and multimedia centres – can allow different voices from marginalised communities to be heard. Through our research experiments, these voices have revealed bottom-up perspectives to everyday issues and identities: participatory content creation has opened new paths for community knowledge whilst enhancing community life. *Finding a Voice* indicates the unexpected applications for which ICT infrastructure can be used in underserved communities, beyond the provision of basic IT and Web literacy. By testing creative
engagement with ICT initiatives, we have supported the contention that "Technologies may end up clearly defined but they do not start out that way... Thus human agency is central to the process of technological advance, contrary to technological determinism... the issue here is not merely how the technology is used but what it becomes".¹

The implementation of participatory content creation systems depends upon a basic level of 'digital literacy', a term which is used here to refer to the sociotechnical elements required for ICT-based interaction with content. These elements include: choice of and control over content consumption; and the ability to create and distribute content. So defined, digital literacy refers to an individual or organisational skillset, as well as a set of accessible digital tools and techniques.² The term describes the ability described in chapter 2 for the citizen to shift from being a passive consumer of media content, to becoming a local producer. Digital literacy might be the result of specific community-based training, education or general cultural absorption via Web browsing or content creation. By integrating research on digital literacy, participatory content creation and digital inclusion, we have proposed 'creative engagement' as a suitable goal for ICT for development. This involves the ability for people to access technologies and be creative with them in ways that enable their voices to be heard. ICT has the potential to create new services for community engagement, whether commercial or cultural. Digital literacy should be considered essential to the further development of such community services. By demystifying the processes of digital production and consumption through participatory content creation initiatives, ICT for development programs can further equip communities to effectively engage in the civic opportunities afforded by interactive digital new media. As digital literacies evolve through ICT for development initiatives, we can only imagine the new skills that will be acquired by participants in content creation programs; particularly with reference to modes of production and distribution, and levels of interaction within and beyond the local community.

Unlike more traditional print-based literacy, digital literacy encompasses the skills to both produce and distribute content and messages across a number of media, and create communication products which can be distributed in semi-mediated environments.

This characteristic can present a simultaneously daunting yet attractive possibility to many who do not take such opportunities for granted. This is not to say that we can ignore the other varied social, cultural, political, economic, structural and geographic obstacles that challenge underserved communities: participatory content creation strategies should acknowledge and carefully negotiate such local circumstances. From our experience at the Finding a Voice research sites we feel confident enough to state that such strategies can be well supported by community members and groups; agencies; organisations and/or government; through the provision of local ICT infrastructure such as community media and/or multimedia centres. Finding a Voice has pointed the way to how the integration of ICT with existing analog systems can facilitate participation in local and regional issues by individuals and communities. There is a long history of this kind of participation by community media concerns around the world: agencies or donor organisations may be well placed to help facilitate analog and digital integration. Yet human and social networks essential to the success of this kind of endeavour depend upon support, participation and leadership from the community itself.

**Creative engagement via ICT**

If you agree that "the new computing is about supporting human relationships" and "participating in knowledge communities" then it's not difficult to imagine how creative engagement can play a role in ICT for development projects.³ Finding a Voice used digital storytelling to propagate creative engagement in underserved communities. The term 'digital storytelling' is applied to many narrative forms including hypertext, interactive stories, and computer games. We used a format based on that popularised by the USA-based Center for Digital Storytelling, where non-professionals make a three-minute mini-movie using a narrated voice-over and images from a family photo-album. This mini-movie is supposed to be a work of individual creativity; a personal story conceived, written, edited and narrated by the storyteller and free from any interference from media professionals: "Stories put us in touch with ourselves, others, and our surroundings. Using innovations in multimedia technology, students and adult audiences can make personal connections... through new ways of storytelling".⁴ Even during the short timespan of Finding a Voice, we

³ Quote from Leonardo’s laptop: human needs and the new computing technologies by Shneiderman, B. Published by MIT Press (2002).

witnessed an explosion in this kind of user-generated video content on social media portals such as YouTube;\(^5\) which to some extent supported our decision to experiment with video content.

Our decision to use digital storytelling was also based on a hypothesis that community participants might not be familiar with ICT, but they could engage with technology through the more familiar process of storytelling: therefore using ICT in a new and more creative way. This decision was borne out at our research sites in Nepal and Sri Lanka, and some of our sites in India. Our experience in Indonesia (chapter 4) suggests that storytelling was not necessarily a familiar cultural process for communities at all the research sites. Digital storytelling provides a format and tools to support the individual creative process, but some community participants found its focus on individual expression challenging; particularly when faced with the simultaneous requirement to use unfamiliar ICT.

This was one reason that we changed our focus from digital storytelling techniques that privileged individual creativity, to team-based microdocumentary production. We don’t need to look too far to realise that ongoing content creation within the professional context is often achieved by a team, rather than an individual: think of creative duos such as composer & lyricist; director &

\(^5\) Watch a CMC related digital story on YouTube at http://youtube.com/watch?v=s5X7wTOAtxs

cinematographer; or art director & copywriter. Our experiments in participatory content creation during Finding a Voice lead us to believe that a strategic team-based approach may provide a more sustainable approach for communities and organisations wishing to establish a local creative engagement initiative.

Finding a Voice and the UNESCO agenda

Rapid changes in ICTs and new trends in development communication projects in the Asia region have initiated a process of redefining key concepts of participation, content and community. As a key agency promoting and supporting community media, it becomes crucial for UNESCO to develop a critical understanding of the impact of these changes; and what this means to grassroots development.

UNESCO’s relationship with many of the Finding a Voice research sites predates the project itself. Indeed, the research framework for Finding a Voice was to some extent established by prior initiatives such as the CMC Global Pilot project in Asia\(^6\) and the ICTs for Poverty Reduction project.\(^7\) Through all three of these projects, the consistent agenda for UNESCO has been to:

- Investigate and explore various combinations of technology and social networks to the benefit of the local community.
- Ensure that new media and ICT refer to and converge with existing social and communication networks, rather than replace and perpetuate digital isolation.
- Demonstrate feasible and sustainable models and approaches that ensure ICT is beneficial to marginalised sections of the community.
- Demonstrate the value and limitations of action research.

Finding a Voice is a reaffirmation of this agenda, with a crucial focus on participatory content. We recognise that different initiatives have different understandings of participation. This project has aimed to critically analyse participatory mechanisms by comparing and contrasting strategies and research findings across a range of sites.

Digitisation has changed the use and exchange of information. For example, the emergence of national content production agencies in Nepal means that many community radio stations can

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now download more generic magazine-format programs produced and packaged by professionals. At Kothmale CMC in Sri Lanka, communities are instrumental in informing content which is distributed across multiple platforms in order to reach different target audiences. For instance, community experiences of water shortage are broadcast on community radio; a multimedia digital story on the subject is screened at local communities; the same content is uploaded to the CMC website (see chapter 5).

Across Asia, participants at the *Finding a Voice* research sites have implemented and engaged with a diverse range of technology. Many sites have strived to optimise ICT to reach target audiences. Newsletters have reinforced the newly acquired online skills of young Muslim women in Seelampur, New Delhi. Wireless networks linked to the local cable operator have opened up a 50,000 plus consumer base in households across Bhimavaram, Andhra Pradesh. Interventions in both Kerala and New Delhi have also benefited from market research that has tried to explore how local content can contribute to the financial sustainability of an initiative.

By extending its relationship with the *Finding a Voice* networks, UNESCO has striven to understand the local impacts of ICT and any special relevance to community participation through content creation initiatives. The research method implemented across the fifteen *Finding a Voice* research sites has demonstrated the multidimensionality of existing social networks in the target communities. As discussed in previous chapters, we understand that implementing a mixed media strategy that makes content ‘work harder’ for target audiences can enhance the effectiveness of local initiatives. In order to achieve this, we have learned that the real challenge is to design participatory systems for both ICT-based content creation and distribution which really do support human
relationships. To aid sustainability, these systems inevitably require more strategic planning than many stakeholders appreciate: a question asked repeatedly by some of our project partners is whether participatory content creation processes will survive after the end of the *Finding a Voice* project. More specifically, will content from ICT projects continue to address and engage the excluded and marginalised? While it is premature to answer that question, it can be said that to date, *Finding a Voice* has demonstrated the value that participatory content creation can present and offered some solid and relevant practices and principles which community media and multimedia initiatives can adapt to their specific purposes. We have also demonstrated that to creatively engage the poor, it is crucial to develop an understanding of their lives, culture, practises, and social networks. ICT initiatives more often than not do not place emphasis on ongoing study using embedded researchers: this lack can result in top-down implementation strategies which may only deepen voice poverty.

**Summary**

We started this book by proposing that creative engagement with ICT is an important element in poverty reduction strategies, leading to the construction of a digitally inclusive knowledge society. To test this proposal, we have explored how ICT for development programs can be supported by participatory content creation, defined as "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". The result of our exploration is a set of key principles and practices drawn from the experiences of researchers and practitioners working across South and Southeast Asia to creatively engage marginalised communities with ICT by using participatory content creation activities to relieve voice poverty. Although these principles are presented as a result of interventions in four countries, this does not mean that they are only relevant to an individual country or local context. Indeed, we anticipate that these principles will be relevant across a range of locations. For example, chapter 3 relates how community radio programming and digital storytelling in Nepal demonstrate that locally relevant content told by local voices can create forums for important social debates. The same content can spread important messages to wider audiences about how individuals can bring about change in their own lives. Chapter 4 describes how the use of telecentre infrastructure for content creation training in Indonesia was far more exciting for local
participants than Web or office application training. Community members found their own voices and identities through creating multimedia self-portraits and biographical stories. Chapter 5 relates how concerns around digital inclusion and engagement at Kothmale led to the introduction of a mobile ICT and content creation platform through which to reach out to remote communities. Chapter 6 proposes a gradualist approach to participatory content creation strategies in order to achieve engagement on issues that challenge asymmetric power distribution. The use of content creation to contribute to behavioural change objectives requires constant and ongoing negotiation and engagement with the community in order to build production and distribution networks; and maintain trust in an initiative and its representatives.

These findings have reinforced the need for a consistent and sustainable approach to making technological change socially effective and culturally empowering. For example, lack of a distribution strategy in Indonesia contributed to the discontinuation of the content creation intervention, which was considered peripheral to the aims of the lead organisation. In contrast, the lead Sri Lankan organisation has well-established expertise in content creation which boosts both the eTuktuk project as well as the CMC’s other innovative digital outreach initiatives. The Seelampur GRC in India shows how difficult it can be to sustain an initiative in an environment where agency and/or government funding rotates through a succession of projects in order to satisfy diverse sponsors and stakeholders. This issue is certainly not confined to India.

We have seen that strategies that address solely ICT access can fail to adequately address the needs of marginalised communities. All stakeholders – community, agencies and government – should undertake to prioritise participation: a shift we believe can only improve sustainable engagement with ICT. The examples in this book show how ICT access strategies can be enhanced by creative engagement through participatory content creation: specifically by encouraging local people to use ICT to identify with, influence and produce locally relevant content and messages. Participatory content creation can generate value and social capital by allowing local people to view themselves and their own lives through the content they produce. We believe that it is this process that underlines how participatory content creation can create an environment for social change.